

Architecture Is Fun devotes itself to the architecture of play and driving the process of participation to engage stakeholders of all ages in this constructive foundational activity. Elevating this area of practice from the trivialized to the transformative recognizes the power play has as a catalyst for learning, socialization, community and culture.

Architecture Is Fun makes everyday life fun.

Architecture Is Fun is a collaborative practice that explores the nexus of architecture, education and experience. For the past decade, this small, yet, successful studio has spread its influence as educative design strategists, consulting to major organizations in myriad fields, from museums and schools to foundations and associations, on a wide range of issues but always with a long-standing commitment to build accessible places of learning, living and fun that are indispensable for human growth and development.

Thanks to its seminal approach to play, Architecture Is Fun has been tapped to work on such a visually compelling and socially engaging host of museum, library, school, healing, community and public space projects. **Renown collaborators, architects and educators Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown called the studio's oeuvre "work of significance and relevance, joy and seriousness, range and depth."**

Founding & Educative Design™ Philosophy:

Architect Peter Exley FAIA RIBA and educator/designer Sharon Exley MAAE ASID cofounded the Architecture Is Fun as a multidisciplinary studio in 1994. FUN is an important part of the firm name and a critical part of their trademark educative design process. This ideology – design that makes education fun and design that is fundamentally educated - - is fulfilled through its participatory nature.

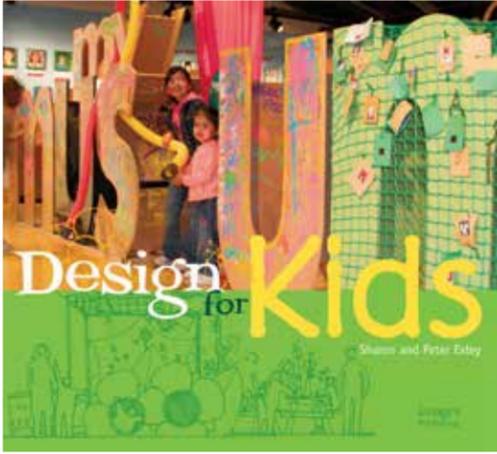
As an architectural think-tank for play and learning, the studio stands apart in their willingness to continuously innovate and evolve. They design the way they lead, manage, source, create, and collaborate. Multiple perspectives are valued. Education, experience and design inform each other. The firm's team of multidisciplinary professionals has included architects, art therapists, educators, scientists, historians, medical professionals, graphic, industrial designers and more. The inventive, broad-minded attitude of the studio extends outward to clients.

Its collective process - inclusive, focused and committed – brings everyone to the design table, values multiple perspectives and shapes stories through an architecture of complexity, familiarity, beauty and richness.

Architecture Is Fun develops opportunities to connect clients and communities in the creation of meaningful public space and play experiences. At a grassroots level, the studio shapes spaces that instill pride and bring empirical value. On a global scale, the architectural work and philosophy bring thought leadership and the power of play to those who experience its projects, presentations or publications.

Exponentially Through Architecture

In a world that is becoming increasingly more complex, specialization and vertical thinking is essential. **While the firm's work stems from the voice of two partners, it thinks in the "power of ten" - the "power of play."** Connectivity and focus allow Architecture Is Fun to be a laboratory of creative problem-solving that extends beyond the studio size and address. Frequent guest stars work and play under the Architecture Is Fun "umbrella," which allows the studio to be scalable, agile, and project-centric. **Working with an inward-facing and outward-facing work force presents Architecture Is Fun with new lenses to see the world at differing scales and in multiple ways.**



In the museum world, Architecture Is Fun continues to have a very positive impact upon the direction of museum design, and his most recent book, Design for Kids, has become an important primer for pioneering work in children's museum design.
- Peter Kuttner, FAIA, President, Cambridge Seven Associates, Inc.



Sharing our educative process and notions of participatory design.

The growth of the studio is visible by its rising reputation for educative design excellence, diverse portfolio, and ever-widening geographical reach. Over 175 educational, non-profit projects - libraries, museums, schools, and parks – plus profit-based ventures have benefitted from the studio's trademark approach to design and fun. Each project is reflective of place, purpose, and participant – here at home, across the U.S., and in Canada and Rio de Janeiro.

Recognition

As architects, the studio creates safe projects that speak to communities. As educators, it imbues play with significance, creating dynamic and magical installations. As playmakers, the firm has built a strong, recognized portfolio. In the last decade, Architecture Is Fun has been honored with 9 AIA Chicago Awards, 5 AIA Chicago Service awards, 2 AIA Illinois Awards for projects at all scales – from diminutive public spaces to entire museums.

