

## Higher-Education Faculty Interview

Jiaai He interviewed Associate Professor Wolfgang Max Rudolf April 10, 2020.

### Jiaai He

A graduate in INTAR Department receiving her Masters of Design in Exhibition and Narrative at Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) in 2020. She received her Bachelor of Interior Design from School of the Art Institute of Chicago and has studied at East China Normal University in Shanghai. She has had internships at Perkins + Will in Boston and Atlanta, and Dong-qi Architects in Shanghai. She has a LEED Associate certificate and will be receiving her RISD TLAD Graduate Collegiate Teaching Certificate in 2020. Her research is focused on the relationship between people and interior space.

### Wolfgang Max Rudolf

Division of Architecture & Design

Department of Interior Architecture at Rhode Island School of Design

wrudorf@risd.edu



MAS            Massachusetts Institute Technology | History Theory and Criticism

DIPA           Technische Universitat Berlin | Architecture and Urban Planning

2017-Now     Associate Professor    RISD, INTAR

2015-2017    Assistant Professor

2001           Critic

1984-1988    Adjunct Faculty        Boston Architectural College (previously Center)

Associate Professor of Interior Architecture, **Wolfgang Rudolf** received his Master of Science in Architecture studies from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with a research focus on the Public Works Administration's public housing initiative during the New Deal era. He has a Technische Diplom Ingenieur der Architektur und Stadtplanung (Architecture and Urban Planning) from Universität Berlin Charlottenburg, School of Architecture and Urban Planning. He is a registered architect and has practiced in both the U.S. and in Germany, including the offices of IBUS, Berlin, TAC (The Architect's Collaborative), Cambridge, and Ann Beha Architects, Bos projects include public housing, museums and libraries. He was the project architect at Ann Beha Architects overseeing the construction. His many built ion of the award-winning conversion of the Charles Street Jail in Boston to the Liberty Hotel. Rudolf is the co-author with Nolan Lushington and Liliane Wong of Libraries – A Design Manual published in 2016 by Birkhäuser Verlag. Rudolf received departmental recognition in 2013 and 2015 for his excellence in teaching. Rudolf is a licensed Architect in Massachusetts and a LEED accredited professional, concentrating in his practice on the interface between the architectural and engineering disciplines. Responsible for the design and construction of large adaptive re-use projects, affordable housing projects, and the preservation of historic landmarks in the United States and Germany, he is an adamant supporter of an integrated project delivery method.

## Wolfgang Rudolf's Academic Research/Areas of Interest

Green Building Technology

Integrated Project Delivery and Building Information Modeling

Interface of Architecture and Engineering

RISD Courses Taught:

INTAR-2397-01 Design Thesis Prep

INTAR-2301-01 Intro to Interior Studies I

INTAR-8900-04 ISP Major

INTAR-23ST-01 Advanced Design Studios

INTAR-2379-01 Theory Wkshp: Investigating Interiority



May 23rd, 2019. Grad Studio Final Critic – Exhibition of Cork

JH: How many years have you been a faculty?

WR: *In the mid 80s I taught at the BAC, the Boston Architectural Center (BAC, now the Boston Architectural College) in Massachusetts.*

JH: What was the opportunity or motivation for you to become a teacher?

WR: *Back then, the BAC offered an architectural education to students who were already working in the field without a formal education or degree. The unique concept was to offer the education for a very low tuition to the students in the evening hours after work. The faculty just received a small honorarium (covering*

dinner and may be parking in downtown Boston). For me as a young architect who had the opportunity of experiencing a great education, it was a way to support students in their efforts to earn a degree and to gain some experience in teaching.

JH: How was your very first class? What kind of class was that?

WR: *Well, back then we as teachers were in our late twenties early thirties and the students were college-age - as mentioned, they were all working in architectural firms supporting the technical operation of the architectural firm. Together with two architect friends, I taught for several years, studio classes at the BAC - among other topics a Highrise studio for which we traveled with the entire studio to New York. We did not greatly think about structured pedagogy - the teaching was focused on sharing knowledge, often in a conversational fashion revolving around architecture history and theory. We as teachers greatly enjoyed the once a week studio classes and I think and hope the students also did benefit from it.*

JH: So you were teaching architecture at that time, but when you came to RISD, you started with the INTAR department. What attracted you to work in this field?

