Archispeak 333 - AU - Evolving Workplace Design

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Evan Troxel: All right, well, we are joined today by Primo Orpilla, and Primo is principal and owner of O+A Architecture in San Francisco Primo, welcome to the Archispeak podcast.

Primo Orpilla: thank you guys. So excited.

Evan Troxel: Yeah, we're going to be having a great conversation today about workplace design trends and all kinds of things. And, and you have a long history in this. Maybe you can us up, give us a timeline, of what hat you've seen over the last 30-plus years working in architecture.

Primo Orpilla: Yeah. So, I graduated from, uh, San Jose state in 88. probably the worst time to come out of school and go into the job market. 89 was not a good time. And, uh, I didn't get the fancy job up in San Francisco or LA or New York. I got it in San Sunnyvale, California, where I worked on many cool projects for Lockheed, Marietta, Raychem. Uh, at that time, uh, the Bay area was especially Silicon Valley was really military complex all those companies were making satellites, tanks, weapons. And, uh, the only company that you might have heard of is Apple and Intel.

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Otherwise there was no Google, there was no Facebook. It was very much a hardware, uh, driven economy down there. And a lot of

Evan Troxel: back then, right? Like huge. Yeah.

Primo Orpilla: Xerox was still around. I mean, Philips, things that, uh, you, you know, you don't even hear about today. Uh, and this is like the cycle. It's very much like every, uh, five or 10 years, all those companies kind of go away and a new company appears. So, um, I started my career in the Valley. Um, really, really got into, uh, what I would say the first version of tech workplace and, um, kind of saw. Uh, a lot of how that was, that was Dilbertville, a lot of cubes, a lot of very sort of static workplaces with a, a conference room and a cube and maybe if you're lucky, um, there was an office or two and maybe three conference rooms shared by 250 people. [00:02:00]

Um, at that time, there was no big focus on this agile work. Um, I think we saw that. I think we kind of realized, you know, after doing so many TI's and so many build outs with this formula, we kind of like figured there's got to be something a little bit better for, uh, and the workforce was beginning to change. So I feel like this was the beginning of where you were seeing, uh, the com. I don't know if the number is that, but it was about a three year period where all of a sudden everybody had a com after their name,

Evan Troxel: Right.

Primo Orpilla: right? So this was actually a great time for experimentation. I think the Valley kind of was looking at, um, especially entrepreneurs hiring and maybe creating workspace in a different way than, let's say their father or their families had worked several years at HP that they wanted something different. So we kind of took that and we started developing new types of topologies of workspace. So I kind of feel like that was sort of the beginning and then it cratered. And then we went back sort of to this old way of working because nobody wasn't, it was a bust. it was an absolute bust.

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So you'd had millions of square feet vacant, uh, that were tech companies that no longer existed. Um, and then slowly, um, I would say, To 8, 9, I mean, after we crawled out of that, cause that was about 2003, we had like a five year kind of like really low point in, in workplace. I would say 09, 10 to 11, then you're starting to see it reemerge again. And then we were very into what we call agile work or more of a open plan type of design.

And we were. Really, really lucky. We got to work with some really great companies and experiment with this new type of working. And I think we were, we were, we were knowledgeable enough that we wanted to kind of really explore workplace and really create next generation workplace. So yada, yada from 2009 to now, There was a good 13 year clip. [00:04:00]

People think that San Francisco just fell off. No, it went for like 13 years of just enormous growth with workplace, big headquarters, real focus on, um, good design for these environments, uh, because people were working their long hours, We used some of these amenities to save time.

So the idea was like, what can we people save time and create things a little closer to, to, to the workplace, as opposed to commuting and having to go to yet again, get your, even to get your haircut or wash your dog, everything was kind of brought into easy to do things. Um, so. Lighten your commute, lighten your load. So we have done lots of different workplaces for all different types of companies and, um, the culture, the community they build, the leadership, all sort of dictate what this space might be because they're competing. [00:05:00]

We're in a very, very place for talent. Uh, there's only so many engineers or software developers that come to this area and They've all got three or four other companies that are looking for that same person.

So, uh, it is important that the workplace really perform and do certain things for a company. So I feel like, in a nutshell, our background hasn't really been there, but we've gone to other, companies and advised and done strategy and design for not just tech companies. Uh, we do all types of companies now.

Cormac Phalen: So let me ask, as part of this. Notion of like the agile work. You were talking about, basically it being a draw for bringing in new talent. So not only are you designing, or working with the place or the place is trying to pull people in, but you're also designing the place that they want to work, right?

