

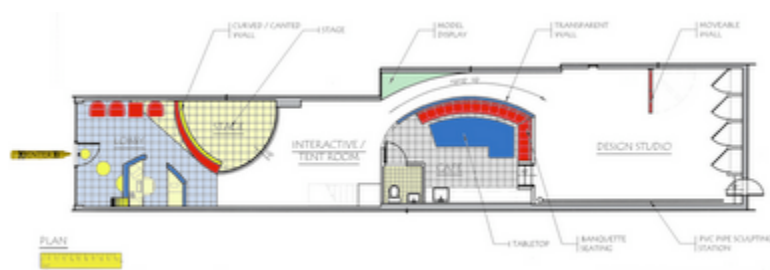


Dreaming, Drawing, Designing

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Like many a budding architect, Shane Stock speaks of his designs in terms that are both lyrical and logical. Stock is now in the construction phase of his latest project, one in which the main structure and the surrounding grounds, are both meant to evoke a sense of lightness.

"Buildings that make us feel lighter are more attractive," he says. "I'm inspired by greenhouse spaces with a lot of windows and a lot of light. I have a 'rain drop' hotel design that I'm working on—mostly made out of glass." His current building, however, employs different building materials. It is constructed from white cardboard and ornamented with a variety of colored markers. It stands approximately twelve inches tall, and fits nicely on his classroom's desktop. Shane Stock is, after all, a fifth grader enrolled in a studio program, called "Architots," in the Middle Village neighborhood of the borough of Queens, in New York City.



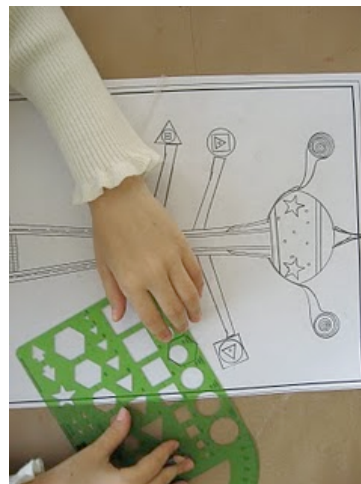
Architots Floor Plan

Started in 2002, Architots has a mission to introduce kids to architecture and design from an early age. "The goal," says founder Michael Macaluso, is to "change the way children interact with their built surroundings and help them to understand their space in a unique, different, and exciting way." Each student is encouraged to study the nuances of global design, relying on fundamental mathematics and geometry to inform their work, create designs that are exciting and unique. Shane Stock has been with the group for several years. Working in such an environment, he says, "Gives me ideas about building and space that I never had before. Adding and subtracting space from a building design lets me look at the design piece by piece. It's an opportunity to be creative and to experiment."



Shane Stock, Architot

The importance of an early interest in architecture is something Macaluso understands well. As the son of an architect, a love and passion for building and design was ingrained in him as a child, and that exposure would provide the basis for the Architots program he now directs. Macaluso explains that distilling the complexities of the discipline into something interesting and fun allows architecture to become more tangible, and visits to the M. J. Macaluso & Associates firm makes a future design profession seem possible to his students.



The program is geared toward developing math, art, history, and engineering skills, and is available to kids of all ages. There are playgroups for babies and toddlers, who graduate to parent-interactive and independent design classes. Some participants meet in the Middle Village design studio, but the program travels easily, spreading architecture and design to area schools and private groups looking for more specialized design opportunities. At present, the program is implemented at five locations around New York City—including Garden School in Jackson Heights and P.S. 49 Dorothy Bonawit Koe in Middle Village—where architots engage in one or

two classes per week. Each curriculum, however, is distinct from the next, allowing the program's teachers and a school's administration to tailor classes to the needs and desires of the kids. The Garden School offers an Architots program with a focus on math and science, while P.S. 49 focuses on architecture as an artistic expression and studies its historical influences and social relationships.

Below: Architots studio; kitchen



This flexibility is a major strength of the program, allowing courses to grow, change, and adapt with the students' interests and talents. Macaluso notes that this multi-faceted attitude is inherent to the architectural discipline, and thus a natural component of the Architots experience. He stresses that, "First and foremost, the lessons are fun and expressive, but they give children an underlying educational message.

By building on a child's innate curiosity with the world and the desire to create, the program directs these energies into creative design and a greater understanding of their built surroundings."

The classes have resulted in a variety of creative and well-developed projects, which range from drawings to models and floor plans. Perhaps most impressively, the interest of students

in architecture takes root. Kids like Shane Stock enroll in classes year after year and even take their lessons home with them—using their ever-increasing technological savvy to research information and pictures of far-flung architecture they want to incorporate into their own designs. As Stock says: "Getting ideas is the most fun. I like to imagine designs for



all different types of buildings then try my best to turn my idea into a drawing. Sometimes I can't wait to jot my ideas down. Trying my best and enjoying it at the same time is exciting." In this way, kids learn to see design as a field that is both thrilling and approachable, aspects that pique their interest, and hopefully hold it for a lifetime. As the Architots program seems to prove—at least when it comes to the spaces in which we will live, work, and enjoy ourselves—the children are our future.

—Katy Kiick