now that i see it
how we got here // what we’ve yet to steal // what i expect to find

livetweeters: plz use #NTISI

internet user experience conference 2009
dan klyn
I’ve been designing and building internet user experiences since teaching myself HTML in 1996. In the time between now and then I

1996: went gradschool to better train myself for doing this work ...
1998: I got a job as webmaster of wayne county and built the first website for DTW ...
2000: I was hired by a graphic design and marketing communications firm as a web producer
2004: I landed one of my favorite jobs so-far as an information architect at a leading eCommerce shop
2007: Did a bunch of IA consulting with ad agencies

Currently I’m teaching at UM + responsible for eCommerce and Technology at a nonprofit
I've done and continue to do user experience design work on a consulting basis with a lot of online retailers.
What I deliver to clients is this kind of thing .. “high-level blueprint”
The Costa Del Mar Core Collection is Vivamus sapien odio, pellentesque ac, luctus ut, commodo a, augue. Proin semper. Donec commodo feugiat lectus. Class aptent taciti sociosqu ad litora torquent per conubia nostra, per inceptos himenaeos. Proin laoreet. Class aptent taciti socios

Now showing 1 - 12 of 67 styles

Or something like this - “medium fidelity wireframe”
but sometimes, my 13 or so years of experience designing and building websites and designing IUE can feel like one year of experience repeated thirteen times. Like Bill M’s character in GHD, I try to innovate each time. I add and test new UX methods, reformat and rethink my deliverables ...

... yet it’s often the case that I fail. Time and again I’ve witnessed or been party to this situation where long after the client has signed off on all the strategy and labeling and wireframes and org scheme ... often at the moment when the visual design has been roughed into the application and clients start clickin around on stuff ... they have what I call a “now that i see it” moment.
“now that I see it”

all the design intent, business strategy, user needs encoded and developed in those front-of-project documents and deliverables made sense at the time. but “now that I see it...” the client starts to want to un-do decisions and re-assess the base assumptions upon which all the early strategy and design thinking had been oriented around.

dthis is sucky, and standard IA and UX process is probably part of the problem.
Perhaps some of you would disagree, but in my experience, the “standard” IA and UX process is to do the up-front design and strategy work in a mostly or entirely schematic and somewhat abstract way. In the past when I’ve taught a class on IA Deliverables I’ve presented or even defended this approach on the basis of it being standard practice... on the basis of it being what employers want and do. they want and do it this way because it’s faster and more efficient to iterate through the structural design and strategy phase in this fashion. If we had actual content and color and typography and photography at this phase the argument is that it would take alot longer and that the presence of these more emotional or aesthetic elements detracts or distracts from decisionmaking on Big Picture stuff and on elements of the design that aren’t especially visual (eg navigation labels, org scheme, taxonomy, process flow etc)
So how did we get here? How did it become standard practice to do UX work like this? I’m going to focus on the IA piece of how we UX people arrived at or inherited this abstract and schematic approach. Anybody here self-identify as IA?

As it’s practiced today and as it has been practiced since around 1998 or so, the thing we call Information Architecture is a thing that came from Ann Arbor.
there behind that maple tree...
in 1998, two librarians from the school of information and library science in ann arbor sold 80,000 copies of their book, which as you can see is called Information Architecture for the WWW. Peter and Lou are known all over the world as the founding fathers of IA, and 11 years later librarianship continues to be one of the primary lenses through which IA work is done.
the very skills that are the traditional staple of library science are among those considered central to IA

robbins, d. (2002) // asis&t bulletin // vol. 28, no. 2

labeling + classification // collection development // information access + retrieval // customer service
In spite of the words in the title of their book and on their business cards, the stuff they were doing back then had and still has strong affinities with librarianship and library science. As Web 1.0 exploded in the late 90s, librarianship provided this useful, sensible framework that the engineers and marketers who were in charge of websites so desperately needed - Lou tells a story about ‘the pain with no name’ and it’s easy to see how a sensible, librarian-ly methodology in the form of an O’Reilly book was just the thing. These guys went on to build a 40+ person, multi-million dollar consulting firm in Ann Arbor. So in the 90s ... if you knew or cared or heard about IA you probably knew it as a thing that was invented in Ann Arbor.
which is a little strange, because 20 years before Peter and Lou published the polar bear book .... exactly 100 years after the first American Library Association conference ... the American Institute of Architecture’s national conference in Philadelphia had as its theme “the architecture of information”
The theme of this year’s convention is a significant one—
"An American City: The Architecture of Information." We are coming to know
the importance of describing how physical space performs as well as how it looks
and the convention programs have been planned to explore this problem
in all of its dimensions. Read on for a tantalizing view of what’s in store.
As architects, we know it takes more than good-looking buildings to make a city habitable and usable. It takes information: information about what spaces do as well as how they look; information that helps people articulate their needs and respond to change. That’s what Architecture of Information is all about.

