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## WHAT ARE THE JEFFERSONIAN ARCHITECTURAL IDEALS?

The University community is heir to the Lawn, one of the most important architectural complexes in the United States and a UNESCO World Heritage site. The University community is also heir to Jefferson's progressive vision of education, created to accommodate the challenges of a new democracy and to address the unique American landscape.

Why has this legacy of innovation in service of ideas been allowed to degenerate into a rigid set of stylistic prescriptions? The result has been a faux Jeffersonian architecture, confused between style and substance, characterized by apologetic neo-Jeffersonian appliqué, obsessive in its references to history, and incapable of responding to the profound social, political, and ecological discoveries of the last century.

Is the University committed to architectural excellence?

Is architecture simply a question of style, of applied motifs with historical associations, or is it an exploration of the essence of a building, the needs of its occupants, and the nature of its site?

Is there not a difference between buildings that merely look Jeffersonian as opposed to the infinitely more difficult task of being Jeffersonian?

Is stylistic simulation the sincerest form of respect, or does it devalue the authenticity of the truly historic?

How is history remembered or honored by the destruction and neglect of genuine historical artifacts, such as the interior of the Rotunda in the 1970s, Miller Hall in the 2000s, or the Blue Ridge Sanatorium buildings, in tandem with the simultaneous construction of an ersatz physical history?

Is it desirable that a building built in 1990 be mistaken for one built in 1830? Is UVA to become a theme park of nostalgia at the service of the University's branding?

Given the University's goal to support diversity in students, faculty, and educational programs as a means of fostering excellence, should it not seek an architecture and physical structure that exemplifies this goal rather than one that contradicts it?

Is there a problem in choosing an architecture to stand for the values of a university at the beginning of the twenty-first century when that architecture was inaugurated at an historical moment when racial, gender, social, and economic diversity were less welcome? Should we not acknowledge that architectural forms change meaning over time?

What would we make of the treatment of any academic discipline as static and so sacred that intellectual development, evolution and diversity are essentially legislated out of possibility, as has been done to the practice of architecture at this university? What would happen if other disciplines in the University were frozen in a mindset constrained by a nineteenth century world view?

How is a nationally respected architectural faculty to reconcile its teaching with a physical context of mediocrity at odds with all that is valued in the School of Architecture?

Who should determine the architectural future of the University, the University community, creative and recognized professionals, or those with wealth and power?

Can an architecture of quality be achieved by a skin-deep veneer of stylistic uniformity, or does it demand a broader and deeper response?

***Why has the University commissioned so much mediocre architecture?***

***We would be better served by an architecture that sets aside empty stylistic gestures and glib historical references in order to respond to***

- 1. the qualities of an individual discipline***
- 2. the nature of a modern building***
- 3. the character of an individual place.***

***We stand for an architecture that does not begin and end with style.***

***We stand for an architecture that engages tradition but is not ashamed of having been built in the twenty-first century.***

***We stand for an architecture that preserves real histories without constructing fictitious ones.***

***We stand for an architecture that answers to technology without monumentalizing or suppressing it.***

***We stand for an architecture that evokes the qualities of traditional architecture, construction, and craft without recourse to symbolic, synthetic veneers lacking any virtue beyond familiarity.***

## WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

The undersigned School of Architecture faculty believe there is a fundamental schism between architecture as it is taught, practiced and studied as a discipline at our School and architecture as it is prescribed, controlled and marketed as a style by the Board of Visitors and administration.

This inconsistency affects more than the School of Architecture's academic integrity. It calls into question whether the physical organization and character of the Grounds reflects the University's academic mission, or whether it is a response to the University's fund-raising, marketing, and branding operation.

We ask that the architectural future of the University and the nature of the Jeffersonian architectural legacy not be determined in boardrooms, but be debated openly at every level of the University.

This letter is the first of a series of exchanges about architecture on the University Grounds that are planned for this academic year. We look forward to the participation of many faculty and students, in and out of the School of Architecture, in this long-overdue dialogue and debate.

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