

# REVIEWS

reviews

## DOWN DETOUR ROAD: AN ARCHITECT IN SEARCH OF PRACTICE

**Eric J. Cesal**  
MIT Press, September 2010

REVIEWED BY  
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*As architecture students, the nature of our training and education encourages us to be very inward looking. Many of us have aspirations of opening our own design practices and small architecture firms, yet we are taught business by other architects, not business professionals. We learn social behavioral patterns again from architectural thinkers, not sociologists. Sometimes as well our pride over-extends our knowledge and we are led to believe that as architects, as designers, as the great cultural makers of our societies...we can save the world! The good news is we can save the world – the difficult news is we aren't the only ones, we can't save it alone, and design isn't the only thing that matters.*

*Down Detour Road* serves as an incredible guide for both architecture students and recent graduates who have never considered architecture *outside of the realm of architecture*. If you are a little shocked, disturbed, or ruffled by my above observations, or if you disagree with them, then you should absolutely find the nearest copy of this book. Thirty-three year old Eric J. Cesal provides incredible wisdom beyond his years as a recent graduate writing this book – part memoir, part professional dissection – and quickly deciphers our common faults as designers, problem solvers, and sometimes all too commonly, “heroes of the planet”.

In this quick read, Cesal explores our profession, our love, through the lens of the world around us. He unfolds for the reader the differences between design and planning, realism and idealism, and the multitude of other paradigms that exist in architectural education and practice. He tells us how our clients really think (not how *we think* they think), what role cost and value play in architecture as a business, and even how the architecture dream relates to the American dream. As this pragmatic dissection of the profession progresses, Cesal interjects his personal story – that of a broke, unemployed, recent graduate facing reality.

This book couldn't come at a more opportune moment, or be written in a better context, than our current economic recession, which Cesal appropriately refers to as the *Great Wake*. If you have ever spent a night in studio, slaved over a design project, or sought or lost an internship job after school, then you would be doing yourself a favor by reading Cesal's meandering journey. Much more than just a memoir, *Down Detour Road* is a call for a redefinition of architectural values.

**Who should read this book** (Best stated by user *randydeutsch* at [architects2zebras.com](http://architects2zebras.com)):

“Out of work architects. Architects thinking of leaving the profession but want back in. Former architects who have left the profession for good but on deep, dark nights lie sleepless in bed wondering if they made a wise choice. Neighbors of out of work architects who wonder why they wear a tie when taking the dog out for a walk. Anyone who has ever had to wear a tie. Katherine Darnstadt would like this book. Parents who find their recent grads living once again under their roof. Or in their tent. Employers. Architect's spouses, friends, relatives and roommates. Architects who think they might have a story to tell but question whether anyone will care to listen. Architects who are considering doing a tour of duty helping the world in some selfless way while they wait out the *Great Wake*. Architects who think they may be the next to be let go. Architects who sometimes wish they were the next to be let go. Architects who read architecture blog posts in hopes of finding someone who deeply, passionately understands their situation. Architects.”

**You should read this book if...**

You want a crash course in – history, economics, business, sociology, etc. – all told within the context of the built environment. **C**