...these architects were talking about the kinds of concepts and using the kinds words that could just as well have come from the IUE 09 advance program.
fast forward to 1996 and the same person who put together the 1976 AIA conference publishes a book called Information Architects.
When I first started learning about and embracing the idea of IA from a librarianship “frame” back in the late 90s, I was unaware of Richard Saul Wurman. Who many of you may know of as the inventor of the TED conference. Were any of you guys doing webstuff back in the 90s? Did you know about Wurman back then? This is all hypothetical of course, but I think that if somebody had handed me Wurman’s IA book back then... I’m not sure I’d have known what to do with it. It’s a gorgeous book and Wurman (and the other contributors) talk about some paradigm-shiftingly awesome stuff up in here...
that's why i've chosen to call myself an information architect. i don't mean a bricks and mortar architect. i mean architect as used in the words *architect of foreign policy*. i mean architect as in the creating of systemic, structural, and orderly principles to make something work—the thoughtful making of either artifact, or idea, or policy that informs because it is clear.
but when you compare and contrast this...
...with this... I’m a librarian so this was alot closer to how I looked at the web back then. and you HCI and Com Sci people are probably in the same boat.
So the polar bears won
Anybody go to his talk last month? What a charming and brilliant man. My department at UM was co-sponsoring the RSW talk and I used this as the pretext to wheedle my way into a dinner party after the talk where I rudely monopolized him for about 20 mins ... I told him about this book I’m working on and he told me I could call him. Swoon! So I did. Which is a long-winded setup for the point I’d like to make, which is something I’ve not seen or read about elsewhere in my research.

The highly visual nature of his work on IA in ’76 and ’96 probably has something to do with why the polar bears won. But another and perhaps more important reason has to do with intention. Peter and Lou wrote a book that was intended to provide a methodology and in some ways to help sell their and their firm’s services as IA consultants. Peter and Lou created a movement from within librarianship and their intention was to make IA a “thing” and to take similarly inclined folks along for the ride. They created an institute for IA ... they helped create an annual conference for IA... Wurman had no such intentions. Here’s a snippet from an interview RSW granted me earlier this week:
no

audio available at wildlyappropriate.com
1st page of the 1st edition of the PB book began with a quote from RSW... but references to and acknowledgement of RSW is increasingly pushed to the margins with subsequent editions ... such that he’s not mentioned or cited at all in the 3rd edition.

(note that PB is now translated into 7 languages)
We definitely decided that in our worldview, Wurman was really talking about the digital equivalent of interior design or information design, not true information architecture. We focused on the structure and organization of sites, not the presentation and layout of information on a two-dimensional page.
so, increasingly fewer tracks in the snow back to RSW ...
“we should not become trapped by the metaphor”

In the first chapter of the PB book there’s a paragraph or two about Architecture... but Peter and Lou quickly move away from it as a “frame” and even warn about taking the metaphor too literally ... too seriously
Continued IA Grabs from ROA

Which is kind of fun... because Peter and many other IA and UX folks do a fair amount of selective pilfering from Regular Old Architecture. This one from P.M. is especially good
It doesn’t take great imagination to apply these architectural principles to information architecture—taking them out of the real world and into the digital world.
When You Have A Hammer...

- Alexander and Brand so readily adopted by the IT-erati because their oddball notions are a snug fit with those of software dev and UX
- A&B are far from the mainstream of regular-old architecture
what we’ve yet to steal from regular-old architects

Most of what I know comes from librarianship and HCI. And even while LIS/IA/HCI folks continue with Ad Hoc borrowing from certain kinds of Architects and Architecture ... I don’t think that the ROA well is dry. Not even close. So I’ve started working on this book. For fun, in the context of my research for the book I make the distinction between Info Architects and Regular-Old Architects. Which is cocky and funny (maybe) but there’s something important to my approach here, which is that famous architects like Brand and Alexander and even Wurman are able to practice in a certain way due to their fame and acclaim. My research process will entail interviewing 20 or so nonfamous architects. People who don’t have an oversized position of power relative to their clients. I think they might know some stuff about doing design and attaining client buy-in and understanding of their designs in ways that regular old UX practitioners could learn from and apply to websites and interactive media.
Propriety
Sketches of Frank Gehry
Model of The Diller Building
Photo by Fernando Goméz, courtesy of Sony Pictures Classics
Progressive Disclosure
Chiou, FT. (2003) // we are all connected // boxes and arrows
for us, elevations are always the last part of a building to be developed. this is because elevation drawings close down the process of questioning by making the image of the building too clear, too "graspable" and therefore too final.
just because we can doesn’t mean we should - our eagerness to please and the awesomeness of the diagrams and schematics we can create sometimes leads to us overdelivering, fetishizing, grasping too tightly and showing too much too soon.
Another thing we forgot to steal is the notion of detail as generator. PB IA is often an additive approach where we start with org structures and then create a labeling scheme and then we do page-level wireframes and we build a specification that ends up being 500 pages or more and which encompasses the entirety of the thing we intend to create. But Architects, especially several centuries ago, had an approach where they’d do intense focus on key details ... and then allow those fully-realized detail designs generate the rest of the building
“The origin of the analytique and its role in the construing of architecture can be traced back to the technique of graphic representation and composition developed by Piranesi in his etchings surveying the *Magnificenza* of Roman architecture.” Robert Mellin from McGill Univ. in Canada
nobody would mistake these as being “the design” ... there’s alot going on here but one of the key ideas behind this approach is intentionally showing details at varying levels of granularity / perspective etc...
It is important to notice that the analytique as graphic analysis of details had its development in a period when architects did not have to prepare working drawings showing the construction of the details. The drawings carried few if any details and dimensions. The designer could be almost entirely dependent on his craftsmen. Builders had no need for drawings to show details whose execution was a matter of common knowledge.

