

Community Driven Design

Architect Turan Duda Merges Art and Function

Jackie Carlin

If the recent coronavirus pandemic has taught us one thing, it's that the places where we spend our time have an extraordinary effect on our overall wellbeing.

As you bunkered down at home, did your surroundings make you feel calm and peaceful? Did you experience a sense of flow, movement and instinctual serenity as you walked room to room? If you did, you can thank an architect.

For more than 40 years, architect Turan Duda has infused his projects with passion, purpose and thoughtful design. The former Yale University professor trained under and spent 15 years working with famed architect Cesar Pelli, world-renowned for tall skyscrapers such as the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur and the World Financial Center in New York City. In 1997, Duda returned to his hometown of Durham, North Carolina, to launch Duda | Paine with his Pelli colleague, Jeffrey Paine. Together, they've created an impressive portfolio of projects, including Duke Integrative Medicine at Duke University; the Emory University Campus Life Center in Atlanta, Georgia, and now, the groundbreaking and unique Center for Health & Wellbeing in Winter Park, Florida.

The Center for Health & Wellbeing (CHWB) combines wholeness, fitness and medicine into one, integrated center. It was an audacious idea, launched by the Winter Park Health Foundation (WPHF) and its partner on the project, AdventHealth. Growing Bolder has partnered with WPHF on a new project, the Wellbeing Network, which is headquartered at the Center.

"When we first started dreaming of one center that could cater to a person's entire journey through wellbeing, we began looking around the country for inspiration," said Winter Park Health Foundation President and CEO Patty Maddox. "To be honest, we struggled to find one location that did it all. So, we said, 'Well, let's design that space. And when we achieve this goal, let's share with wellness centers around the nation what's possible.' And that's where our fabulous partners at Duda | Paine came in."

Duda says one key word drove the design: community.

"We have the three different aspects of life here, through wholeness, fitness and medicine," Duda said, "but those three circles need to be connected with a central space that will be a community. If you make the space comfortable, warm and inviting, it draws people to it and becomes an integral part of their everyday lives."



At the heart of the CHWB is The Commons, a wide-open space that serves as the building's beating heart. From its center, visitors branch out to their various destinations, whether it's the Peggy and Philip B. Crosby Wellness Center for a workout, the Elinor & T.W. Miller, Jr. Community Conference Center for an educational program or the Nourish Coffee Bar + Kitchen for a cup of coffee or meal with a friend. The Commons also features inviting sofas and circular tables, all designed to inspire community members to pause and enjoy social time together. On any given morning, you can find groups of friends playing cards, mahjong or even putting a puzzle together.

"People are the life of any building," Duda said. "Architecture is not living until there are people in it. I welcome that, I want people living in my building. If people are avoiding my building, I've failed. This is not some abstract notion of what architecture should be for academics. I want people to see and enjoy and live in this building."

Duda says he draws inspiration from his travels, and one particular feature of Italian life inspired The Commons — the piazza.

"Every small town has this little piazza. It's where life happens. If you've watched Fellini movies, he filmed a lot of his scenes in these little piazzas. It's a theater of life where people are sitting, watching other people. The show is watching other people," he said.

As our recent social isolation experiment has taught us, humans are hard-wired to connect to each other. We crave interactions and experiences with our fellow humans. Technology has distanced us in many ways, whether it's hiding in our phones while sitting in public or relying upon a text instead of a call to a loved one. Duda says creating a warm and nurturing place for people to interact drives his passion for carving out such spaces.

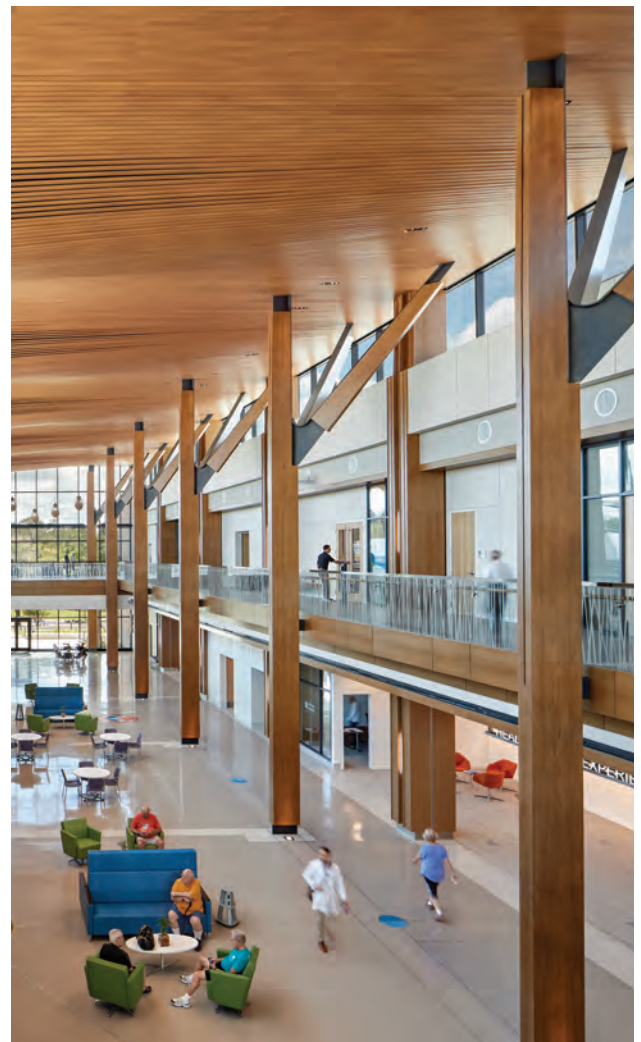
"My 107-year-old uncle said to me, 'At my age, the most valuable thing you can give me is your time,'" Duda said. "The older I get, the more I understand and appreciate what that means. In this day and age, when we are booking every 5 minutes of our lives on our iPhones, to stop and pause and give your time to somebody, sitting in a cafe, sitting on a terrace ...," Duda trailed off. "Well, if I can create places for people to have that human connection, one on one — wow, to me, that's success. If I cause people to think differently about their lives, to appreciate what they have, to be grateful for what they have, to be grateful for another human being, then the architecture has really been successful."