So what, what exactly with this Agile work philosophy. I mean, what, what is, what does that really mean? because I've obviously worked with a bunch of different, firms and stuff, and they've got, a variety of different things that they kind of consider as like, we've got this open concept or we've got this, or we've got that.

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And, and nothing, none of that really screams to me Agile workplace.

Primo Orpilla: Yeah. And I, um, I was actually thinking about the term agile work. Um, it is like, what is that? There's some sort of schizophrenic workplace. I mean, we're not always agile. It is sort of this thing that somebody coined it. I never really called it that. I just said to me, it was about choice when I come in that day and, you know, I feel like working at a couch in the sunshine, I want that.

Yeah. If I want to go work in a room where I can be heads down and close the door behind me, I want to be able to have that. I want to sit in the middle of a park and go do that. We have wireless now. I mean, a lot of technology and devices enabled this, right? Before when I'm imagining we all started with a big 386 computer and were tethered to a NEC monitor.

And hopefully we got the 21 inch monitor and we were working all day doing that. Laughter.

Cormac Phalen: Didn't even have the 21 inch.

Evan Troxel: 15 inch, 17 inch. Yeah, it's [00:07:00] interesting to hear you talk about agile in an architectural sense because that comes from the software development world, right? It's agile. It's a methodology. It's a way of working. I think in an architecture, the closest thing we have to that is LEAN uh, you know, project delivery types where it's like a big room, integrated project delivery and, and Agile is very much like a methodology, but I like how you are tailoring that back to the use of space and choice and having Agile environments where you're offering a variety, I assume, of space types that people can use for whatever they would fit what they're doing the best way.

Primo Orpilla: That's exactly what it is. And so I never was a sort of agile work proponent. I never used that in any of the conversation I had. It was always more about choice. It's like, you know, we don't know what this engineer or developer or support person is going to want that day. We only know that if we don't provide it, then they're going to be [00:08:00] looking for it.

And you're going to be losing people because the other guy has And you haven't thought about it. So it really kind of gets into, you know, what is it we need to do our best work. And, um, if you provide it, then people like working there. Um, sometimes that is, um, more amenities, more lounge areas. Obviously food is a big deal. we were working on companies well before food was free. And given to you three times a day. And now it's like, well, you're, you're providing meals, right? Or you're going to do two, or you're going to subsidize it, or, you know, healthy snacks on a little four. So we really kind of delve really deep into this now.

Cormac Phalen: kind of pushback, you know, because you, you had talked about like the variety of workplaces that you've designed over the course of your career. And as it's become more like a, an amenity base type workplace, how much pushback have you received from that, from, developers or, companies that you've worked for?

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Primo Orpilla: Well, I mean, I, like I said, I was talking about the three typologies, the conference room, the private office and the workstation, um, I wasn't joking. That was the three typologies. We probably. Worked with for six or seven decades, right? Um, and there was open plan, but you didn't get up from your desk and go find a phone booth or a framery booth to go make a phone call.

And you did it out in the open. Um, where everybody could, could hear your conversations. So to me, it's like, we, we kind of like the pendulum always sort of kind of moves all over the place. I feel that if we are kind of doing our job, we are kind of really focusing on the end user, the type of people using the space. And we actually do a very kind of strong diagnostic. I'm like, well, your, your engineers really don't sit here. They kind of go here and then your developers like to meet in these spaces. You know, you know, **we want to kind of have them have these, uh, hopefully moments where they can kind of join and collaborate.**

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**So we kind of engineer the serendipity a bit. We kind of like, coffee station here, juice bar here, and then, you know, library here. And like, hopefully they kind of connect and, uh, meet. Uh, I, I don't know if you're familiar with the story of Pixar. So when Steve Jobs was designing Pixar, he said, Hey. We generally have one set of bathrooms in the main hall, so everybody has to go to the same place, so**

Evan Troxel: them on the other end of the building, right? It was like so People could overlap and connect on the way there and on the way back and we do that now with coffee bars and all kinds Of things. Yeah

Primo Orpilla: **Yeah. So we've all kind of learned that we can just place a certain amount of amenity, in an area and kind of draw people to it. So I feel that was kind of the beginning of like, Oh, well, we don't want to centralize bathrooms on a three-acre campus. We want to kind of have some things that like kitchens and food are usually a good way to draw.**

**So one large cafe or cafeteria, one big area where you can kind of break bread with your colleagues and hopefully. spark up a conversation.** Um, but yeah, I'm, I'm not sure if I answered your question, but you know, we're looking at a lot of different things when we're dealing with space now. And what was amenities is now kind of a, a, must typology.