m. frascari (1990) // monsters of architecture // the tell-tale detail, p. 24
Compartmentalized Flexibility
prince-ramus, j (2006) // TED // designing the seattle central library
Emotion
whether we're architectural connoisseurs or just plain folks, we are emotionally engaged by the physical structures we experience

morville + rosenfeld (2008) // polar bear 3.0 // p.3
3d walkthroughs, and to a lesser extent physical models, can alleviate some of those issues, but *more often than not* its a case of looking at it and not seeing what it means, or truly understanding a system and how it integrates into the whole. *It’s emotional.* Seeing the thing in the flesh can change the client in ways they have no inkling of at the start of the process.

IA process with its schematics and wireframes ... part of the idea there is to subtract the emotional elements from the rendering so they don’t “get in the way” of decision-making around structural and organizational elements. I’m interested in how regular old architects are using 3D flythrus and physical models to create and get client buy-in on their designs .. and even while this quote suggests that regular-old-architects are susceptible to the NTISI problem .. what “crowbert” seems to be saying here is that sometimes R-O-A’s fail because the emotional piece only became manifest after it was built. I think that’s our problem sometimes too.
I really have no idea what I’m going to find. I need to do the work - my plan is to interview 20+ regular old architects with very little filtering on the collection side of things... I’ll filter and analyze after all the data is collected. But I do have some suspicions about some broad notions around Regular Old Architecture and the dreaded Now That I See It problem with clients. Here’s a few of those. Please don’t hold me to these a year or two from now when the book comes out.... If it comes out.
Collective Authorship

• With Colleagues
• With ... gasp ... Clients
leah buley, experience designer at Adaptive Path - Sketchboarding Workshop 09

UX ppl like Adaptive Path are way out in front on this
leah buley, experience designer at Adaptive Path - Sketchboarding Workshop 09
Start With The Joints

- Detail as generator of the whole
- Joints are the most prosaic details of all
- Focus on joints = no “thin slicing”
NEW! 4 Stores, 1 Flat Rate

$7 flat rate shipping
whether you shop one store or four.

As always, Piperlime-only orders ship FREE.

Learn More
Use Physical + Virtual Formats

- Screen-only could be a big part of how we sometimes fail
changes were more crushing in the old days when you had to erase for literally hours at a time. with CAD ...It still hurts, just not quite as bad. technology and software have actually made it easier for architects to make too many major changes late in the project because we didn't resolve the design fully in schematic design. Its relatively easy to do sketchup renderings that look complete but the ideas and the rational basis still need to be there. otherwise, there's no design content to extend and execute throughout the rest of the project.

Todd Warfel at Message First has a book coming out from Rosenfeld Media re: prototyping. I expect it will be excellent
Emotional Engagement

• articulate and/or show what it feels like, even while resisting or subtracting what it looks like
I have no clue how this might work or what it looks like
SOooo... I'm almost done here. Couple more points. First: Anybody recognize this?
Wikipedia says this about JJG’s namesake: “Although James has often been mythically portrayed, even prior to his death, as a kind of Robin Hood, robbing from the rich and giving to the poor, this is incorrect. His robberies enriched only him and his gang”

At the IA summit a few weeks ago, I was robbed ... of my preferred job title ... by Jesse James Garrett. He said there’s no such thing as an information architect. And that if you disagree you’re fooling yourself, or a liar. It was a great speech. Riveting...
thank you, library science, for getting us off to a great start, for giving us the tools and knowledge to win a place for IA in the world. there will still be a place for library science in IA, but it's only a part of our larger destiny...

I believe that user experience design will take its place among the most fundamental and important human crafts, alongside engineering and architecture and all kinds of creative expression and creative problem solving disciplines.

A key piece of his argument is that if practitioners like those who attended this ASIS&T-sponsored event want a place at the table with and the respect and awareness of C-level folks in major corporations the words User Experience Designer and a broader notion than IA (e.g. end-to-end instead of front of the process) have a better shot at getting us there.

First of all ...if your book is called Elements of UX ... and you’re president of what’s probably the premiere UX firm on the planet ... negating LIS-flavored IA and the title of IA is like robin hood in reverse. I’m not sure this was an altruistic bit of rhetoric

But secondly and lastly, the research and exploration I’m doing for this book project has me thinking more and more that maybe what we UX people do ... or at least what I do .. can be usefully and fruitfully thought of and spoken of and practiced as and influenced by Architecture. Regular-old Architecture. Maybe calling us or it IA is passe or more trouble than it’s worth. Maybe we’re Architects? A specie of Architect.
“Now that I see it”

I have a lot of work to do in building or re-building this case and if you’re interested in helping out, please feel free to tag stuff as NTISI
For More Information

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