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Thanks for reading this sample of *The Architect's eGuide To Portfolios: How To Create Architecture Portfolios That Get You Hired.*

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Thanks!
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2: The Purpose Of An Architecture Portfolio

"Design is a plan for arranging elements in such a way as best to accomplish a particular purpose."
—Charles Eames

What is the purpose of an architecture portfolio?

There are many different reasons why you would want to create an architecture portfolio, from graduate school and internships to scholarships and fellowships. The primary focus of this book is getting a job at an architecture office — either large or small.

The root of this task is to share your work, experience and talents in a compact package that can be easily understood by the hiring manager. Regardless of your strengths and weaknesses your goal with a portfolio is to effectively communicate what you can bring to the office.

As you will see in the many examples throughout book, defining your work can be successfully done in any number of ways. For example, you may want to emphasize how you solved a particular problem in a project or how you creatively developed a particular design idea.

There are no wrong answers, but it is the poor, unclear execution of those answers is what you want to avoid. Before including anything in your portfolio ask yourself the question, *"what am I trying to convey with this?".*

For instance, if it is a building site image, are you showing the photo to explain how you learned about the construction materials and methods? If so, then clearly explain yourself. A casual observer might just see the image and not understand its role in your portfolio. This can be achieved through text in an application portfolio or verbally at the interview.

Know your audience

The key to a successful portfolio submission and ultimately landing the job you want is knowing your audience. In this case it is the architecture office that you are applying. The more information you can collect on your selected target the better. *What type and scale are their typical projects? Do they do local or international work? What software do they use?* For instance, you many need to take classes to improve your abilities with a particular program.

Once you have collected this data it becomes much easier for you to tailor your portfolio to the firm. You may even discover this is not somewhere you want to work because it doesn't align with your career or personal goals.

For this reason you should try to meet with current employees to get their honest feedback. Keep in mind that many people are negative about their employment situation, but don't let that derail your goals. Disneyland is paradise for some and hell for others.

> *Don't be afraid to contact the office directly and ask what they are looking for in an applicant.*

How does the hiring process work? Who will be reviewing my portfolio? What format do you prefer?

If you were looking to hire and someone called with these genuine questions would you be put off by their subsequent application? Of course not, quite the opposite.

If you are looking to make a career change into architecture or even within a different sector you may have to find creative ways to build those skills. One option is to pursue the projects you wish to work on full time either through freelance work or design competitions. This is certainly no easy task but if you want something bad enough you will find the time.

Figure 2.2
Greg Whitney, Adaptive Reuse Community, Graphite on paper

To include or not to include

Perhaps just as important as knowing what to include in your portfolios is what not to include. While some people may try, it is not a record of your entire academic and working career. Not only is your time finite but so is the person's time you will be asking to review it.

Back when portfolios were simply mailed hard copies there was a built-in limiter — the printing budget. No one wanted so spend thousands of dollars on printing in the hopes of landing an interview.

However, now that restriction has been lifted with the advent of digital portfolios. This has been both a blessing and a curse. The portfolio length, formatting and design options are infinite, creating an overwhelming challenge.

Rule #1

Throughout this book I cover the different types of architecture portfolios for each stage of the job search journey. Regardless of which stage you are on one rule remains true: **your portfolio is a collection of your most intriguing and relevant work.**

Also keep in mind that your application portfolio (see Chapter 6) will have to clearly describe your projects via text, diagrams or other easily comprehensible methods. On the other hand your interview portfolio will not have to be as self explanatory since you will be there to provide commentary.

Figure 2.3
Lila Jiang, Bridgeport Eco-Industrial Park

Organization

I recommend, depending on your experience that you organize your portfolio by project typologies. There is no benefit to organizing by firm or chronologically.

For example would it matter that the most relevant project you have worked on was from two years ago? No, that would be the project you would want to start the discussion with. This is why it is important to know all of you previous projects inside and out.

The order of importance for portfolio presentation is:

1. A project relevant to the role you are applying AND shows your most valuable skills and attributes
2. A project that shows your most valuable skills and attributes
3. A project relevant to the firm's typology or expertise you are applying
4. A project relevant to the person interviewing you (remember people love to talk about themselves)
5. A particularly interesting project for discussion

You are better off presenting a potentially less glamorous project you know more intimately than a project that is impressive but you only spent a few weeks on or had a lesser role.

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