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Evan Troxel: Expectations. Yeah.

Primo Orpilla: It's expectations. It's like, Oh, you don't have a room for me to, to meditate. Um, you don't have, um, I need a prayer room or I need all these other things because, um, **other companies are providing them and now, and you're not including me in your thoughts if you're not thinking about these things.**

**So it's really become hyper. You've heard it, the human center is very focused on the end user.**

Cormac Phalen: And it's like, you know, why would I come work here if, you know, you don't provide what, they provide down The road or they provide over there. And I mean, I'll, I'll tell you that I, I've actually made, a choice in places that I've worked based off of, what the offering of the office was, you

Evan Troxel: The resources available.

Cormac Phalen: Exactly. Exactly.

Primo Orpilla: Yeah.

Evan Troxel: really kind of we've seen present in this series of episodes that we're doing is, is outdoor space. And you're in California. I've imagined this is a big [00:12:00] component, and I want to take that to the next level with, with this conversation, because I'm imagining the kinds of companies that you're talking about, we really need a tech infused outdoor space. We need a lot of extra kind of layer of infrastructure out there to accommodate the kind of work that needs to happen. Can you talk about that?

Primo Orpilla: I think, um, believe it or not, here. We actually did have. Access to the outdoors, but I wouldn't say it was as easy as one might think. Maybe some of the newer campuses took advantage of it, but really to really have good Wi Fi, to have power, to have kind of the features you need to really operate out in the outside of a building. Nobody really kind of I mean, we, we do it now because now it's more deliberate, but we wanted to kind of, uh, think about, especially, um, after COVID, we go, you know, people are not going to want to go in the buildings all day long. They want to go get, and I have clients right now who every time we have a meeting, we go outside. They don't want to be in a conference room.

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They just, they got long COVID or something happened. So they're kind of very conscious of where they're sitting. So we're very careful to like, Hey, have you thought about maybe having outdoor conferencing areas, meeting spaces, and they're really wired, or they have heated seats. You can now buy these really cool concrete slab seats and benches, and you can sit out there. I mean, you don't have the problem as much in Southern California, but here, it's kind of cold in the morning. You don't want to sit on a cold park bench, or, so you kind of want to also provide the right people. Product, activity, and power. And then, you know, can we have a A. V. outside? Well, you can. You can project. You can have outdoor speakers. Um, so you kind of provide a lot of these things that, uh, Weren't so readily available or thought about, so we're making a more deliberate push to make the outdoor a usable space,just not a sitting area.

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Evan Troxel: and you mentioned COVID. I mean, I, what else did COVID do to workplaces? I, I imagine like we experienced this working in architecture that, okay, now you went from one office to a hundred offices because it's everybody's basement or a spare bedroom or whatever. What did you experience, or what have you, you've been talking to all these companies, what have they experienced as they're contemplating how to get people back in the office, or why to even bring people back to the office?

Primo Orpilla: it's really interesting to see what some companies, uh, offered up in that time period. And a lot of it was to not lose people. Uh, so they said, Oh, we're going a hundred percent remote or, you know, we're gonna, and a lot of them are walking that back because some of the, um, challenges are, uh, culture. Culture, um, is beginning to erode it and unravel at some of these companies. And they know that's sort of the magic, um, sauce. And a lot of companies is to make sure the culture is really learning and mentoring and challenging each other.

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And it's hard to do that in a Zoom meeting. It's not really, it's not really set up for like asynchronous, you know, it's more transactional conversation. You know, we have to stop, I talk over you, you know, it's not like I'm in the room and we can kind of take the body language and signals. So I'm imagining technology will get better. And this might be something that will overcome.

I always joke about like my son, when he plays like a multiplayer game, I, I think the kids are in the same room with him, but no, they're across the street or they're in a different city. And they sound like they're having a great time in a virtual place setting. So I feel like there is a generation that will adopt it and have that.

But, but then we're also finding that they're not socially as prepared. There's definitely some nuances in what they're. They're missing. **And I feel like this is where culture really either makes or breaks a company. And one of the number one things we're trying to do with these spaces is build culture, is build community.**

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And, um, most companies that are doing innovative work, not just innovative work, are finding it very difficult and productivity levels have sort of dropped off because of too much remote work.

