

Empathy in Architecture

Understanding the Fundamental Aspects of Empathetic Design

Architecture exists at the meeting point between art and science, function, and aesthetics. Architects, having been trained for many years in the nuances, complexities, and overlapping nature of design, technology, philosophy, and even psychology, approach their projects with a deep sense of understanding and an obligation to accurately manifest the intended outcome.





Within an architect's mind exists the concepts and ideas for every future building that will come to be in the world by their hands. But how much of a design belongs purely to the architect, and how much of the design is, and should be, influenced by the people for which the building is meant?

What is Empathetic Architecture?

Empathetic architecture is the idea that the designer and user of the building are, in essence, the same. Highlighting the importance of the user and striving for a fundamental understanding of how the space will be used allows the architect to 'step into the shoes' of the user and create a genuine and precise design. User perspectives open the architect's mind to not only the physical possibilities, but also the effervescence of emotional realities that exist in a physical structure, heightened in that of a residential dwelling.

On a primal level, the basic human need for shelter is deeply ingrained in us, and, when entwined with our own personalities, relationships, and ambitions, manifests itself in a uniquely intimate way. When architects open their imagination to the user's perspective, they can understand the specific needs that the building could and should fulfil. With empathy, emotion steps in, and architecture is transformed from a highly technical exercise into an emotive and relational art form between the site and context, user and building, and community and space. The home becomes not just a physical dwelling, but a sacred space for a family.

The practice of empathetic architecture requires more effort and intentionality on the part of the architect as they strive to take on the perspectives of their client's needs, both in a physical and ethereal nature. By spending dedicated time with the client, the architect is able to uncover the daily rituals, weekly habits, hopes, and desires that are wrapped up in the idea of the perfect home. Thus, the client becomes a critical guiding and influencing factor in the architect's design, not merely a bystander, but an active participant in the process.

Trust the Process

An all-inclusive, client-inspired approach to residential architecture ensures the successful outcome of the design process by allowing all the end users to contribute to the requirements and design development. In a time of extreme globalisation where often short-lived design trends manage to weasel their way into every country and culture, the empathetic approach ensures the authenticity of a design that is founded on notions deeper than popular-at-the-time aesthetics that soon wane and expire. As each family is unique in their lifestyle and relational requirements, so should a residential design uniquely portray the essence of the specific family to ensure the longevity of the design's relevance.

For architects, the endeavour towards empathetic architecture can be either an enticing challenge or a seemingly unnecessary obstacle not worth the time. JK Design Architects sees empathetic architecture as a way to expand the concepts and possibilities that already exist in their minds by opening them up to the influence of the emotions, dreams, and desires of others. Doing so allows their designs to take on a heightened sense of depth and meaning, contributing to the design landscape with undeniable influence from all the unique personalities that have crossed their path. In the wake of an ever-changing social, political, and physical climate that sees frequent unrest, the time to be intentional and purposeful with design is more essential than ever.

As mentioned in the book *Architecture and Empathy*, "the weak sense of life in our buildings may not only result from a deliberate emotive distance or formalist rejection of life's complexities

and nuances, it may simply be that geometric configurations are easier to imagine than the shapeless and dynamic acts of life and the ephemeral feelings evoked by architecture."