

Maine Home

+ DESIGN

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THE SMALL SPACES ISSUE



AIA DESIGN THEORY

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Maine

IN *MH+D*'S CONTINUING COLLABORATION
WITH AIA MAINE, WE PRESENT TO YOU A DESIGN
CONCEPT FROM AN ARCHITECT'S POINT OF VIEW.

RUSS TYSON ON HAND DRAWING FOR DESIGN

“In our studio, we eventually computer draft, detail, and specify all of the homes we design. However, in the beginning stages of design I prefer hand drawing.”



MH+D ASKS TYSON TO TELL US MORE.

Q. When did you discover you had a skilled hand?

A. I absolutely loved drawing as a child. I would spend hours sketching images of rocket-fueled race cars, supersonic megaships, ultra powerful superheroes, and innumerable illustrations of a particular treetop fort complex I often dreamed of. One sketch of my boyhood dream home would link to other sketches via an interconnected web of rope bridges, swings, and zip lines that would allow me to escape danger, or my siblings, at any moment. This affection for graphically communicating my thinking is what initially attracted me to architecture. During my formal education, I found that my affinity for hand drawing allowed me to quickly explore ideas and test potential design solutions to assigned exercises.

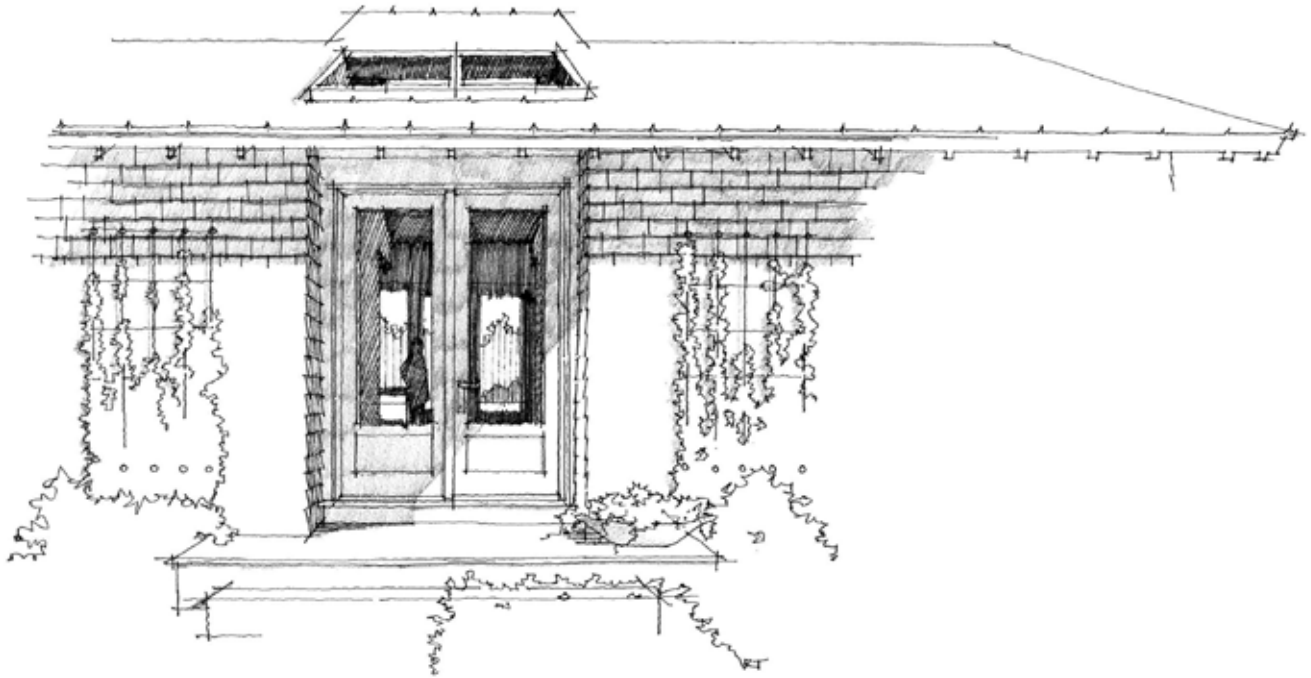
Q. What adventures you had! How does your imagination directly affect your conceptions for homes?

