

Design Like You Give a Damn: Architectural Responses to Humanitarian Crises  
*Edited by Architecture for Humanity*

*Design Like You Give a Damn* is an emotionally driven historic coffee table book that takes you through the beginnings and history of the non-profit “Architecture for Humanity” along with responses to natural disasters throughout America and the rest of the world. It starts off with a section about the history of the non-profit that is writing the book itself, then ventures into the world’s response to disasters throughout history, and ultimately the bulk of the book revolves around case studies throughout the world specific to certain disasters with a multitude of pictures, descriptions, and projects of successes and failures.

Cameron Sinclair, co-founder of Architecture for Humanity, describes the early stages of his organization as very unorganized. The section starts off with a conversation between Sinclair and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees just three days after 9/11; the UN wanted emergency refugee housing units in case the U.S. decided to launch a counterattack missile. He laughs as he makes a comment about how he hopes the list of people she is calling is long, because the organization he is head of only consists of 2 volunteers (at that moment). Sinclair then walks through the politics of starting an NGO and what exactly it entails. He saw a need in the world for an organization that revolved around housing and buildings for refugees. It started with two people leading design competitions for architects throughout the U.S. to develop housing responses to certain crises and eventually turned into an organization revolved around disaster relief as well. The ultimate goal of Sinclair’s organization is to network designers along with NGO’s in order to bring services to people who are in need.

Kate Stohr, also a co-founder of Architecture for Humanity, then goes on to depict the history of architectural disaster relief in her section titled “100 Years of Humanitarian Design.” She talks about stories from the San Francisco earthquake and fires in 1906 all the way up to the 2005 earthquake in Kashmir, Pakistan. It’s very interesting to see how we as a society have progressed over the course of a century by learning from each disaster and how exactly to deal with each one. Throughout the years, more and more community involvement has been installed into relief programs. However, even from the start of the San Francisco earthquake, involvement of the community has been a key role. Stohr emphasizes investment of the victims themselves as a key role in building successful response housing. She mentions that ideas such as creating smaller communities within large camps is also key to keeping the community sustainable and successful as a whole. She ends her section calling on all designers and architects to “humbly venture into the communities in which they live, listen to the needs of their neighbors, and offer their services – proceed and be bold!”

The rest of the book involves case studies ranging from Burning Man to experimental paper houses in Africa. Statistics, pictures, graphs, and quotes are spilled throughout this section of the book.

I particularly thought this book was a good read. Although it is very informational, both Sinclair and Stohr did a very good job at emotionally engaging the reader with very relatable and humble wording. I think they fully understand

the importance of complete empathy and understanding of the affected community that is ultimately the client of what ever is being designed or built to better society.

These two quotes were included in the book on full spreads that I thought pertained to our class:

*"I decided I had had enough. I closed the office, bought a motorcycle, and went into the desert for five years to work with the people on their ideas and dreams." - Nader Khalili*

*"The main purpose of development should be quality of life for the large majority of people. If you don't have a generous view of cities, then you don't have a generous view of people." – Jaime Lerner, mayor of Curitiba, Brazil*