Evan Troxel: So these amenities a lot of times are there to attract people back to the office. And one thing that we saw talking with multifamily architects and residential architects in this series is that, they built a lot of these things at their house. And now they're going back to the office and they want to have those same amenities that they put in their house.

So it's attractive, but it's also, like you said, it's still kind of giving them what they want and what they need because it's all about expectations now.

Primo Orpilla: we've had two years to take our kids to work, to take our elderly parents to an appointment. Uh, you know, wash the dog, whatever those things during the day that you kind of also do with your job. Uh, and they don't want to miss that.

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They want to lose that. They want to be able to sit with their kids and help them with homework.

So I feel like, okay, so if that's the case, then, um, let's take that option and bring it to the workplace. So we have a new typology, which is basically a private office, family room that you can, and in some cases there are some companies that actually I've walked into a meeting or a conference area, and I've seen a small kid sitting next to the parent. And it's because that company has a hundred percent allowed you to bring your family to work. That's not all the companies in the Valley, but I go, wow, that is extremely progressive because the liability and the concerns, but now it's like, you know, Dogs were one thing. Now we're bringing our kids and now we're bringing our parents.

It's like, you need to kind of think of who your audience is and your employees and what their needs are. Because if you you're going to kind of, uh, now be a provider of that. You, you need to think about it. Otherwise somebody down the street is going to [00:18:00] offer it and they're going to pick you over. Over them for that.

Cormac Phalen: as you're talking, I'm thinking about, our workspace, um, where, where I work, we're actually nestled in the, uh, Under Armour campus. And one of the interesting things that Under Armour offers that, you know, we're lucky enough to actually be able to, take advantage of is, they have, an on site, cafeteria.

Primo Orpilla: Mm-Hmm.

Cormac Phalen: Cafe, not cafeteria. It's far more upscale than a cafeteria. Um, they have a gym. They have a daycare center. They actually have early childhood learning. They have an outdoor track. all of these different things. Um, we, you know, just happened to also be located on, you know, Baltimore's inner harbor.

So there's, outside deck that, you know, people go out and they eat in the sun and watch boats, go by and, all of these other things.

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And when I was saying that, one of the reasons why I chose I was referring to where I work now and it was, it was because of all of these amenities that were offered, you know, because it's pretty amazing because you pretty much can do everything that you would normally leave the office to go do.

Hey, I need to go to the gym. Well, your gym's like literally five steps away, you know, those kinds of things, that's, you're, you're seeing that, often with, requests from your clients.

Primo Orpilla: Yeah, I think, um, you know, the goal is always to keep them on campus, um, because, you know, the, the work happens there and they can kind of meet people and hopefully innovate or get ideas. We have seen how, um, just kind of putting a couple of, a gym equipment on the floor is not as good as building like a, Separate gym

because separate gym means that I'm going to a place and then, I can work out and there's a trainer and it, it feels like it's not just an add on to the floor.

So there, you need to kind of really look at them and go, okay, what's the investment? And the return on investment is like, well, everybody keeps on going to the gym and by the way, they come to work now because they won't want to work out now. Um, so [00:20:00] I feel like it is definitely something we've seen is like, gosh, I thought it was like, we're going to.

Build an entire building and just dedicate it to gym equipment and a juice bar and a yoga unit. It's the biggest draw on one of our projects.

It's like, you know, that gym, everybody comes to work because they love going and working out and they go over to their office afterwards.

Evan Troxel: was going to, I was going to ask, like, what, what is the sense from the companies who are now basically forced to offer all of these amenities just to compete with the other tech companies? But it sounds like based on what you just said, that like, It's super successful. And so you get, as the designer, when you're going through that kind of discovery phase and the programming phase of the project, and you're trying to figure out what's going to be in the project, you can point at those success stories and say, like, it actually works.

Like it is an investment, but it actually works.

Primo Orpilla: I mean, we honestly have put together case studies because we got to go, well, we got to talk about this.

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Um, and this happens to be an athletic shoe company. So it's very easy for them to invest in that kind of stuff because everybody there is an athlete and they bring athletes in and it's like, Oh, well, we need this thing as a part of our market.

No, it's become a real, uh, draw. And, um, and there's some companies that go, well, we want you to go home. We don't want you to stay here. And I get that too. That's like, don't, uh, don't provide a gym, then provide something else. I think it's, it's really based on the type of company and the, uh, community they're building. Right.

Cormac Phalen: but I think, you brought up a good point earlier about that. It's also a way, we kind of kept starting to say marketing, but then kind of like veering away from saying marketing, but it's a way to market your company to draw in talent, because we even see this in, higher education.