The studio's specialization, thought leadership, and collaborative practice have made significant impact well beyond the architectural profession, testified by over 100 education, design and public access awards extending the reach of the architect: for accessibility, interior design, landscape and interpretive architecture, museum, library design, collaboration in art and design, excellence in teaching, and color in design including the renown Benjamin Moore HUE Award.

The work of Architecture Is Fun makes a measurable impact that our work has on the lives of children and neighborhoods they call "home." **Shared success stories and metrics include positive economic impact on communities, rises in student test scores, high attendance rates, increases in memberships, successful capital campaigns and grant applications, sustainability, pedagogically-based master plans and public space studies – all designed for universal access and appeal.**

Thought Leadership:

The principals and associates participate in national and local conferences, panel discussions, lectures and exhibitions to share the educative process and notions of participatory design to the greater architectural, design, educational and industry-centric communities. Recent speaking engagements include **AIA Puerto Rico, NeoCon Chicago, Nelson-Atkins Museum Kansas City, and the Lazio/Rome Chamber of Commerce.**

Architecture Is Fun was content advisor to and featured in *Extraordinary Playscapes*, the Boston Design Museum traveling exhibit on the history, science and importance of play. The studio produced *An Architectural Circle* for the 2016 Chicago Architecture Biennial and a series of events for the city's Department of Cultural Affairs and *Chicago Artists Month* in which Peter Exley was named as featured artist. For the 2017 Chicago Architecture Biennial, Architecture Is Fun designed AIA Chicago's Pop-Up Gallery, *Functional Objects By Architects*.



The house brings the serenity that families are looking for.
~ Mary Agnes Laguatan, Director of Programs,
Ronald McDonald House Charities

In the city in which modern orthodoxy continues to infuse the architectural practice with gravity and earnestness, Architecture is Fun pioneered the notion that one design principle is to be above all others: attitude. In the mold of Ray and Charles Eames, Sharon and Peter Exley continue to meaningfully impact communities with their playful, courageous, and deeply humanistic work, both in Chicago and across the nation.

~ Thomas Jacobs, AIA
Principal, Krueck + Sexton Architects



...a project that appeals to adults while delighting children.
~ Neal David, AIA, Vice President
Lincoln Park Zoo

Notable Recent Projects

In 2017, Architecture Is Fun completed a *Public Space Study* for [The Field Museum](#) to better understand the challenges and opportunities in making Stanley Field Hall open and accessible. The study included in-depth envisioning with staff and stakeholders, pedestrian flow studies, analytics on current public space, benchmarking, and prototyping desired openness and heightened accessibility. Other notable cultural planning projects include public space and renovation studies for the [Art Institute of Chicago](#), [Calgary Public Library](#), [Chicago Children's Museum](#), the [Getty Museum](#), and [Children's Museum of Fond du Lac](#).

Simultaneously artful and art-filled, the recent design of [Young At Art Museum](#) is motivation and map of a new sector of socially inventive museums – the art museum for children. Developed in a public/private partnership with Broward County, the Knight Foundation called Young At Art one of South Florida's "most transformative arts initiatives." [The 43,000 SF LEED certified project garnered national and international attention; featured on MOMA Online and BOB International Magazine of Space Design, Korea. Awards include 2 AIA Chicago Awards, 2 ASID Illinois Awards, a CODA Collaboration of Design + Art Award, an American Alliance of Museum of Award, Project of the Year Vision Award from the Urban Land Institute, among others.](#)

Designing a multifamily "home away from home" for families of seriously ill children demonstrates the importance of building a sense of community through support, socialization and shared experience. [The Ronald McDonald House in the Woods is a healing place, providing anxious families a warm and nurturing place of refuge and respite.](#) "The Oak Lawn house brings the serenity that families are looking for," concurs Mary Agnes Laguatan, Director of Programs and Services for RMCHI-CNI. "We wanted the house to be welcoming, where families could find a place to rest and to have some playfulness for kids. It is warm and inviting. It is a design that embraces the family." [Published nationally, the project received the Outstanding Project Award, Association of Subcontractors and Affiliates and serves as a new Ronald McDonald House standard for innovative design of family-style accommodation and access.](#)

Home in Chicago, Architecture Is Fun designed the following award-winning high profile projects, each having significant positive impact on their end users, institutions and our city: [Pritzker Family Children's Zoo at Lincoln Park Zoo](#), [Latin School of Chicago](#), [Kids on the Fly](#), [Chicago's O'Hare International Airport](#), [City of Chicago Ogden Park](#), [St. Chrysostom's Day School](#), [Weissbluth Pediatrics](#) and [Chicago Children's Museum](#).

