

# WHAT I'VE LEARNED

Twenty-eight  
creatives share  
career-defining  
insights

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# INTRODUCTION

‘What I’ve Learned’ is a successful section of *Frame* magazine that first appeared in May 2014. It’s here that readers find the thoughts and opinions of designers and architects in articles that cover the experiences that have marked their careers. This eponymous book is a compilation of the 26 articles featured thus far in the pages of *Frame*.

Asking creatives to reminisce about their professional achievements is not so difficult in most cases, but having them recall their blunders is a different story altogether. Prior to the launch of ‘What I’ve Learned’, *Frame* experimented with two forerunners: ‘Failures and Fortunes’ and ‘Éminence Grise’. These short-lived sections of the magazine appeared in four successive issues between September 2013 and March 2014. Practically speaking, ‘Failures and Fortunes’ focused far more on fortunes than on failures. After all, designers – like the rest of us – are not eager to point out their existential crises or their commercial flops. In ‘Éminence Grise’, the spotlight was on designers who greatly deserved the accolades bestowed upon them. Approaching the twilight of their careers, they turned out to be more open to self-examination and introspection than their younger colleagues, who had contributed to ‘Failures and Fortunes’. Older designers tended to speak quite plainly about weathering the ups and downs of their profession and to be unafraid of criticizing clients, for example.

It wasn’t long before the editors at *Frame* decided to merge the two sections of the magazine. The result is ‘What I’ve Learned’. A stroke of genius, the section has become a go-to source of information and inspiration. Paging through the first few issues that included ‘What I’ve Learned’, you’ll find that the editors did indeed choose older designers. Among the earlier interviewees was industrial designer Ingo Maurer (born in 1932), furniture designer Toshiyuki Kita (1942) and architect Tadao Ando (1941). As established role models, they empowered a younger generation of guests to express themselves more freely.

This compilation of in-depth articles provides a good impression of the challenges facing today’s designers. The struggle between autonomy and commercial pressures, the sometimes problematic dealings with clients, the occasional feeling that the world is already overburdened with too much stuff: it’s all part of the picture. But so is the high that comes with the discovery of something new, the freedom enjoyed by thriving independent entrepreneurs when selecting collaborators or partners, and the intense satisfaction of a well-designed product that’s still popular years after it was introduced. Together, the various facets of a creative’s activities make for informative reading of interest to every designer – and to everyone else. For one thing is clear: important life lessons have a universal value.

DAVID KEUNING

# TADAO ANDO, who's well into his seventies, says he still aspires to create a 'masterpiece'

WORDS

Kanae Hasegawa

PORTRAITS

Madako Akiyama





## TADAO ANDO

**1941**  
Born in Osaka, Japan

**1962-69**  
Educates himself in architecture

**1969**  
Establishes Tadao Ando Architect & Associates

**1979**  
Annual Prize of the Architectural Institute of Japan for his Row House in Sumiyoshi

**1983**  
Rokko Housing I, II (1993), III (1999) in Kobe, Hyogo

**1995**  
The Pritzker Architecture Prize, USA

**2001**  
Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts in St. Louis, USA

**2002**  
The International Library of Children's Literature in Ueno, Tokyo

**2004**  
Langen Foundation/Hombroich in Neuss, Germany

**2006**  
Omotesando Hills (Omotesando Regeneration Project) in Shibuya, Tokyo

**2013**  
Ando Museum in Naoshima, Kagawa  
Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, France

**2015**  
JCC (Jaeneung Culture Center) in Seoul, South Korea

OPPOSITE PAGE **ATELIER IN OYODO II (ANDO'S OWN OFFICE), OSAKA, OSAKA, 1989-91.**

FOLLOWING SPREAD **MODERN ART MUSEUM, FORT WORTH, USA, 1997-2002.**

'I grew up in Osaka, in a district filled with family-run workshops and craftsmen. My after-school hours were spent with woodcarvers, glass-blowers and metalworkers, who took care of me and taught me their skills.'

'My grandmother raised me single-handedly. After my work had been featured in an architecture magazine, she passed away peacefully. She approached everything pragmatically. One of her theories was that it doesn't make sense to cart textbooks to and from school, so she ordered me to finish every assignment before leaving school each day, which meant I had no homework. People thought the idea was bizarre, but in the end I found it practical. She taught me that it's okay to be adamant about your beliefs as long as you find logic in them. This is something I've been exercising throughout my career.'

'At age 14, a seemingly small event made a decisive impact on my life. A second floor was being added to my house, and I saw a young carpenter working so incessantly that he even forgot to eat. I was struck by his attitude and commitment to the job; he ignited my interest in the world of architecture.'

'I wanted to study academically and train professionally, but I had to earn a living after school to support my grandmother. In addition, my school grades weren't quite high enough to study architecture at university. I begged my university-going friends for their architecture textbooks, which I read from cover to cover, cramming all the information students typically learn within four years into one. I also took a course in drawing via distance education.'

'Thanks to a couple of eccentric characters who showed an interest in someone with no academic training, I designed a club at the age of 18. Since then, my practice has evolved through trial and error.'

'I tell architecture students to travel while they're young – to experience historical architecture first hand. To me, the essence of architecture is the creation of a space in which people gather. I've felt it during my countless travels in Japan and overseas. It can be discovered in the





ABOVE **ANDO** SURROUNDS HIMSELF WITH MODELS OF FAMOUS BUILDINGS AS A METHOD OF SELF-REFLECTION.

OPPOSITE PAGE **ROKKO HOUSING**, KOBE, HYOGO, 1978-83 (PHASE I), 85-93 (PHASE II), 92-99 (PHASE III).

FOLLOWING SPREAD **SHIBA RYOTARO MEMORIAL MUSEUM**, HIGASHIOSAKA, OSAKA, 1998-2001.

architecture of my famous predecessors, as well as in indigenous houses made by locals.'

'Early in my career, I realized that things hardly ever work out as intended. One of my first projects was a house for a couple with one child. As the house neared completion, the couple discovered they were expecting twins. My original plan was too small for a family of five. The couple joked that because I'm a twin [Ando has a twin brother], I brought them the same fate. In the end, I decided to keep the house as an office, and I still work there today.'

'Having experienced my own architecture as a user, I understand that architects are invariably responsible for what they create. As my studio took on more work, I had to make my office bigger; it's now five storeys high. I have no problem with the number of levels, but people arriving for meetings have to climb the stairs all the way to the fourth floor, as there's no lift. I've realized it's difficult to make architecture that serves everyone's needs.'

'Sometimes I underestimate how my buildings may be used in the future. My design of the Shiba Ryotaro Memorial Museum, which houses books by eminent Japanese author Ryotaro Shiba, incorporates an 11-m-high bookcase. Floor-to-ceiling shelves hold some 20,000 books that informed Shiba's writings. While the gesture is striking, the labour required to stack the shelves and clean the bookcase is something I should have considered earlier.'

'Regrettably, close consideration of the user is something I often neglect and only engage in after the fact. That's why I have all these models in my office. They're not of my projects; they're models of masterpieces designed by other architects, such as Louis Kahn, Norman Foster, Richard Meier and Arata Isozaki. I participate in many architecture competitions and often fail. But later I reflect on what was wrong with my plan, and why another architect's plan won. Being surrounded by models of famous buildings helps me to reflect. What keeps me going as an architect is the aspiration to make something close to – and perhaps that even transcends – these masterpieces.'

Mitsuo Matsuda



'Having experienced my own architecture as a user, I understand that architects are invariably responsible for what they create'



Mitsuo Matsuda