My name is Steven Song, I graduated from Carnegie Mellon University with a BA in architecture in 2005 and I am currently working in NYC as a junior architect.

While in School, I have had working experience with Urban Design Associates in Pittsburgh, Liu Architects in Long Island, Samsung Development in Seoul, Korea, and Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates in Philadelphia.

The summer with Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown started out with a simple letter, perhaps like this one.

A couple of years ago, through a professor, I heard they were looking for a student who can live with them for a summer to help with their house renovations and such, and I wrote them an extensive email about why I need to meet them, live with them and work for them. To make the longest story short, basically I told them that I have a nature to question things, and the things I question, are in parallel to the things that they question.

Somehow, one day they called me to their house, and then I stayed for three months until I had to go back to school again.

The three months, was full of discussions, questions and learning. In a car to the office, over dinners, while walking around in the backyard, at the VSBA office, everywhere we were, every chance there was, Denise and Bob told me things that I am still studying to understand.

What they told me over the summer and even after, gave me ideas to continue all kinds of research on my own to further the arguments. I tell them about the research and my thoughts, and the interest in the topics goes on.

This on-going 'apprenticeship', if you will, is what guided me and my architecture so far and probably will have continuing influence through the coming years.

How they can pay so much attention and support to a mere architecture student, whose intelligence should be doubted, as he is still struggling to understand things they said years ago, is beyond me. But I sure am speechlessly grateful and I know the only way to pay the debt I owe my teachers is to keep studying the issues and arguments until I can one day further them on my own and share with not only the similar minds but also the different kinds.

For that reason, I'd like to share my interview with Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown about life and Architecture.

February 20, 2006

revised Mar 6, 2006, 1:45 PM

THE INTERVIEW WITH BOB AND DENISE

RV - Robert Venturi

DSB - Denise Scott Brown

SS – Steven Song

DSB: It's nice to know that students from all over the world want to come and talk to us. It makes us feel that we have gone beyond the old Post-modernist argument, moved a whole generation if not two generations. Perhaps the real issues we stand for will now be understood.

SS: Being around you, it's interesting to see how far Architecture extends in your lives beyond the house you live in.

RV: It 's very true that architecture penetrates into our lives and, just as important, our lives penetrate back into our architecture. Why that is I don't know. Since I was two feet high, I have wanted to be an architect. I was always interested in buildings. I can remember my favorite buildings along the way to school. I guess architecture does affect how you see everything. For instance, when I

drive a car or ride in a train, ordinary landscapes are very interesting to me, not only the great architecture but the every day…

SS: There are many stories here that will be a very honest mirror – health-inspiring rather than painfully realistic -- for us college students to reflect our daily lives upon. Seeing how your every day is full is more than inspiring to me -- from waking up at the same time the sun wakes up to insisting on going to work after coming back from a four-hour trip to the clinic for an exhausting check-up. Why do you work such long hours?

RV: We made the decision on our way of working quite early. Naturally when you're young, you work for another architect. But I soon came to the realization that I should have an office on my own, or with a partner. This was because I generally didn't agree with the people I worked with; I realized that my attitude was rather unusual. However, the price you pay for having your own office is that you can't design all the time. You have to be involved with administration, the technical side, and to participate – an awful lot – in selling your firm.

Some architects are very good at self-promotion. My approach isn't so much self-promotion but it is pretty much to get the job started so that we can begin the work. One sad thing is that seven days in a week aren't enough for all we have to do. And another is that they aren't all spent in design. There's also the irony in how the techniques of design are changing. A lot of my design time now goes to critiquing younger people on the computer. Telling them to make this a little longer, shorter, or bigger… It isn't a bad way to design.

DSB: Still, the *partis* come from us.

RV: Yes, the designs come from us, and then they are developed and refined by critiquing. A lot of creativity is involved in the critiques.

DSB: There are several other reasons why we work the hours we do. Being the kind of people we are, we do academic work at the office. For us, combing research, writing, thinking, and teaching makes a whole life. But that takes a lot of time.

RV: We do a lot of writing.

DSB: Although I work full-time at the office, Bob works longer than I do. But I work in the house. So in the end we work a similar number of hours. Another reason we can work so single-mindedly is our position in the life cycle. We've done our child-raising. The interns in our office, who are at the beginning of their life cycle, don't have family responsibilities either. So they and we tend to keep similar hours. The people in between who have kids, especially small kids, physically cannot do that. Child-raising is a two-person business in America today; it should be at least a four-person job. A child needs at least two grandparents and two parents. But in most families, grandparents live far from grandchildren and parents have to go home from the office to look after the babies. So Bob and I and the interns do things that other people don't have the time to do.

RV: We may write because we can't do what we're thinking of or want to do. That's why I wrote when I was younger. If you can't do it, you write it. If I were a painter, I could do anything. I would be starving in my basement and not

selling the art, but at least I could do it. But in architecture you can't do it without sponsors. So you write to accommodate your frustration.

SS: Now with a bit of stretch of my position, I have comments to make. In *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, Kuhn asserts that "improvement" in the natural sciences comes from the revolution of a new paradigm, rather than from accumulation of knowledge. Normal science leads to scientific revolution, leads to a new paradigm, leads to normal science. Applying this model to architecture, the starting point of my "wonderings" is that your works are an architectural revolution, a force liberating architecture from rigidity, that is leading to acceptance/recognition of energetic explosions of different architectural ideas/approaches. Is my starting point valid and fair?