WR: *As you know, I have this German background, and adaptive reuse, a euro-centric concept, plays a significant role in architectural practice. Already my education at the Technical University in Berlin focused to a degree on the adaptation of space, the restructuring (often de-densifying) of the tenement fabric and with that the increase in the quality of life and the creation of affordable, sustainable housing. The subject of planning sociology and anthropology, analyzing context and the political implications were often in the foreground of design solutions. Studying in Berlin in the 1970's was a political endeavor. At the same time the city offers a most amazing collection of icons of architecture from Schinkel to Behrens and Muthesius, Mies, Taut, Tessenow, Sharoun and so many more. Sociological and anthropological research juxtaposed with the progressive and often radical political climate of the times and the saturated architectural landscape of Berlin, I think automatically leads to the understanding that context analysis and context comprehension is most critical. Context provides a framework for any intervention into a fabric, entirely new or in the form of an adaptation. So the focus of INTAR is unique in this sense.*

JH: What do you usually prepare before class?

WR: *In general, many hours of research are invested in the investigation of the studio topic and the preparation of the syllabus. The syllabus is critical in communicating the thematic and structural framework of the studio, the learning objectives, deliverables, literature and references and the studio schedule and studio conduct. Project stakeholders, site visits, review critics and many other logistic aspects need to be considered. Preparation is required for the first day of class to introduce the studio topic, discuss the syllabus and to outline the studio teaching strategy and the teaching philosophy. Seminars of course demand a different level of preparation reaching from constructing the syllabus to developing lectures, relating reading assignments and a suggested bibliography, the invitation of lecturers, etc.*

JH: Art and design classes are different from other subjects; we need to balance the talent of students with the class goals. What do you do to achieve the class goals with a full range of students' different interests?

WR: *Studio teaching is often focused on individual desk crits and it is the role of the studio faculty to listen with great care to the ideas and concepts of the student and to provide an overarching scaffolding of guidance, and a framework that allows each student to build a body of theoretical, historical, design oriented and technical knowledge. From studio session to studio session continuity in the guidance without preconceived notions is crucial. Keeping each studio project in mind throughout the weeks of the semester is important, it allows forwarding relevant information on exhibitions and events, literature sources, news articles, etc. relevant to the design explorations of a particular student project, to the student.*

JH: What do you do if the student's learning outcome doesn't meet your standards?

WR: *It is my philosophy to meet each student at the point where she or he is, and then to measure progress throughout the term and observe the willingness and openness to learn and to grow, to build a body of knowledge and to develop design and research tools.*

*Grading is the least enjoyable part of teaching - and allocating grades unfortunately needs to be used in the context of a particular student cohort and studio or seminar setting.*

*Students who have made a great effort in growing and absorbing knowledge may unfortunately receive a less favorable grade in comparison to the work of their peers, however, it should not deter them from continuing their explorations into the field of design / exhibition and narrative environments.*

JH: Since the technology and trends move so fast now, what do you think is important for teachers to do, in order to keep him/herself up with the times?

WR: *Building a body of knowledge in design, in architectural history and theory, and teaching architecture as a body of knowledge is to a degree independent from technological advancement.*

*Of course, it is important to understand how to access databases, to employ search engines and to use modern communication tools and social platforms - the latter is currently critical due to the health pandemic. Knowledge regarding software programs, digital fabrication and advancement in technology (not only in the building industry) is required. On the other hand, it is important to remember that great icons of architecture were created under purely analog conditions.*

JH: What are the issues or problems you met during the teaching career?

WR: *Clearly, the last unprecedented weeks of transitioning from a physical, tangible teaching environment to a virtual world of communication, have been challenging. My teaching techniques, the visualization and communication of ideas require software augmentation to address the new reality. Due to the necessity of social distancing, the studio workplace has had to undergo the transition from being a place where students and teachers met physically together, to becoming a virtual space fused by various means of technology, the scheduling of on-line*

*synchronous teaching, and the preparation of learning materials for asynchronous communication. The COVID19 pandemic has made wood shops and maker labs unavailable for students, therefore teaching conventional means of model building and modeling methods, the use of collages, phone-based photography, and video platforms, and the exploration of alternative representation techniques will be required.*

JH: What advice would you give to me about your career through your experience?

WR: *Foremost, understanding context is highly relevant for the way we operate as humans and the respect and empathy we need to express towards others. Love and enthusiasm for the discipline in which you teach is critical - you have to attempt to infuse the very love and enthusiasm for the discipline into your students. Preparation is important and despite the fact that you should avoid teaching with a preconceived notion, it is critical to imagine potential outcome scenarios as well as potential hurdles and complications. Meet your students where they are. And experience of course is valuable - and comes with time and age. That said, it is however paramount to be able to relate as a teacher to a usually younger generation and to try to understand their concerns, their Zeitgeist parameters and their perspective for their future.*