

PROFESSION WITHIN A PROFESSION?

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Can it be said that specifications writing is a profession with the profession of architecture or engineering?

Seems most reasonable as the work is quite specific [no pun intended] and is usually carried on by staff dedicated to that singular task. In addition, due to both the need for, and the penchant toward accuracy, the specifications writer is the conscience of the office, on each project. Wording, phrasing, terminology and the minutiae of the work and the project are paramount.

Architecture, as a profession, has many phases and aspects to it, most of which are performed by those trained and dedicated toward them. For example, design. Here some students, interns and professionals find their work place, and a pattern of work that utilizes their design sense and skill. Their results re developed thoughts, dreams in the sense that they are mentally conceived; ideas, and mental illusions. While working on the overall function of the proposed project, and the inter-relationship, the "design, per se" is the visual appearance of the project.

In turn, the mental process is converted into conceptual sketches that begin to delineate the project for others to see and appreciate. One can attempt to verbally describe a project [here is the fodder of the "signature architect or starchitect"] but usually fails to convey to others the impact of complete description so the others can create their own mental image or vision.

Since this information and even the rough preliminary sketch are not fully communicative of the needed information [for use by the contractors and skilled trade workers] there is need to translate and transform the illusionary and sketchy preliminary information into another motif-- working drawings. Technical drawings, and details which expand the initial information, and show what is to be built, and how. This must occur since the concept, vision and illusion of the design simply cannot be shared on an equal basis with all others involved with the project. There needs to be a more common method of transmitting the information.

But it is obvious even with cursory study that ALL of the required construction information cannot be depicted or graphically displayed. Some of the information simply defies depiction! In addition, the lack of totality in the drawings leaves a gap in information that can be devastating to proper construction of the project.

To this point the staff involved have been those directly trained in architecture including construction systems, materials, CAD operations, etc. Of course, their efforts are necessities, and are well performed, but still the documentation of the project lies incomplete and rather inadequate to the task.

Enter another group of staffers or consultants-- another set of *professionals !!!!* Some very similar to those in drawing production; some very, very different. We submit this is truly "the profession within the profession"!

The Specifications Writer is the professional, whether a registered design professional or not. People from varied backgrounds, with proper dedication, and direction are among the writers, and doing admirable work. So while an integral part of the production of "architecture", theirs is a task somewhat apart—one of a different ilk, direction, dedication and impact.

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For it is the writers who bring a sharp, distinct, razor sharp focus to the project. They introduce the precision that converts the project from concept and graphics to specifics and accurate information. There is the task of completeness, correct descriptions, detailed information, exactness, specificity, and clarity. Also, there are correct legal requirements, relationships, and coverage for all concerned parties.

With all this is the setting of project terminology, procedure, and the directions and instructions required to perform the work. All this is packaged in a communicative style whereby the contractors, both office and field personnel know what the project work is about, and how it is to be executed.

In this, there is a new skill set required; an experienced eye; knowledge of field and office operations; understanding of construction and its many systems; and a mix of new personal dedication and perspective-- toward correctness and accuracy. With a careful eye, always, the legal environment is addressed, often unseen, but in place and proper. Add to this a sensitivity that is not present in CAD operations for example where electronic images are functions and not really sensitive to function of impact. Also, there is a need for modification, unlike standard details where they can be re-used often without much if any revision—specifications are dynamic in nature and must be conformed to circumstances.

This is not an elitist effort, or one made to draw attention or accolades. Rather it is the life work of those who find their direction and contribution to project work in a new form-- one often maligned; often ignored; often verbally minimized; and frankly, too often misunderstood. New professionals with no instruction or exposure to specifications, come with the baggage of simply not realizing the need, the function or the existence of the documents.

But they are there—those specifications! And behind each set and Project Manual is one or more finding pride in work, and satisfaction with effort and result. With a personal dedication and technical know-how not present in all.

A very unique set, those Specifications Writers. A profession within a profession?-- ABSOLUTELY ! **