Social Responsibility:

Associates, colleagues, and clients join in Architecture Is Fun's social and cultural activism: tutoring, serving on boards, and volunteering with global and local organizations on disaster relief and the transformation of cities through art and architecture. The studio works with *Architecture for Humanity*, *Habitat for Humanity*, *Big Brothers/Big Sisters*, and local non-profits who transform Chicago's neighborhoods through art.

Committed to its clients' missions, the Exleys take part beyond project completion. They advise, teach, mentor, and volunteer at local museums and schools, creating programs about sustainability, architecture, geometry and space architecture and touring children and adults around Chicago's legendary structures and artful spaces.

We first got in touch with Architecture Is Fun when we were searching for architects and designers with a strong background and reputation on projects for children and interactive museum installations. It was back in 2010 and the idea was to develop the project of a big park for families in Rio de Janeiro. We worked together for almost a year and Architecture Is Fun developed a fantastic project. Sharon and Peter Exley are really special people and professionals. The way they engaged us in this project was unique, conquering the respect and the admiration of all the people working on it. They demonstrated such a passion for what they were doing in such a transparent way that made this not only a very special project but, more important, a unique life experience for us. [Translation]

~ Flávio Mendes, Animason Owner & Software Solutions Executive, IBM Latin America Social Business & Collaboration

It is hard to imagine a more productive, hydra-like two-person design/education practice than Architecture is Fun. Fighting way above their weight class for over 25 years, they indeed float like a butterfly, sting like a bee. They have sought out and filled so many voids; championing and designing for children, teaching, serving the AIA at the highest levels, writing/publishing, and oh yeah, [evangelists for] the world wide sensation Pecha Kucha.

Sharon and Peter and their work have had such a sustained influence on design, education and the profession at every level; local, national, and international. You want to be with these guys - they are fun and colorful and cool. But mostly, to be inspired by their forcefield. So grateful for their presence....they need to know that!

~ Dan Wheeler, FAIA
Principal, Wheeler Kearns Architects

Culture Building

Architecture Is Fun contributes to Chicago's architectural and cultural landscape. [Committed to discourse and public awareness of the built environment, the partners provide expert architectural testimony on local news and through online blogs, industry magazines and academic journals.](#) The studio is devoted to Chicago's architectural future, demonstrated by the partners' accessibility and enthusiasm in mentoring young and seasoned professionals as they seek licensure or fellowship, by building multi-generational bridges to share career guidance, and in being the first Chicago-based studio to support *Architects Advocate*, hoping to inspire others by taking action on climate change.

As culture builders, Architecture Is Fun introduced Chicago twelve years ago to the *PechaKucha* Night lecture phenomenon. Now a staple on the cultural calendar, these events bring architecture, art, and education to the attention of Chicagoans, and over 30,000 audience members to date. The studio assists PechaKucha start-ups and AIA chapters as a means to channel public speaking and social networking as a methodology for diverse and dynamic public engagement. [Through culture building, Architecture Is Fun collectively imparts the legacy and relevance of Chicago design across time, disciplines, and cultures.](#)

The partners take part in the larger academic and design community, embracing learning, teaching and sharing best practice. They advocate for young talent to become active members and leaders of associations relevant to their disciplines. Principals and protégés are encouraged to teach and volunteer, at the university level and at street level.

Peter Exley FAIA RIBA has been a dedicated adjunct professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago since 1993. He volunteers regularly as an AIA Bridge Mentor for young practicing architects, hosts student and local groups, and is a national steward and advocacy leader, including his current service as Director-At-Large of the American Institute of Architects National Board of Directors.

Sharon Exley MAAE Associate ASID mentors the next generation of problem-solvers and space-makers in and out of the studio, producing teacher workshops, creating classroom architecture programs and curriculum, and serving as thesis and professional advisor. Sharon takes part on local non-profit boards. She received the Archi-Treasures Gem of the Community Award for initiating a fundraising advisory board and producing events that raised awareness and funded the non-profit's transformative work.

Architecture Is Fun encourages young talents to be entrepreneurial, adventurous, complete their qualifications, establish work life balance, and share its commitment to improving the quality and beauty of the built environment – be it through architecture, art, design, data, education or collaboration.

Through architecture, inspired interiors, artful installations, and place-specific provocations, Architecture Is Fun creates special places that hold meaning and memory for all. In a time when play is under siege, promoting scalable opportunities for all to experience fun contexts is critical.