Um, especially when we're, you know, looking at, additional, types of buildings or types of spaces that we're designing, because they're trying to draw in, the top talent for, you know, say medical research or whatever else. [00:22:00]

And, and, you know, I, it, it sounds to me like, you know, you're creating not only the workplace, but also the branding place to be able to bring in top talent to compete against the other athletic shoe companies that we,

Evan Troxel: value.

Primo Orpilla: And, uh, if it's not that, if it's a, if it's a software company or a hardware, they make widgets. It is about alignment. It's about, like, I'm going to do my. Life's work here. Um, I want to go to a place where everything that I, I, they're speaking to me. I align with their vision. I like healthy foods and you know, this is what they value is really also we call them basically the principle.

**What are your core cultural touchstones and values? Because we go. We need to make sure that's a part of this design. And people don't understand that, you know, that's not specking colors and paints and being, um, somewhat scientific about it. It is like, your culture really needs to read through in this environment. The way you treat them, the way you kind of feel space should be curated.**

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People notice. It's like if you take one lounge and you clone stamp it 50 times in the building, guess what? Nobody uses those lounge spaces. If you curate that space and you kind of do it with a little bit more love and care, it's like, oh man, look at, they put a board game down. So it's, it could get a little cheesy at times, but I feel like it's okay to kind of at least have that conversation with them because They, they more or less go, well, I didn't think you needed that. Well, you kind of do need that.

Evan Troxel: I want to get back to the outdoor spaces because I think that's such an ambiguous term, especially when it comes to workplace, because there's, there's like outdoor amenity type spaces, but then there's actually working outside, like getting work done outside. And some of the most, Interesting outdoor spaces that I've experienced.

Cormac and I actually, together, were at the AIA conference on architecture in New York City, and we got to walk the High Line, right? And I saw images of your work and I'm like, this is like the High Line.

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And because it's so good at creating spaces that you, you know, It's not just wide open space, it's not an alley, but it's, integrated seating, integrated workspace, integrated vegetation, lighting, technology, people watching, uh, like in, on the High Line, you're on bridges looking down over traffic, and there's like a mini amphitheater.

And so, I would love it if you could kind of talk about outdoor space types and zones that you're designing because, again, I think it's such an ambiguous term just to say outdoor space.

Primo Orpilla: Yeah, I think, you know, if you take the, um, the workplace and you have the different typologies, we need to have the same, um, access to typologies in an outdoor setting. So if you, if you have a theater, you need to be able to create, uh, some sort of outdoor lawn theater. Um, if you have these meandering walkways. With perches and little setting, we wanted to kind of do that to kind of like. Change your elevation like the Highline.

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The reason the Highline works is because it's above, you know, you kind of have this really articulated path with different viewpoints. So I feel like Let's not just not have a flat landscape and just put a couple of park benches out there.

Let's create those groves and eddies and places where people collect, which is kind of what the High Line is, right? If you go down there, it's kind of like this really organic, fun place to be and you can kind of have tons of people or a few people and you still find a place to go. And I feel like a workplace is like that.

**A workplace is not just a row of cubes and a phone booth and a thing here. It's like All these different moments that I could, at a second, I could sit down and put my laptop and work. And I feel the workplace, if we're translating to the outside, has to have the same complexity, otherwise no one's going to use it.**

Evan Troxel: I was just going to say, I think I, the word I think of with, with the Highline, like just looking at it, and I think it applies to what you're talking about in, Workplace architecture too is texture.

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Like there's just such a variation of texture and, and integration of organic and inorganic and, all of that stuff just really makes it feel interesting, right? It's not necessarily exciting. It could be very serene, it's not like overstimulating when it has texture, but that to me is just kind of the word that comes to mind when I'm thinking about it.

Primo Orpilla: Yeah. I read this really great article, and I usually do a lot of, I do several workplace and there's this one where writers write. And it's like Benjamin Franklin wrote in the bathtub. Um, Hemingway liked to stand up kind of at a bar and he would write and, you know, probably throw back to me, everybody, you know, a quiet kitchen or a little nook or something like that.

