



e² design season three — The Village Architect

Episode Summary

Architect Brian MacKay-Lyons grew up on the shipyards of Nova Scotia and borrows from that economical, vernacular building tradition in his own architecture. The term vernacular architecture is used to describe structures that are created using traditional methods, styles and materials. In many communities the local architectural traditions are many years, if not centuries, old. The building methods have been passed down from generation to generation, and because they have been revised and refined, they are often the most sensible and economical methods for the location, in terms of materials, landscape and climate.

While many architects choose to move away from the vernacular, Brian MacKay-Lyons has built his career around incorporating the vernacular into his designs. After earning his Bachelor of Architecture from the Technical University of Nova Scotia in 1978, he continued his studies in China, Japan, California and Italy before returning to Nova Scotia in 1983. He started his own architecture firm in 1985 and twenty years later partnered with a former student, Talbot Sweetapple, to form MacKay-Lyons Sweetapple Architects Ltd. in 2005.

MacKay-Lyons has taken much of his inspiration from the building traditions of Nova Scotia, most specifically, a barnyard in Kingsburg. A barnyard is created with the cultivation of the land in mind, and because farmers traditionally had limited resources, intelligence and economy were key elements to their building techniques. On one hand, a barnyard is very practical, just as quality architecture should be. It provides shelter from the weather, while also providing space between the buildings for productive fields or grazing. On the other hand, a barnyard also creates a sense of community, which is evident in the way the buildings work together while also working within the surrounding landscape. Mackay-Lyons uses the barnyard metaphor to inform his designs, as he strives to create buildings that incorporate all that the landscape has to offer while also serving the practical purpose of the structure.

In this episode, Brian MacKay-Lyons uses examples of his work to show how he learns from historic buildings but still creates modern architecture. By taking into account the local landscape and the vernacular architecture of the area, he moves forward by first looking backward. This concept of critical regionalism, to take a critical eye to what the culture of the region has created and then apply it to modern work, is central to his approach. He has been able to expand his work from private homes in Nova Scotia to



academic buildings in Ontario to the Canadian Embassy in Bangladesh without losing his adherence to the vernacular.

To find out more about MacKay-Lyons Sweetapple Architects, visit www.mlsarchitects.ca



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PRE-VIEWING QUESTIONS

1. Can you give three examples of architecture that is specific to one culture or region? (i.e. adobe houses in New Mexico)
 2. What are some potential benefits or drawbacks, both environmental and cultural, of using local materials in the construction of new buildings in a community?
 3. How would you describe the style of architecture in your community?
 4. What is your favorite building in your city or town? Does it blend in with the local architecture or stand out?
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POST-VIEWING QUESTIONS

1. In what ways does Brian MacKay-Lyons draw inspiration and methods from the building traditions in Nova Scotia to inform his architecture? Use specific examples to support your answer.
2. What responsibilities do architects have to the local communities in which they work?
3. How does the purpose of a building affect its design? Use examples from a building that you know (i.e. school, home, town hall, library) to support your answer.
4. What effect does the climate have on architecture?
5. Describe what type of architecture would work best in your local community, keeping in mind available materials, climate, and aesthetics. Does your description match the vernacular architecture of your community?



NATIONAL STANDARDS FROM MCREL STANDARD

Engineering Education

Standard 9.4: Understands the steps involved in designing construction projects (e.g., planning, generating layouts, developing drawings with measurements and details of construction considering constraints, selecting materials).

Standard 14.4: Understands how societal interests, economics, ergonomics, and environmental considerations influence a solution.

Family/Consumer Sciences

Standard 6.7 - Understands effective space utilizations in home design

Standard 9.1 - Understands how clients' needs, goals, and resources influence the creation of design plans for housing, interiors, and furnishings.

Standard 9.2 - Understands the principles and elements of design as they relate to housing, interiors, and furnishings.

Standard 9.6 - Knows factors affecting housing construction and furniture design (e.g., architectural styles, considerations for housing site selection, effects of technology, materials, life-styles).

Standard 9.10 - Understands influences on architectural and furniture design and development (e.g., various historical periods, technology, trends).

Technology

Standard 4.5 - Knows that since there is no such thing as a perfect design, trade-offs of one criterion for another must occur to find an optimized solution.

Standard 4.6 - Knows that a design involves different design factors (e.g., ergonomics, maintenance and repair, environmental concerns) and design principles (e.g., flexibility, proportion, function).

Standard 6.7 - Knows that construction design is influenced by factors such as building laws and codes, style, convenience, cost, climate, and function.



Standard 6.8 - Knows different requirements for structural design (e.g., strength, maintenance, appearance) and that these structures require maintenance.