DSB: I think some kind of liberation leads to a new paradigm sometimes. And liberation could be caused by revolution, in our case, by social revolution. The civil rights movement of the 1960s caused a lot of liberated thinking. Social change was one of a range of liberating influences on us. Bob and I are both marginal, in some

respects, to our societies. We're not really part of a group – neither of our "own" groups, nor of any others. That lets us take a slightly skewed view, see things differently, from a peripheral point of view. This, I think, is liberating. Also liberating was our delving into the social sciences at a time when social scientists were questioning a lot. In the 1960s, social scientists asked architects, "Why do you feel this way? Why do you think that way? Are you sure that your value system is the only correct one? Why do you see Las Vegas as ugly, as urban pollution?" Looking at popular culture helped to free us. And so did our interest in history. Each pointed to different ways of thinking. Mannerism, in particular, jolted us into new ideas. It is a way of breaking the rules. It leads you to question things. There was a time when Bob and I played a game called, "I can like something worse than you like." It was very liberating. And it was fun!

RV: I believe there is too much emphasis today on the idea, "to be good, you have to be revolutionary, you have to be different." But evolution is also good. There are moments in history or in architectural development that are right for revolution. But there are also moments for evolution. A lot of the great architecture we love is not original. But it takes the convention

and modifies it, tweaks it. It treats convention in a mannerist way. The resulting tension can create great architecture.

SS: It seems to me that Architecture has expanded its spectrum in all directions creating different architects, including people who chase the highest computer/engineering technology possible, who stick to exploration of basic geometric forms, lights and shadows, who come from the opposite side of the earth to show their architecture of minimalism/vitality, who are more sensitive to environmental issues, who put effort into doing more than one of these, etc. What do you think of these new extremes?

RV: Among those on your list who have expanded our field recently are the Neomodernists. They have gone back to early Modern architecture, but in a Postmodern way. They take a superficial look.

DSB: Being a functionalist is a good thing. The Neomodernists don't believe in Modernism's philosophy of function. Yet functionalism, I feel, was one of Modern architecture's glories. It was a

moral stance, but it was also an aesthetic one, and a way of liberating your eyes. If you look very straight at a design problem and you find that the logical solution -- perhaps the only good solution -- is incredibly ugly, then as Louis Kahn said, "You hate it, and you hate it, and you hate it, until you love it -- because it's the way it's got to be." That movement from hating to loving via facing and understanding functional requirements, can liberate your eyes. You question the rules of what's beautiful, you find beauty in what you had thought ugly, and you develop a new aesthetic sensibility.

Computer programs, especially the 3D modeling programs that students can easily use, tend to push them in certain aesthetic directions. For example, it's easy, with these programs, to put a gloss on architecture, but it's hard to make it look shabby, or to make sketch design look sketchy. And lighting applications can be misused. I remember a student design for a shoe store that stressed light on surfaces. The student used an enormous amount of light. Now a store has to show goods, and there is an art in using light to show goods, to make people want to buy them. But this project showed the shop's surfaces, not the goods, and lit them in a way you would not see, or want to see, in reality. The store looked as

if it had been lit by a distant atomic blast. And there wasn't a shoe in the entire shop!

RV: Oh, god.

DSB: They weren't thinking about the point of the architecture -- about how the goods would be seen. They were considering the design as surfaces only. And even then, not from the viewpoint of what a human being can see, but from the viewpoint of what a computer can do.

RV: A similar thing would be to build the shoe store in the shape of a shoe, which is pretty ridiculous too. That is another extreme, but I would like that better than the other.

DSB: Because it is still about the shoes.

SS: I guess the means had become the goal.

RV, DSB: That's right.

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EXPERIENCE

URBAN DESIGN ASSOCIATES — Pittsburgh, PA
Urban Design Intern May - August '05
- Developed a Source Book of Urban Patterns for Pittsburgh
- Participated in a Design Charrette for Huntersville, NC
- Modeled a 3D model for an Italian Hill town proposal design in St. Louis, MI

CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY — Pittsburgh, PA
Site Engineering Teaching Assistant August - December '04
- Taught in review sessions and assisted grading process

VENTURI, SCOTT BROWN & ASSOCIATES — Philadelphia, PA
Handyperson, Architectural Intern May - August '04
- Maintained and supervised renovations of the Venturi Residence
- Assisted Principals in completing a new campus plan report for Tsing Hua University, China
- Initiated research and 3D computer modeling for the renovation project for Metcalf Research Laboratory at Brown University, Rhode Island

LIU ARCHITECTS — Long Island, NY
Architectural Intern December '03
- Proposed a renovation project for a residence in Long Island, NY

SAMSUNG CONSTRUCTION — Seoul, Korea
Assistant Manager May– August '01
- Responsible for supervision of the last construction phase of an 11 story building for the school of Business Management of Suh-Gang University, Seoul, Korea
- Learned the importance of knowing the site and working with line-level workers

SEO-IN DESIGN STUDIO — Seoul, Korea
Model Maker May – July '00
- Constructed a physical model for a residence project in Korea
- Featured in an architectural magazine as one of Houses of the Year

EDUCATION

CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY, School of Architecture — Pittsburgh, PA
Candidate for Bachelor's Degree in Architecture, with Minor in Chinese

PARTICIPATION

Urban Reserve New Visions Design Competition — May '05
- Designed a sustainable single family housing type with a vision for the growth of the neighborhood in an Urban Design scale with a student team

New York New Housing Competition AIA — December '04
- Planned an apartment with prefabricated modular units that are site-assembled partnered with a professor and a student

World Trade Center Memorial Site Competition — June '03
- Proposed a memorial with thousands of glass tubes of different sizes that glow
- Published on the Website of Lower Manhattan Development Corporation

SKILL

Computer: AutoCAD, Form-Z, 3dMAX, Sketch-Up, Quark, Photoshop, Illustrator
Language: Fluent English, Fluent Korean, Conversational Chinese