

NEWS & FEATURES December 19, 2006, 11:17AM EST

text size: T T

## Brands and the Built Environment

Architecture and marketing come together in LA-based firm, (M)Arch

by Ingrid Spencer

### ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

Two architects and a strategic marketing professional walk into a building. This time, however, it's no joke. Architect Todd Erlandson, AIA, and marketing guru Sherry Hoffman, principals of Los Angeles-based architecture and branding firm (M)Arch., and (M)Arch. project architect Lara Hoad, have structured their firm into what could be a significant niche in the business of architecture. While some architects might scoff at a firm that puts its own star power aside to focus solely on a company or community's identity, these three are happy to concentrate on creating a holistic brand experience for clients that includes good design as part of the strategy, and keeps their egos out of the picture.

"Becoming stars is the antithesis of who we are," says Erlandson, who has worked for Richard Meier & Partners and Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, and teaches a course about branding and architecture with Hoffman at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California. "We are focused on creating significant work, not signature work."

To these three, creating significant work means defining a company's values, and maximizing those values into a built environment, whether it be for a corporate headquarters, a preschool, a city, or a dental office. "Our goal is to translate the values of a company or community into architecture," says Hoffman, whose experience includes marketing positions at Young & Rubicam and Universal Studios. "Companies want to communicate their identity, and their physical environment can do that for them."

The 5-to-8 person firm, which began in 1998, has worked for such varied California clients as HBO Films, hip Los Angeles department store Fred Segal, and the City of Santa Monica. The (M)Arch. team believes that buildings are important vehicles for communicating a message. "We offer a creative business strategy for our clients that encourages them to define who they are," says Erlandson. "The strategy applies to different areas of design, including logos, business cards, Web sites, and more, so we'll collaborate with graphic professionals to create the other material for a client. And context is everything. We pay attention to how this brand fits into the community in a meaningful way. We want to create something that will make a difference, expose the process, and give people a connection to a hot place."

And connecting with the public means designing structures that are more than boxes covered in logos and signage. "Brands are creating the landscapes of our cities," says Erlandson. "If we, as architects, don't step up and get into it, what will happen to our built environment?"

Provided by [Architectural Record](#)—The Resource for Architecture and Architects

#### READER DISCUSSION

Name

E-mail

Comment



Be the First to Comment on this Story!

*BusinessWeek* welcomes and encourages reader comments. Permission to post reader comments is assumed, and we reserve the right to excerpt or edit for clarity any comments that are posted. We won't be able to publish all comments. And we can't

#### RELATED ITEMS

[Slide Show: Brand Building](#)

#### STORY TOOLS

- post a comment
- e-mail this story
- print this story
- order a reprint
- digg this
- save to del.icio.us



### Clover Park Santa Monica, Calif., 2002

At Clover Park in Santa Monica, Calif., signage, cladding, and landscape communicates the city's identity and aesthetically blends new and existing office trailers in a public park.