



THE SPECIAL ONES

We know designers are a great bunch because they keep telling us so. In the first of seven articles about the seven deadly sins of architecture, Robert Adam takes on elitism

THERE'S A SPECIAL PHRASE FOR MODERN DESIGN – IT'S CALLED BEING 'UNAPOLOGETIC' – CLEARLY IN ANTICIPATION THAT SOMEONE'S GOING TO ASK YOU TO APOLOGISE

Whenever you walk into a room of architects, prepare for a fancy dress party. Some men will be sporting suits with the lapels cut off, others will have 20 cuff buttons. You might see funny glasses, ethnic hats or eighties student kit. Women, who are generally more into fashion than business uniforms, look less like clowns, but even so you will find the occasional bag lady and some scary make up. And you might be surprised to see, looking out from these curious costumes, the familiar faces of comfortable, well-off businesspeople.

It's a rather charming scene but behind it there's a serious message – architects are telling you that they're a tribe apart.

It's like the doctor's white coat and stethoscope or the barrister's wig and gown. But unlike doctors and barristers, architects go home in their stuff.

The wacky get-up is to tell everyone that architects are interesting, creative types, and certainly not people who could be described as run-of-the-mill. It's not just a way of saying: "I don't look like the boring businessmen who pay me or the poor uncultured sods that live in my

creations." Rather, it's a declaration that they do not want to be anything like them. If you're an architect, you've joined an exclusive club. And, like all exclusive clubs, it's worked out its own ways to keep out the riff-raff.

Odd clothes are just part of the members' kit. There's also a special way of talking: windows are "glazing", gaps are "voids" and groups of buildings are "clusters". If that doesn't work, the way these special people live is a major clue. This can be tricky: because architects are usually fairly well off, they can afford to buy the kind of high-status old houses that they don't think other people should copy. But if you can get inside, it's all pretty clear – all the old stuff is ripped out and replaced with bare boards and very expensive, very uncomfortable chairs designed by members of the club from the thirties. A dead giveaway.

Once you've joined the design professionals' club, solidarity with other members is vital. Success isn't the usual sort of thing, like making money or being happy; it's what other club members think of you. You know you've really made it when you get one of the prizes that are dished out by members to other members for being the best at sticking to the rules.

And if anyone has a go at a fellow initiate,

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members rally round to defend them. Defence groups – called "architects' panels" – have been set up to make sure the uninitiated don't have the brass neck to tell club members what to do.

Of course, the reason you need to keep out the riff-raff is because you're not interested in the riff-raff. You may have to do things for the masses, but it's not your job to give them what they like – it's their job to learn to like what you think they ought to like. There's even a special phrase for this – it's called "raising the bar" and doing it is called being "unapologetic" –

clearly in anticipation that someone's going to ask you to apologise.

In fact, the declared mission of the club is to make everyone else want the same things as club members. Everyone talks about the great day when the rest of the world is going to come round to their way of looking at things. Delegations are sent out to persuade people in power to take up the mission and become associate members. This way, lots of people out there will get the "right" things even when they don't want them and this will force them to see the error of their ways. If all else fails, when they've had this stuff around for long enough they'll just get used to the idea and go along with it.

Nobody seems to have spotted the problem with all this. One of the best things about being a member of a club is that you're special and being special means that you're different. If everyone thinks and behaves like you, you're not different any more. The most important thing about being a member of an elite is to believe that you're top dog and to do that you can't be mistaken for the mindless herd out there. If ordinary people really became members of this club they'll have to change the rules to keep them out.

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