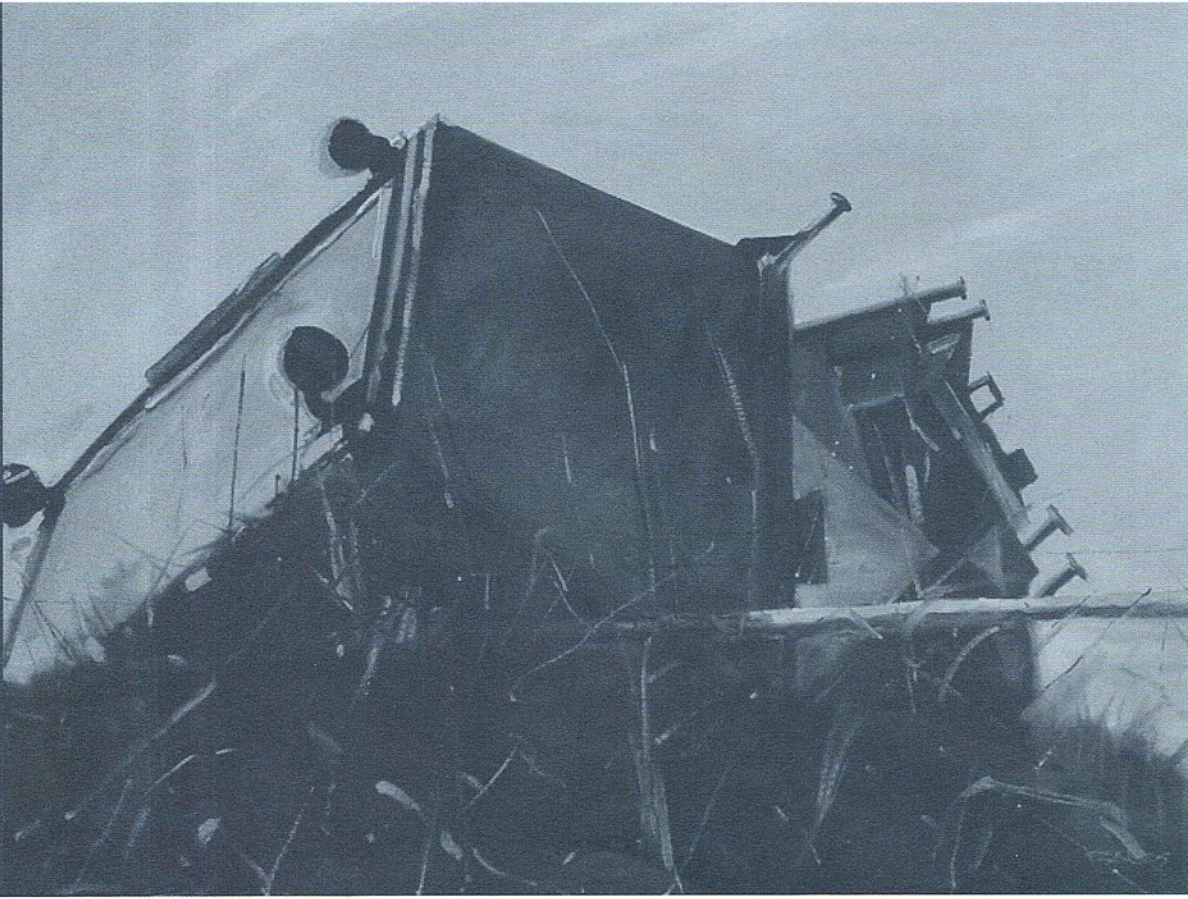




## DESIGN PERSPECTIVES

"Dumpster Graveyard" Oil on Canvas, ©2009 B. Alan Frakes

## WASTE (NOT)



BRIAN L. FREESE, AIA

I have persistent (if not fond) childhood memories of my dad endlessly berating my brother and me about stuff that made no sense to me when I was a kid. "Turn off the lights when you leave the room! Turn off the water when you're not using it! Don't put more on your plate than you'll eat! Don't buy it if you don't need it! Don't throw it away if you can reuse it!" I don't remember my older brother's response, but mine was typically a heaved sigh, a roll of the eyes, and the thought that the old man was soooo uncool. "What difference does it make?" I would think.

Decades later, my dad still lives by these rules. He abhors waste, and is unabashedly practical. A few years ago he bought a Toyota Prius and says to this day it is his all time favorite car. Whenever I was a passenger, he would smugly point to the dashboard screen indicating the eye-popping miles per gallon he was getting, knowing full well it was about double the mileage I was eeking out of my Toyota Camry. He now drives a luxury SUV hybrid, which he enjoys but thinks it is too fancy and showy for his needs. He still pines for his Prius.

