

designer forum



Urban Outfitters Corporate Campus, Philadelphia PA
Photo: Lara Swimmer



Herman Miller Design Yard, Holland MI
Photo: Lea Babcock Scherer

Jeffrey Scherer, FAIA

Principal, MS&R

A founding principal of MS&R, Jeff leads MS&R's commercial and library design practices. He has more than 100 public, academic, and private libraries to his credit and 1.25 million square feet of office space. His innovative approach and resulting designs have resulted in professional honors and awards for 30 consecutive years. Most recently, his work for Urban Outfitters Inc. received a Global Award of Excellence from the Urban Land Institute and a National Trust for Historic Preservation Honor Award. A provocative thought-leader, Jeff has been featured in national publications such as *Fast Company*, *Metropolis Magazine* and *The New York Times*. He is passionately and actively involved in a diverse collection of non-profit organizations, currently serving as Chair of Libraries of the Future a national library advocacy group based in New York City. Known for leading the discussion on important issues surrounding libraries and the workplace today, he is a frequent conference lecturer for The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), American Library Association (ALA), Public Library Association (PLA) and CoreNET and has co-authored numerous articles and books on topics such as libraries creating a sense of place in communities, changes in technology and distribution of information, and sustainable design.

Balancing the Desires of Client, Community & Designer

Jeffrey Scherer, FAIA

Designers face the challenge of balancing a competing mix of desires from three core constituencies. First and foremost, there is the client's desire to blend design with fiscal responsibility. Second is the architect's own desire to create, and third is the architect's sense of the larger community—the users of the space—who often wish to be considered. Often, the finished building mirrors the architect's ability to strike the right balance.

My first obligation is to community. For this reason, I believe our work must be rooted in the larger context, extending beyond the client and site to embrace the neighborhood and global community. Setting ego aside, I strive to listen to the users of the space. I argue for equity in the design process. Every voice should be heard, every option explored.

Everything is then filtered through my personal value system and aesthetic sensibility. For what we offer as designers is essentially a three-dimensional portrait of our own aesthetic, ethical and moral values. My personal filters embrace historical context, resourcefulness and value. Existing buildings reflect the portraits left behind by the previous designers, capturing the state of nature and design at that



Rancho Mirage Public Library, Rancho Mirage CA
Photo: Assassi Productions

time. I am careful to consider their context in seeking relevant lessons from this history. From their ideas, I learn how to knit together design, community and environment. Because I would rather fix something than throw it away, I seek to uncover and explore the latent, layered history of existing structures in order to transform them into innovative, forward-thinking spaces that actualize and manifest the community's desires into the design.

At the center of every design resides a client. I purposefully seek clients who share my values and embrace an open process. There is, however, and always has been an inevitably large area of conflict between the desires of the designer and the desires of the client. To view the design process as a triad by adding the tapestry of a community-at-large may seem, on the surface, crazy. Anyone who attempts to act genuinely in the interests of the general public runs the risk of alienating the client, while acting solely in the interest of the client leads to accusations that community (and the environment, for example) are being ignored. I believe it is a duty to balance all three. Otherwise, design will be one-dimensional. Thus, I believe significant architecture is a delicate balance of the designer, client and community.

For this reason, I have chosen to work mainly on specialty commercial office space and libraries. Although these may seem like an odd pairing, they are actually quite alike. They share a need to have space where individuals can learn, share ideas and participate in discussions of broad ideas. Each has to be smart, efficient and enable the occupants to do their best knowledge work. Both must be flexible and use state-of-the-art technology. Each building type should serve a greater purpose. And finally, the office and the library contain records of present and past thinking.



Pre-Paid Legal Services Corporate Headquarters, Ada OK
Photo: Timothy Hursley



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