

# Q+A: Peter Hendee Brown

TEXT BY CAROLINE MASSIE

Peter Hendee Brown, AIA, has held many job titles in the building industry: architect, city planner, and now urban development consultant. In his latest book, *How Real Estate Developers Think: Design, Profits, and Community* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), the Minneapolis-based polymath discusses how public perception of real estate developers has changed over time, why current stereotypes about developers should change, and why architects should care. ARCHITECT caught up with Brown to learn more.

## How does this book seek to change stereotypes about developers?

I'm trying to debunk three common myths: Developers are only in it for the money; they don't understand or care what good design is; and they don't care much about community because they're only in it for the money. I try to humanize developers by letting them talk about what they do and why.

At the same time, I provide historical context for development. As I say: Show me a historic district and I'll show you a 200-year-old real estate development. One example in my book, Beacon Hill [in Boston], was a big bunch of land that some folks bought, regraded, and started building houses on. Today, the word "developer" often has a derogatory connotation. We used to call developers our town founders and place their statues in our town squares.

I try to put developers into the context of making products we need and want. We grow up in homes, shop in stores, and work in office buildings that have been envisioned by developers. They do a great job of envisioning what we might want next as people's tastes change. Everybody's got their own view of what development is, but the developer has to knit together all those views and then succeed by producing something he or she can sell for more than what it cost to build.

## How can architects and developers collaborate to create buildings that are architecturally interesting

## but also economically viable in the marketplace?

One developer I know defines a good architect as someone who is sensitive to design time and cost on the front end before the deal is real. Developers want an architect to design something that'll stand out in the marketplace. You can't do 10 big design moves on every building, you have to figure out one or two [to make the building] stand out. Then, get the nuts and bolts right and do a good job on the details.

Architects have a vision for a building. Developers have a vision for a larger service, a product, or experience, of which the building is one part.

## How can architects make clients and the general public understand and appreciate what they do?

Architects should try to understand what their client is trying to achieve. Similarly, when architects are presenting their projects in public, they benefit from explaining in clear language what they're doing and why their project achieves greater goals—how it's helping the city complete an undeveloped area, raising the tax base, creating jobs, or helping to move development in a certain direction.

Growth, development, and density are all coming. We can't stick our heads in the sand, pull up the drawbridge and try to oppose everything. Developers do want to learn from the community, because they want to improve their product as much as they can before they build it.



> To read the full interview, visit [bit.ly/PeterHendeeBrown](http://bit.ly/PeterHendeeBrown).