**It's like, everybody has their sweet spot of where creativity and they hit the zone.**

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I feel like the outdoor and the, and to me it's like, I go sit here in this park. I have an employee who goes to Yerba Buena Gardens, reads the New York Times every day, religiously, eats his sandwich, and that's his time to kind of decompress and kind of recalibrate himself. I go, we all need to do that. **And if we have that place, We're going to be much better off than if we don't have it. So I feel like every place can be that potential opportunity. So we, we, we, we, we kind of invent pieces to be honest. We go, this is a cool space and you know, let's just call it this and see if it takes, you know, we're, we're experimenting.**

Cormac Phalen: So how do you create those spaces? So, were talking about, creating opportunities that somewhat mimic the, the offerings of an indoor office, like, a conference room or things like that. How do you create an outdoor conference room that, might still have the same privacy or, issues of like, how are we going to, show something on a screen or things

Evan Troxel: How are you gonna mitigate glare?

Cormac Phalen: Yeah,

Evan Troxel: everybody hear what, what's happening on a Zoom call? Yeah.

Primo Orpilla: I don't know if you saw there's various levels of enclosure on some of them and we have some, you can spin the [00:28:00] whiteboard so you can kind of like, move inside the

Evan Troxel: the day.

Primo Orpilla: So, you know, we're, we're, we're, we're trying to think of all the different things that is going to be, uh, you know, an impingement or some problem in the outdoor space.

And sometimes it's just going to be too windy and cold to do it. But I think that the more that we kind of like, play with this, give them a whole set. assortment of things to, to try. We, we can obviously test them and kind of iterate on more. I think workplace, be honest, we had 10 typologies that we delivered when we first started working and people were like, what's the, what's the typology?

**Well, we have a living room space. We have a shelter. We were, we were just coming up with these names. So, uh, it was just like, these are places. That you go in the home where you go, and we've just sort of given them sort of definition, and this is where the casual conversation has. This is where you kind of break bread with your friends All these things that people understand innately, but they don't really put it in the definition of space.**

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**And I feel like once we were able to kind of explain that, they go, Oh, you're right. I have better conversations on a couch than I do at a conference table. it's less hierarchical. I said, that's exactly what you want.**

**So we kind of apply these things that we take for granted. Into the space and really just have fun with our new space is called Arboretum and you know what Arboretum is, right? So we create the space that is fully vegetated, feels like you're in a hot house and maybe it has doors that open up and maybe you can shut off the house air and you're just getting all that kind of air coming from the plant.**

I mean, things like that are kind of like, Oh, That's kind of different. Or something that you can dim the lights and there's no technology in there. Uh, we call that the audio. So it's kind of more sensory deprivation. Remember that movie Alternate State? I mean, it was like, we're thinking of like all these different things that, you know what?

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During the day, we tried this. We actually did a, we did a show in, at Milan, uh, at Salone. We were invited as guests. For workplace designers and what was Workplace of the Future. Our exhibit was all about decompressing. And it was all about putting on a jacket that maybe flipped up and made your ears a little bit more sensitive.

And you looked at a movie and you heard raindrops. And all of a sudden you kind of, again, for five seconds, you heard this. And then for five minutes, you were taken out of a very busy environment. Or we had a projection screen on a pool of, uh, that looked like a pool of water and somebody swimming and it had swimming sounds and you built this little bench and you sat there.

So the whole ritual of building the bench and sitting there and looking again, it was made, it made you like for five minutes, you know, how do you take a walk on a block to reset yourself? This was in your office space and it was wildly successful. Everybody was like, where are the desks? I go, there are no desks. This is about in between.

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**This is about going from desk to conference room, that you take two minutes here, three minutes here, and that transitional space is like resetting yourself to do your work. And people don't realize we, we know how to do it ourselves and sometimes we don't. But if we were making that part of your daily ritual for work. Maybe you'd be more productive. Maybe you'd be happier. Um, so there's things like that, like little hacks that we're trying to do in the workplace. And I think outdoor is yet another opportunity to, you know, we can work outside, you know, you can do everything on your iPad or iPhone now, right**? Back then with our 386s, you guys probably had 486s.

Yeah. I couldn't do any of that

Evan Troxel: The idea of the Arboretum is super interesting. I think the most famous version of that is the spheres that NBBJ did for Amazon in Seattle, right? It's like these crazy spheres, but they're conference rooms, right? That's what they are. And I imagine they're wildly popular. And so to go to the other end of the scale, because another word for, for this is greenhouse, right?

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And, my partner, when I was doing design build, designed a indoor, outdoor dining facility at a university that was like a temporary dining hall, but it was a giant greenhouse. And it was so popular with the students because you get the best of both worlds.

You get indoor and outdoor. Now. The installation values, the R values aren't as good, right? And so you have to accommodate for that you might have to do heaters or fireplaces or fire pits or something, but you can accomplish all of that with, and, and, and again, kind of get the best of both worlds.

