



Panelists discuss diversity in architecture

By: Alex Visser in Architecture and Engineering May 28, 2019 2:25 pm



Architecture professionals discuss diversity in their field during a panel discussion at Portland State University last week. (Alex Visser/DJC)

Rookie and veteran architects alike took to the stage Friday in front of a packed auditorium in **Portland State University's Shattuck Hall** to discuss personal challenges related to diversity in architecture, and how the next generation may change the industry landscape, which has traditionally been dominated by white men.

The six-person panel event, organized by students of the university's **School of Architecture**, was the last of "Fridays@4" – a series of discussions between students and industry professionals.

Leading the veteran charge on Friday was Bill Hart, co-founder of **Carleton Hart Architecture**. As he explained, there have been challenges in architecture related to race and gender since he got his start, with clients through the years questioning his skill level and professional success. He stressed the benefits of a diverse team, which provides varied perspectives and strategies.

"Firms don't recognize that everyone can contribute to putting the project together," he said. "What we need is to give folks an opportunity to try."

Nicolai Kruger, who owns an eponymous studio in Portland, has 15 years of experience in architecture, most of it in Japan. She said the process of learning Japanese and teaching her colleagues English helped develop empathy for cultural differences, and led to a more cohesive environment.

Now an adjunct assistant professor at PSU, Kruger said she is encouraged by her students, the majority of whom are women. In a predominantly-male industry like architecture, new professionals should apply to more diverse firms to make a statement to the less-inclusive ones, she said.

"Architecture is traditionally kind of an old boys' club, and Portland is kind of an old boys' town," Kruger said. "I think we need to put the old boys' club on notice."

Octavio Gutierrez, an associate at **Mahlum Architects**, said individuals with diverse backgrounds should advocate for the benefit their viewpoints bring, which many modern companies will value.

"Take your talent where the talent's welcome," he said.

Cosette Hardman, who earned a master's degree from PSU last year, is currently nominated for a secretary position on the World Deaf Architecture Board of Directors. People with disabilities can be even further marginalized in the

industry, she said, and accommodations for an employee's needs can depend on a given company's size and willingness.

"There's always a lot of accessibility we need to have to get the job or even get the job interview," Hardman said. "A significant obstacle will probably be the budget of the firms."

Designer Kayla Anderson of **Salazar Architect** said she is fortunate to work at a firm that values communication and is willing to listen to any issues an employee might experience because of gender or racial differences. That equality won't be attainable until everyone in the industry begins thinking like this, she added.

"Until we decide that these issues are important, we're never going to find a solution," Anderson said. "We need to start advocating for everyone's rights."

Another unique perspective came from Dena Davani, an intern at **C2K Architecture** who grew up under a strict Iranian regime. Everyone wants change, and it could be achieved if citizens took action themselves, she said.

She said she believes the situation is the same in architecture. Regardless of one's diverse challenges, Davani said he or she has a responsibility on a personal level to enact change.

"Inclusivity does exist; that's why we're here," she said. "As an individual you have a lot of power to choose what you want to be involved in."

Tagged with: [C2K ARCHITECTURE](#) [CARLETON HART ARCHITECTURE](#) [DIVERSITY](#) [MAHLUM ARCHITECTS](#) [PSU SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE](#)

