

The Collaborator

Working through transition.

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By [Isla McKetta, for AIA Architect](#)

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Rico Quirindongo, AIA, is a principal at DKA Architecture and, since September, president of AIA Seattle. For the last 17 years, he has combined design with social justice through his practice and his involvement with the AIA Diversity Roundtable and the Northwest Chapter of the National Organization of Minority Architects, of which he is a founding member. Architecture is undergoing a generational shift, he says, which creates an opportunity to expand its definition. “With 40 percent of architects retiring in the next 10 years,” Quirindongo notes, “we need to be thoughtful about what the future holds for the industry and for our clients.”

AIA Seattle has done a very good job of making the most of its resources. Our city is a saturated design community where the level of geekhood is huge. Our intellectual capital values collaboration and pushes high-performance design—and I think we share those ideals with other AIA components. We’re working to make our Public Policy Board accessible to a larger group, and to concretize the relationship between design leaders and policymakers so they see our members as resources. This makes architects more impactful on important issues surrounding places in Seattle like the waterfront, Yesler Terrace, and South Lake Union.

Design in Public [DiP], a new not-for-profit, was created by AIA Seattle to educate the public about what we do, to position architects, and to celebrate design. DiP will elevate discussions by collecting information and creating new datasets. We can then provide that research as a resource to the public and the design community.

Our industry has very much been in transition since the economic downturn, which made both clients and architects a little threadbare and wary. It’s a good time, though, to broaden the definition of what it means to be an architect. We need to create diverse workplaces desirable to a generation of architecture students who have gone off to make higher salaries working for contractors or as 3D technicians. Let’s tap into the reasons they went to architecture school in the first place.

The AIA’s Citizen Architect program has become a mainstream conversation as the downturn focused our attention on public projects and engaging the civic realm—and I think there’s a desire among architects to remain vigilant about investing in change, rather than just changing the way we talk about what we already do. This gets to the AIA’s Repositioning effort as well, which means remaining earnest about our intentions and turning over every stone when looking at how the AIA can be a community. This time of great challenge is also a time of great opportunity. I hope we step up as an industry. It’s hard work and it’s certainly more than we get paid for, but as designers and problem solvers we have the skills and the desire to make that positive impact in communities such as Seattle.

-As told to Isla McKetta