You can feel like you're indoors outdoors. Maybe it reduces the glare a little bit, maybe it stops the wind, but you can still have it be nice and comfortable to be out there.

Primo Orpilla: mean these outdoor pavilions that we're creating, these little kind of rooms, they've got to have heat built in, radiant heat with some device or a heated concrete or element. That's all available now. And it's all very tucked in nice and clean. and that radiant heat is actually kind of nice to sit next to when you're out in the cold.

It's not like, no one ever like says, I don't want it to be next to that.

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Everybody kind of moves towards it. So I feel like the technology is there not only from connectivity and there's also like heating and warming that we can So the latest one we did, because I can't afford to build it. You know, spheres for my clients. We just created a fake, greenhouse and put Paul gal around it to make it feel like, and we just hung a bunch of potted plants and put some, and everybody goes, this is my favorite room to work

Cormac Phalen: Hmm.

Primo Orpilla: Just, it's not a living wall. It's not a 150, 000 detail. It's Home Depot potted plants. And a bench and some nice wood And Paul,

Cormac Phalen: but it's that transitional space. It's, it's detaching them from their desk, from their cubicle, from, their kind of like norm to get them outside and actually feel something different.

Primo Orpilla: it's the experience, right? I feel like I'm walking into a greenhouse. it's certainly not outside. We couldn't shut off the house there cause it was the corner of an open plant, but it felt detached from the rest of the [00:34:00] workplace that people sitting there all the time and. we tried goofing around playing bird noises in there.

It actually worked. It was like just paying a little, something like that. All of a sudden you feel like you're Disneyland and the bird.

Evan Troxel: just wanted to, just wanted to cue into that because that's what really, what it really comes down to, right? Is how it makes the people who use the space feel. And, and that's what architecture kind of does, right? Is it, it's an emotional connection. It's a feeling. It's not just, yep, we checked all the boxes.

We've got all the amenities we've got, but it's, you're leading people through a process throughout the day, you're giving them choices to pick different spaces over others, depending on what they need to do, how many people need to be there, what technology they need to accomplish that job, what kind of environment they want to be in, and you're, you're letting them feel satisfied because they have the choice, they, they have agency to kind of go out and pick, but you're also kind of solving for all the different constraints that you could possibly have.

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Primo Orpilla: exactly. **So I feel like, and to me, that experience, it's not often, and this is more kind of like when, when designers and architects, you know, now, now they tend to look at pictures and they don't necessarily experience the space. So that's why I say go take pictures of these spaces and experience firsthand, because you're going to be designing something like that. And you can't go pick it off the net and just look at it and go, well, I want to do this. Well, have you sat in it? Do you know what that experience is like? Think about your favorite place to do your work, take pictures of it. And I want you to write me a page on why you like that space. That is kind of what we're getting to.**

**It's like that real experiential, moment that. You only know when you're in the right place and it has that smell and it has that sound and it makes you feel comfortable. So it's getting that curated, which is fine. I think it shouldn't be, you know, it should be that level of detail.**

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Evan Troxel: Well, maybe to wrap up Primo this has been an awesome conversation. I, I'm interested in what kind of, behind the scenes, uh, master architect talking to the client. Uh, you've, you've got a ton of experience with this. Like, what are the kinds of things that you could tell other architects interior designers, to really, Use as kind of like a mini toolbox to have a great conversation with a potential client about this kind of stuff.

Because I think a lot of times we're approaching these projects and even the client is like, Oh, we're just going to replicate what we've already done. Right. And, and we're talking about a paradigm shift for many different reasons. So what's kind of your go to kind of conversation starters to get clients thinking in the right direction.

Primo Orpilla: Well, you know, I mean, kind of, we're fortunate in that we have a, body of work where people kind of like they're in their transitional state. So I'm not so much arguing about that. They're usually something that has gone horribly wrong or they're not on the right trajectory. So they're trying to correct and we're saying, okay, you know, we've looked at your space, we've audited, we kind of feel, I would say that, I mean, people always ask me, how do you get them to do that stuff? And I, I go, well,

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Evan Troxel: They chose you because of that. That's why they came to

Primo Orpilla: chose that, but I go, I also, um, I'm also very aware that some of this might seem a little bit like, well, does it really help? And, and, and I, and I kind of, you know, I, again, I go to that whole experience and I go, what makes you do your best work? What is going to bring the engineers, to that place where they're innovating again, or your marketing company is making great, whatever it is that you're trying to do in your company. Um, try to understand kind of where, where they're at in that, and then you try to help them. Create the environment that's going to cultivate and inspire that work to me. It's like, you know, if people aren't engaged, then you're going to get so- so work if people are engaged and maybe it's because we're in the West coast and this innovation and this stuff is a big deal, but I feel like I've been successful in the Midwest with this.