A. The imagination is the most powerful resource we have as humans. Drawing by hand is the most immediate and direct articulation of the imagination possible. Why is the original book usually better than the movie created of that book? Because the book relies on our own mental images for its illustrations and is thus far more provocative. Similarly, my hand-drawn sketches and schematics

require more of the viewer's own imagination than do machine-aided graphics. At Whitten Architects, drawing is fundamental to our ability to communicate with our clients. We use a variety of methods to create and then depict what a specific family's home will look like prior to construction. Computer-aided drafting, or CAD, software requires us to input a myriad of project specifics including dimensions, details, and even materials. Early in the process of imagining, I've found that this gets in the way of my ability to efficiently fill an intimidating blank piece of paper with schematic notions.

Q. What are some of the simple benefits of a hand drawn sketch?

A. Freehand drawing requires fewer tools and resources than the alternative. All I need is a pen and paper. This allows me to record a thought virtually anywhere and at any time with minimal expense. It also saves me time. For conceptual design, I've found drawing by hand to be the most efficient way for me to manipulate form, scale, proportion, space, order, orientation, and then test these within the site-specific context. I can effortlessly communicate complex design strategies in a simple and abstract way.



Q. Are there other, less obvious advantages to drawing by hand?

A. Often the act of hand drawing can spontaneously reveal a new and unanticipated concept. The right side of our brain is more creative and intuitive. If given the opportunity, it can explore, find, and express ideas outside of the linear and more rational left-brain analytical processing.

Q. Drawing by hand can be intimidating to many, especially when it comes to “mistakes.” What happens when you change your mind about a certain element? Are there times when you wish you could push the “undo” button?

A. I draw on layers and layers of tracing paper. This automatically creates a record of my thought process. I can quickly explore an evolving thought pattern without losing a record of where I was before. As with most inventions, failing many times ultimately leads to a well-considered solution. Also, when I physically record something with my hand, I have better recall of it. After I’ve spent a few hours working on a problem I find that my mind continues searching for a more thoughtful solution, even after I’ve closed the door to our Old Port studio and headed home for the day. I find that, when working on a computer, it is easy to get lost in the details of a design that are only important later in the design process. Because they are inherently less detailed and more abstract, hand drawings allow me to maintain focus on the big picture.



Q. How do you think an organic sketch benefits the client?

A. Because hand-drawn illustrations look unfinished and less precious, they naturally encourage the client to be more of a participant in the design process. A client gets to fill in the blanks and focus on the big picture.

Q. Does working this way help you connect with the uniqueness of the site?

A. A hand-drawn solution naturally feels integrated

with its organic context. Where hand-drawn architectural solutions are free-flowing and alive, a computer forces me to use more specific shapes and dimensions that can make the architecture feel overly precise and thus less integrated with nature. Most of my early schematics focus on integrating a home with its specific site and context. I find that my pen reaches out into the landscape and there's an intent to marry inside to outside so much so that it can be hard to tell where the building ends and the scenery begins. This leads to outdoor spaces becoming just as important as indoor spaces. Likewise, the surrounding vegetation and texture become just as important parts of the design as the materials that make up the architecture. **MH+D**



MH+D IS PROUD TO PARTNER WITH ACCLAIMED ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHER TRENT BELL ON HIS ARCHITECTURE, DESIGN, AND PHOTOGRAPHY PODCAST. TO HEAR TRENT BELL'S CONVERSATION WITH RUSS TYSON, PLEASE VISIT TRENTBELL.COM/PODCAST