From this description some people would think my dad sounds like a conscientious and concerned environmentalist – maybe even a Democrat. God help the fool who calls him that to his face. He is a staunch conservative Republican – the tip feathers of the right wing (he has been known to jokingly smear the John Birch Society as a dangerous liberal organization). Rather, his habits of conservation come from his own childhood, from a time when all Americans, regardless of political affiliation or social class, shared the same concern for saving precious resources and commodities. My dad's early childhood years were lived in the ominous shadow of the Great Depression. Years later, in his late teens he was gripped by the fervor of American patriotism and tried to join the military to serve in World War II. Those two events were bookends to his formative years, and shaped a national ethos that wastefulness was very nearly a sin. My dad's family probably fared better than many in those trying years, but virtually no one was spared the expectation to be prudent with food and resources. Most people from that generation share these memories in common, and still hold firm to the

discipline of minimizing waste. It stuck with my dad.

In our current culture, we practically celebrate wanton consumption and waste. We fill our homes with more and cheaper electronic gear, appliances and needless stuff, and in a few years shove them to the curbside to be dispensed to the nearest landfill. Along with our growing mountains of outcasts are countless tons of uneaten foods dumped each year. Meanwhile, we leave our oversized vehicles idling while chatting in the coffee shop or strolling into the boutique of choice. Everywhere one looks there is human-made trash whirling and rolling around and in general defacing the landscape. We have exponentially ramped up the pace to which we foul our waterways and pollute the air we breathe. As the ultimate homage to our culture of *grab and toss*, we have created a literal floating island of plastic bottles and debris in the Pacific Ocean reported to be twice the size of the state of Texas.

And how do we live in our homes? No different. It is *all systems go, all the time*. The typical American water tap is in a virtual state of continuous *FULL ON* while we waterlog our lawns, luxuriate our sinkfulls of pots and pans, brush teeth, shave, and meditate in the shower. We think not of turning *off* the spigot when we are actually *not using* water. Our electric meters continue to spin at high speed as lights glow in unused rooms, televisions drone to semi-present audiences, and our home temperatures are forced to the equivalent of meat lockers in the summer and saunas in the winter.

Feel depressed yet? Well, don't. One of the marvelous things about us humans is our ability to analyze, reason, and modify our behaviors to remedy problems and better accommodate our needs. There is much work to do, and if we do our work well, we can reduce and reverse the damage we have wrought, and vastly improve our condition of living. In particular, architects and design professionals are perfectly positioned to serve as lightning rods to positive change, and educate the general public to a better way to live in our homes and work in our buildings.

Our toolbox of waste-reducing solutions range from the simple to the more sophisticated and complex. At the simple end of the equation,

we can manipulate windows and position buildings to receive more natural light to reduce the need for electrified lighting, and pull in free winter heating to boot. We can specify better insulation and reflective barriers to reduce heat gain in summer and heat loss in winter. We can encourage the use of compact fluorescent light bulbs and highly efficient appliances and environmental systems. We can specify from a variety of water saving plumbing fixtures and we can select building materials manufactured closer to construction sites that reduce transportation costs, invest in the local economy, and save money for our clients. In fact, *all* these solutions can save money for our clients. We all know that money in the pocket gets the attention of even the most skeptical and conservation-adverse. Once most people enjoy the benefits of using equipment and fixtures that by their very design actually save money, they will take care of the second key component to effective conservation, which is to modify their own habits and awareness to affect even greater savings and less waste.

The bottom line is this: architects and design professionals have a fundamental responsibility to create buildings that are efficient in materials, function, structure, and systems. For architects, this has always been implicit in our standard of care and professional service to our clients. Buildings that are consciously designed to be efficient will minimize wasteful use of resources. If all architects were to implement just the simple methods of energy efficiency into their building designs, and if people would be more mindful of reducing waste in their everyday lives, we would significantly improve the condition of the natural resources on which we depend and reverse the environmental degradation we have caused. This is all very simple stuff.

I have no doubt my dad looks askance at the current environmental movement. He and I have not talked about it much, probably out of conscious avoidance. Still, I am proud that he and those of his generation, though for reasons different than I may wish, live more lightly on this planet than many in my own generation. To Dad, waste is simply wrong. I would even consider him an environmentalist. Rest assured, there is no way I'll ever accuse him of that.