I've been successful at colleges. I've been [00:38:00] successful at hospitals in healthcare and I don't even do healthcare. But I think the thing is that no matter if you're a line worker or if you're a support person or you're a top engineer, space matters.

Cormac Phalen: Yeah.

Primo Orpilla: I feel like our space is archaic. We're already kind of in a new chapter because of COVID. So everybody's like, well, I've got my company two, three days a week. I'd like to get them the four. Okay, well, let's look at that. What is the mechanisms? What are they doing? Again, taking their kids to school, taking a family member to all these things. You need to really. Do the research and do the kind of what I say, it's sort of the, to me, it's like everybody has something that's not quite right with their company and we can find it out if you let us kind of do a little deep dive into what your culture and community is about, and that means asking employees kind of what's working and what's not working.

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Sometimes you don't get that. So sometimes you have to take a sampling from, from the folks, but we can kind of usually right away tell, and it's really problem. Solving to that level of, of experience that they don't normally think is important to the end user. And, um, maybe, maybe that's where you start.

It's like, you know, why aren't people enjoying your workspace? Well, you've got 10 year old cubicle furniture and you have one conference room shared with, you know, 50 people.

Evan Troxel: yeah.

Primo Orpilla: right away. A big red flag, you know, you don't have the space for them to have private conversations, to to do the things that they need to do their business. So. People will pick you last as a company to work for, and you won't get the top, you won't get the top talent.

Evan Troxel: Yeah. It's interesting how it's shifted from you'll be happy that you have a job that you work here, To it's, it's completely flipped. It's like you,

Primo Orpilla: it doesn't work that way anymore.

Cormac Phalen: you would be lucky to have me. And what do you give it?

Primo Orpilla: totally, yeah, I mean, generationally, you're absolutely right. And that's the other thing. We have [00:40:00] a generation that's going to be the majority of the workforce. And they have a very different attitude towards working space. So you need to at least design for that new generation. That they are going to take off at 5:00 or 5:30 and they are going to do that yoga class and hang out with their friends, and they are not going to work till 10 o'clock, doing what we did to make sure the deadline got hit. But, let's try to also provide the things that makes it so well for AR. There's hot foods, refrigerator. There's something here. I mean, you're always kind of trying to figure out what the next, you know, thing is that is, is going to kind of maintain happiness and keep culture and, and that, that really, uh, alive. And that's why you have to look deep into what these companies are doing and what they're offering.

Evan Troxel: But bringing it back to what is going to enable them to do their best work, I think is a great direction to steer that conversation because that's why you're doing this in the first place, right? It's, it's not what can I do to get them back in the office? No, it's like, we're in business for a reason.

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What is the reason we're in business? And then amplifying that all the way down the line to the people who you are paying to be there, who are you, or you're trying to get to come work there. It's like, so you can do your best work that you've ever done. And, and we're creating a place, a tool to make that happen. And this architecture happens to be that tool.

Primo Orpilla: Yeah, exactly. I mean, place making tool, whatever it is, it's really, uh, if we don't If we don't think about it to that level of detail. And I think, you know, to me, it has been about like, let's get a place where people align and want to do Want to do that great work and some spaces just don't speak to you that way and that's why they're they don't Get the best talent. They don't often have the best productivity.

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Evan Troxel: Well, Primo, this has been fantastic. I've learned a lot. and I'm going to put pictures of the kinds of the, some of the spaces that we would talked about in the video version of this. So if people are listening on the audio version, they they'll need to go over to YouTube to look at it. But I think to truly appreciate the kinds of spaces that you're talking about here, it would be great to, to see those.

And so thank you for providing those as well. And we'll put links to your website. And the show notes for this episode. And is there anywhere else that people can find out that maybe you want to say the website and so everybody knows what it is.

Primo Orpilla: It's o plus a. com It's terrible URL, but you can't put plus signs And we didn't know that when we came up with our fricking name. So o-plus-a, it's long and it's terrible, but you can find a lot of good stuff. I do occasionally do a lot of talks, so be kind of on the lookout for that. I'll be doing something on AI next week on a panel in LA. Um, Um, and I do, you know, I do try to teach in lecture when I get a chance. So I, I do, I do enjoy teaching it.

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