design for good

By John Cary
Foreword by Melinda Gates

A New Era of Architecture for Everyone

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Island Press gratefully acknowledges major support of our work by The Agua Fund, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, The Bobolink Foundation, Center for the Living City, The Curtis and Edith Munson Foundation, Forrest C. and Frances H. Lattner Foundation, The JPB Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, The Oram Foundation, Inc., The Overbrook Foundation, The S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, The Summit Charitable Foundation, Inc., and many other generous supporters.

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**A New Era of Architecture
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Keywords: Affordable housing, architecture, community design process, design, dignity, green building, health-care design, healthy building, human-centered design, locally sourced materials, participatory design, public architecture, public health, public interest design, social equity, social impact design

This project was made possible in part by the generous support of the Curry Stone Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Reis Foundation.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017934969

All Island Press books are printed on environmentally responsible materials.

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Designed by Pentagram: Paula Scher, Courtney Gooch

To Courtney Martin, who taught me that buildings
are about people and people are about stories,
and our friend Raymond Lifchez, who has dedicated
his life to the social art of architecture.

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Foreword

Melinda Gates

When I think about the power of design, I think of a visit I once made to a clinic that my friend Paul Farmer runs in Haiti. Paul met me at my car and walked me to the front door, stopping every few steps to greet a patient, offer a hug, ask about someone's family. As we got closer to the building, a lovely garden with a canopy of flowing vines caught my eye. Paul mentioned that he'd planted it himself.

In a country so burdened by poverty and disease, it was striking to think of a physician like Paul making the time to plant a garden. It was a kind gesture, but in the face of so much human suffering, it could also be mistaken for a small one.

Paul, of course, had his reasons. He planted this garden because he wanted his patients and their families to stand in the shade instead of the sun as they waited for care. He planted it because he believed they deserved comfort and the company of something beautiful. He planted it because he wanted more for them in every way possible, and he wanted them to be empowered to expect more for themselves.

When you think about it that way, the garden is no longer just a garden. It's a symbol of empathy, of optimism, of hope. It signals deep compassion and a principled refusal to compromise. That is the power of design.

As John Cary writes in these pages, design dignifies. It exists not for itself but for those whom it serves. It honors its users—who they are, where they are coming from, what they want to achieve. It proves that their preferences are important and that their voices have been heard. Great design starts with listening, and the product it produces is an expression of empathy.

Before Bill and I started our foundation, I spent a decade working at Microsoft, where I thought about design mostly as it applied to creating new, more user-friendly software. There, I learned that the most important choices we as designers could make were the ones that made our products more accessible to the user. Our research team spent countless hours talking to our customers, learning more about them—their hopes, their frustrations, their comfort with new technologies. The insights they gained helped drive decisions like putting a big button that said “Start” prominently on the screen. For many people, that simple icon managed to transform the personal computer from a source of confusion into one of endless possibility.

Possibility fills the pages of this book as John takes us on a tour of clinics, schools, shelters, and community centers around the world. The spaces we visit are places where bodies will heal, communities will come together, and families will break the cycle of poverty. At each stop, John explains the thoughtful choices that went into creating these sites and gives voice to both the people who designed them and those they were designed for. These structures are intended to be not only landmarks in their communities but also milestones in the lives of the people who will use them.

←
Maternity Waiting Village
in Kasungu, Malawi, by
MASS Design Group, the
University of North
Carolina Project–Malawi,
and the Malawi Ministry of
Health; completed in 2015.

←
Women gather and
rest at the Maternity
Waiting Village in
Kasungu, Malawi.

As you turn these pages, let these stories come alive. Imagine what it would be like to be a woman in Malawi traveling from your remote rural home to a Maternity Waiting Village where you will spend the last, most dangerous days of your pregnancy safely within reach of expert medical care. Imagine your anxieties about giving birth someplace so far away and unfamiliar—and your relief at arriving to find it is comfortable, beautiful, and even built with the contours of a pregnant body in mind.

Or imagine what it would be like to have suffered the insecurities of homelessness and the indignities of a life without privacy—but now, finally, to have the simple satisfaction of hearing the door of your own home lock behind you, turned by your own key. Imagine watching a new community meeting space rise from the ground near your home, knowing that the gatherings that will take place there will add new texture to your life, perhaps drawing you into new friendships and beginnings.

The stories in these pages are not merely meant to be read; they are meant to be felt. These photos should not just dazzle you—they should inspire you, uplift you, and even challenge you. They are a reminder that great design is not a finite resource; it is a choice we can all make by listening more, empathizing more, and demanding more for humanity. They call on us all to insist that even in the face of scarcity and suffering, there must always be room for dignity.