



What Designers Know



Bryan Lawson



Architectural
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Architectural Press is an imprint of Elsevier



Architectural Press
An imprint of Elsevier
Linacre House, Jordan Hill, Oxford OX2 8DP
30 Corporate Drive, Burlington, MA 01803

First published 2004

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

ISBN 0 7506 6448 7

For information on all Architectural Press publications
visit our website at www.architecturalpress.com

Typeset by Newgen Imaging Systems (P) Ltd., Chennai, India
Printed and bound in Meppel, The Netherlands by Krips bv

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Preface

The physician can bury his mistakes, but the architect can only advise his client to plant vines.

Frank Lloyd Wright

The great American architect Frank Lloyd Wright was quoted in the *New York Times* (4 October, 1953). In the litigious climate of today his comment is unlikely to gain much sympathy from any disgruntled clients of designers. But the essence of his aphorism remains as penetratingly perceptive now as it was then. Designers commit themselves very publicly to ideas that often with the hindsight gained by the passage of time look poor or even absurd. Architects in particular have come in for some pretty bad press recently as a result. At least industrial designers see their products fade away in response to the market but buildings have a nasty habit of hanging around advertising the misjudgements of their architects.

Consider then, dear reader, the fate of authors of books about design. Not only does the book remain on the library shelves but we also have the misfortune to have our work imprinted with its initial date of publication. This rather sneakily leaps out of the page at you whenever it is referenced by others kind enough to have found it of some value in their own studies. To begin with this seems flattering but as the years go by it becomes a constant reminder of the inexorable passage of time.

My first book, *How Designers Think*, was written an alarmingly long time ago (Lawson, 1980), and if I were starting to write it now I would probably do so in quite a different way. But it has been in print ever since, and has passed through several editions as ideas have developed and more research has been done (Lawson, 1997). This book started life as yet another edition but it gradually became apparent that there was now much more to say than the original structure of *How Designers Think* was capable of accommodating.

So this book might usefully be seen as a companion volume to *How Designers Think*. We understand design a great deal better than we did when that book was first published. People have written about their own experiences of designing for centuries and a few have tried to generalize, but design theory as a serious subject on the global stage is perhaps no more than four or five decades old. There is clearly much yet to learn but we now think we know a very considerable amount about designing.

The field of knowledge had its origins in what was really known as design methodology. Those early contributions were much more in the style of