



The Remote Studio

by Lori Ryker

As an assistant professor of Architecture, I teach design studios of all levels and theory seminars. I have developed a program I call the Remote Studio. It is a semester long immersion in the wild lands of Montana where a studio size group (7-16) learns about their place in the world and explores these lessons by designing and building a project. The program is suitable for sophomores to graduate students.

Program Fundamentals: The study of architecture, like many programs, has moved away from helping students develop their creativity within the context of society and the world around them, and instead focuses on egocentric expression. The relationship of the self to society and the world is difficult for design students to see when sequestered in studios that allow little interaction with the world. The traditional methods of architectural education are helpful but are not enough to facilitate the synthesis of knowledge young architects require. Fictitious projects done in the studio cannot replace the “real thing.” Only by experiencing the world can knowledge of places and cultures be gained and an awareness of the synthetic relationship between architecture and the world be fostered.

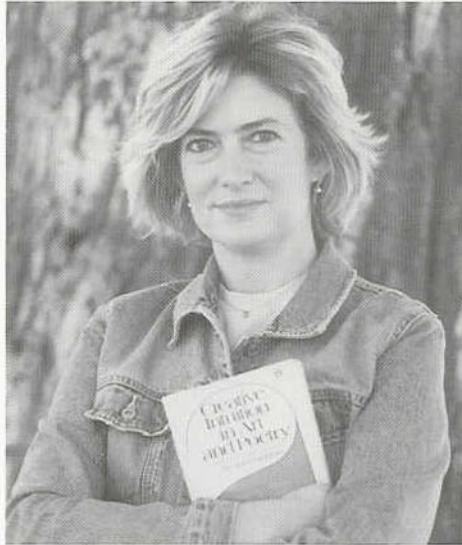
Program Description: The first step in organizing a Remote Studio is locating a client who is in the public domain (such as the National Forest Service, or Fish, Wildlife and Parks) or has a strong public presence and is interested in having students design and build a project. The scope of the projects varies depending on class size. Construction costs are usually covered by the client but may be funded by a grant. Having the classroom facilities and housing near the site is important because spending time in the area provides students with a deeper understanding of the place, its ecology, cultural history, myths and land formations.

The semester is arranged around two educational experiences. The first introduces students to the concepts of sustainability, bio-regionalism, beauty and engagement in the natural world and helps them better understand where creativity comes from. A seminar format is used to discuss

readings and draw out important issues. They explore the concepts of material, immaterial and place through small constructions done by each student. Wrestling with these timeless issues aids in their development as creative individuals. Moreover, they are taken on back-country trips to immerse them in the location. From these experiences, the constructs of modern civilization fall away and students begin to know the world from personal experience. This philosophical foundation and the experience of being in a particular place impact their proposals from their overall designs and placements on the site to the materials and technologies employed. The concepts of sustainability, bio-regionalism, etc. became tangibles that provide a grounding for practicing from a world centered perspective.

The second experience introduces students to the activities of the professional world. Working as a group, they meet with the client, learn about the project and develop a proposal. The client provides feedback relative to their acceptance of or reservations about the proposal. Any required revisions are done by the students. Once a proposal is accepted, students develop detailed drawings for the construction, make a price estimate, do material take-offs and prepare the site. When completed, the students construct their design with full-time mentoring from the instructor.

Program Particulars: The Remote Studio is taught entirely off campus and accounts for a full class load that includes studio, elective and theory components linked to degree requirements. The program is run by a faculty member who may contract other experts to advise on such issues as wildlife management or environmental theory. Students register through Extended Studies. Their tuition covers the instructor’s salary, field trips, tools and some con-



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