

CONJECTURES  
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An interview with Mr. Belcher, Director of School of Architecture

**Conjectures** is a monthly journal published by students of School of Architecture at Florida International University (FIU). Its contents are opinions of individual contributors and do not represent those of the student body as a whole or the staff or faculty of FIU. **Conjectures** is a forum for the students to express their academic opinions and to improve their skills in written communication without the strict requirements of research thesis. To be published, these opinions, as approved by a panel of supervisory students, must have the following qualifications:

- Have clear purpose.
- Be important.
- Be professional.

**Conjectures** has the following sections:

- Original articles or rebuttals – should start with a statement of thesis.
- A semester long competition for projects in architecture, interior design, landscapes, and other design intensive areas such as apparel, automobiles, and household items. Poetry and essays are welcome.
- Student-Staff Corner where students and staff voice their concerns relating to school-life quality issues.
- Notices / Ads.

To get to **Conjectures**, go to

[Hhttp://www.fiu.edu/~soa/s\\_organization.htm](http://www.fiu.edu/~soa/s_organization.htm)

Then click on:

SOA Student Life + Work

Or simply click on:

[HSocial Organizations](#)

Interview with Mr. Belcher, Director of School of Architecture on Wednesday, June 13, 2007 at 2 pm.

Conjectures: How long have you been with FIU's School of Architecture (SOA) and in what capacities?

Belcher: 10 years. I was an assistant professor, then was promoted to associate professor, then director of Architecture Program / Department and assistant dean. More recently I was promoted to director of School of Architecture – which includes Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Interior Design.

By the way, Adam Drisin, Marta Canaves, and Janine King are now called Chairs of Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Interior Design academic programs, respectively.

Conjectures: Where and when did you receive your education and what degrees did you attain?

Belcher: Undergrad: Virginia Tech, 83-88, BS Architecture.  
Graduate: Harvard University, 90-92, MS Architecture.

Conjectures: Who is your favorite architect and what do you like about her/his architecture?



Belcher: No one favorite. But I am interested in contemporary architecture, i.e., modern architecture. I like avant-garde, experimental, innovative architects. Additionally, as I am getting older, I am becoming interested about architects who follow some ethos – e.g., ecological, social, etc. issues. I like architects that practice with passion.

Conjectures: Each design project requires a different approach. Generally speaking, what is your approach to design; what steps do you take for a typical design?

Belcher: Projects are process-oriented; they emerge through analysis. A project is not a linear process. The approach should be rigorous. At best of circumstances it requires patience – almost Zen-like.

Conjectures: What are the few steps in any design that you think are most important?

Belcher: Research, analysis, and passion.

Conjectures: What are 10+/- pros and cons of student's projects that you encounter in midterm and final presentations? Please comment in detail.

Belcher: Good projects are those that show student has learned. Project is precise and clear, and leads to the illustration of an idea. Also, student is receptive but challenging and is prepared for a dialogue.

On the negative side are:

Projects that are incomplete, incoherent, erratic, or lack clarity, e.g., plans don't line up with sections or models. Students put things on the wall that they don't know why they are there; they follow what the instructor said but they don't know why s/he said so.

Student's inability to detach from the work; the work becomes personal. They take challenge of their work as personal and they object to it.

They are not sure why they are doing what they are doing. This shows insecurity and lack of trust in self or faculty.

Impatience. It takes a long time to evolve the design. They don't want to do the homework. When they realize how unprepared they are they get frustrated. Sometimes frustration shows up as cynicism and/or insincerity.

Sloppiness:

Conjectures: What books, journals, or other resources would you recommend?

Belcher: There are many. Textbooks and faculty recommended books. Everyone should start their own collection of books.

Some of the good resources on the web are:

[www.deathbyarch.com](http://www.deathbyarch.com)

[www.Designboom.com](http://www.Designboom.com)

[www.research.net](http://www.research.net)

[www.aadrl.net](http://www.aadrl.net)

[www.archidose.blogspot.com](http://www.archidose.blogspot.com)

[www.architect.com](http://www.architect.com)

Also visit university websites.

Some of the good journals are: Architecture Record, El Croquis and publications by universities.

Conjectures: What study habits would you recommend?

Belcher: Designers have high ego and think that they can keep everything in their head. This may work against you. Organize your time – otherwise you may be overwhelmed.

Communicate with fellow students and teachers.

Conjectures: What is the funniest incident that you have encountered as the faculty/dean of School of Architecture?



Belcher: I remember, during a presentation (not in FIU), a student was responding to a faculty's critique by saying "yah right". I knew that the student was sincere, but the faculty interpreted his answer as snobbish "YAH

RIGHT!!” Towards the end, the faculty was red faced and privately said to me “I almost hit that kid.”

Conjectures: You are a biker and a motorcycle fan. Where have you traveled on the motorcycle?

Belcher: I am not necessarily a biker, but I do have a motorcycle. While in grad school I circled the United States on the motorcycle. I went from Boston to Chicago to S.F. to New Orleans.

Conjectures: Are any of your designs available on the web or can you share some pictures of them?

Belcher: I don't have a website. Most of my work are at other offices. I did a little house for Architecture for Humanity last summer. I also did an exhibition in France. Most of my time in recent years is dedicated to university work.

Conjectures: Is FIU's School of Architecture *concept-oriented*. What does this mean? What are some other approaches to architectural education, say in other institutions?



Belcher: Concept is the idea of a project; a critical thought behind the building or landscape or interior; it is more than just gestures and shapes. Student's definition of conceptual is abstract.

We have very specific idea. FIU is not referential – e.g., not necessarily classical orders only. For example, the gallery dose not have many projects with pitched roofs. Other schools may be referential and emphasize historical references. Some define Architecture by the artifact or the idea.

We are not rigorous or dogmatic, e.g., Miesian. We emphasize invention, innovation, newness, digital technology, sustainability, and interdisciplinary communication. Some faculty has commitment to pluralism, some fear dogmatism.

Our agenda of school is closer to contemporary practice: modern. Also for accreditation, our education includes Body of Professional Knowledge; they are: Technical, Historical, Theory, and Business and Professional practice. Our design presentation and graphics mimic actual practice.

Conjectures: What is your vision for the School of Architecture say in 1 and 5 years?



Belcher: School has three exciting and strong academic based programs: Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Interior Design. At the end of this year architecture school will be accredited. We are looking into Geneva program. We like to incorporate Urban development together with hospitality industry as we work with public services design of environment.

We launched the website in December of this year. We will provide website for students as forum.

Long Term: I think there is real opportunity for us to lead in professional design disciplines: Digital, industrial, and graphic design. We would like to bring these in at the level of a major regional university. Currently FIU does not have industrial, graphic, or motion graphic design. In 5-10 years we would like to be a leader in the SW of the country as a research and design school – even as a center of hub including South America.

Conjectures: Would you like to add anything else?

Belcher: No.

Conjectures: Thank you very much.

Belcher: Good Luck.

Articles:

None this issue.

Competition

None this issue.

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Notices:

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