

Architectural Jargon

Every student of architecture should know these terms (most of which are French from the Beaux Arts):

Academie de Beaux Arts (pronounced "bose are"): founded in 1648 by Cardinal Mazarin to educate students in drawing, painting, sculpture, engraving, architecture and other media; renamed "Ecole de Beaux Arts" in 1863. The curriculum was divided into the "Academy of Painting and Sculpture" and the "Academy of Architecture", but both programs focused on classical arts and architecture from Ancient Greek and Roman culture. This was the only school of architecture in the western world until Nathan Clifford Ricker graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign as its first student of architecture in 1873.

Academy: Universities, particularly, schools of architecture.

Aperture: A wall with windows sounds so banal. A mass punctuated with apertures seems formally intriguing. Hint: They're the same thing.

Architectonic: Even though the definition of tectonics already relates to building and construction - the science or art of constructing materials - architects like to include the prefix "archi" wherever possible just to make sure everyone knows that they are still important.

Assemblage: a model of a design built of anything around. From the French, meaning putting things together.

Avant-garde: design that is ahead of its time.

Bricolage: design for a building that reuses pieces of another building: a "bricoleur" is an architect who practices bricolage

Building Membrane: Architects also like to take terms from other disciplines and use them as their own. Obviously taken from biology, a building's membrane is the skin of its structure, or the outer walls.

Built Environment: When everything around you is manmade, you are within the built environment. When everything around you is natural, you're probably much better off.

Charette: (or "en charette") a last-minute surge of drawing activity just before the project is due.

Concours: a test or project to be solved; "Concordance" in English

Collage: gluing fragments of paper on a board to create a composition

Discourse: What architects talk about when they talk about architecture.

Enfilade: Rooms arranged in a line ("on a thread") so to get to one, you have to pass through the one in front.

Entourage: Trees, people, cars, flagpoles, furniture drawn to embellish a building or site.

Esquisse: a first, rough sketch for a design

Esquisse-Esquisse: a sketch problem to be solved in 4 to 8 hours.

Emerging: Trends in architecture that are just around the corner—maybe.

En Loge: work required to be done in the studio

Fenestration: Doors and windows.

Glazing: Windows

Instantiation: It means representing something by giving an example. A term borrowed from philosophy.

Intentionality: An architect's intent is what they tried to do, and their intention is what they tried to accomplish. Their intentionality is what they were thinking about when they intentionally obscured their original intent in order to achieve what they intended. It usually has something to do with spatiality.

Materiality: What a building is made of, except more abstract. What buildings are made of. Sounds more impressive than bricks and sticks. See concrete, but think monolithic expression of solid planes.

Metamorphosis: Change, as in, "Metamorphosis of space is a flexible correspondence of space to its situation, caused by certain external actions."

Parti: the central essence of a design

Poche (pronounced "poe shay"): shading of solid wall thickness in a plan or section drawing

Potentiality, spatiality, conditionality, functionality, modernity: When in doubt, add "-ity." Or "-ology." "Ology" means the study of something, but in architecture methodology and typology just mean method and type.

Praxis: How theory is implemented, which in architecture means building buildings; also "architectural practice."

Space: To the surprise of many, architects don't think they construct buildings. They're thinking about creating space, the interior volumes that people simply call "rooms." Buildings are merely the inconvenient consequence of space-making.

Stereotomy: Involves the carving out of space from a solid. Ever wonder what turns a pumpkin into a Jack-O-Lantern? Now you know.

Sexy: What architects like to say about anything that they think looks good, or well, sexy. Anything and everything. A model of a building can be "sexy." A drawing of a building can be "sexy." I guess we need to get out of the studio more.

Spatiality: The shape of a room. Architects have a penchant for adding the suffix "ality" to every word they use, even though a shorter word may suffice. It gives architectural discourse a certain amount of "complexiality."

Tectonic: Also from the ancient Greek. Nothing to do with geology, it signifies, as far as I understand it, anything to do with building.

Urban Fabric: Not to be taken literally - curtains. Urban fabric describes the nature of a city due to the relationships of its constituent buildings. Basically, it's what you see when you walk down the street.

Visualization or representation: Architectural sketches and drawings.

Zeitgeist; the cultural spirit of the times in which a building is designed (it literally means "time ghost")