"It's in our very human nature to engage in real-life conversations with our friends and watch the theater of life go by. With my designs, I try to bring a little bit of that civic space, civility and community into every project we work on," he said.

He is also inspired by our natural world and is always looking for ways to bring the great outdoors inside. At the CHWB, that includes an undulating wood ceiling that evokes

the idea of movement and takes advantage of the shifting sun, creating different moods depending on the time of day. In the Crosby Wellness Center's pool area, wall tiles mimic ocean waves, and the ceiling overhead twinkles with light in the patterns of constellations. In the Commons, large wooden pillars rise up to the ceiling, emulating the power and grace of tall trees. Duda and his team are passionate about features like this, but what if the average person misses the connection that inspired their design?

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“As architects, we talk about what is called a haptic sense. These are things that your body senses, even if you don’t visually see it,” Duda said. “Your body senses when you’re in a compressed space, when you’re in elongated space. So those rhythms of life, the rhythms that we have in our daily activity, are things that we wanted to bring to this building. I think that people do feel them. They may not see them but they will sense them in a very intuitive way. It’s intrinsic to how we use buildings. It’s about a sensation that you get that’s not overt, it’s subtle, it’s in the background; but whether you realize it or not, you’re aware of it.”

Duda also is inspired by something that terrifies many of us — math! He is particularly fond of the geometric ratio known as the Golden Section, sometimes called the Golden Ratio or the Divine Proportion. It’s something that’s been discussed since the Greeks, and it shows up in ancient and modern architecture, Renaissance paintings, the music of Claude Debussy, Dan Brown’s best-selling book “The DaVinci Code” and even in nature. The Golden Section is a ratio based on the Greek number Phi, or 1.618, which goes on infinitely, and it exists when a line is divided into two parts and the longer part (a) divided by the smaller part (b) is equal to the sum of (a) + (b) divided by (a), which both equal 1.618. Got that?

“The Golden Section is something that is pervasive throughout history. I was just in Greece last year, and the Parthenon is based on proportions of a golden section,” Duda said. “The CHWB has a Golden Section in about a dozen different places. It’s something that is found in nature, is found in the movement of the stars, is found in the wave motion of water, is found in the growth of a snail and all kinds of plant life. It’s something that is intrinsic and fundamental to life itself.

“It’s one of those things that I may incorporate but not even make it obvious. It’s subliminal, but it’s something people sense; and they sense the proportions are right, the heights and widths of the space feels right. So never underestimate what something feels like,” he said.

Duda sees his architectural designs as a marriage between art and function. He says he personally is inspired to make his projects like great works of art, something that you return to time and time again and pick up something new each time.

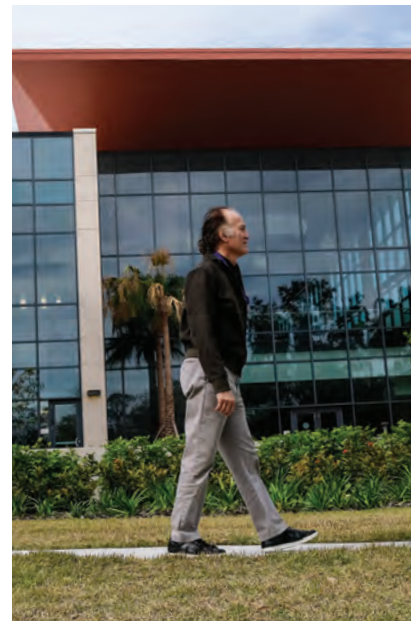
“Great art provokes curiosity. if you look at it and go, ‘I wonder why the artist did this? Why does this composition have this unusual moment in it?’ That aspect of discovery is what makes the experience of a building rich,” Duda said. “I know as an architect I’m raising the bar really high; but when our visitors walk into these buildings, I want to spark curiosity and inspiration in each of them as well.”

Now 66, and after spending more than four decades in his field, Duda says he has no intentions of winding down his career. In fact, he feels he’s just entering his prime.

“I tell my wife every morning that I feel like I’m just getting started in my career. It takes a very long time to master what we do. To master this thing called architecture is so complicated. You’re dealing with the realities of construction costs, programs, all kinds of things the complexities of all that,” he said. “It takes a long time to satisfy the problem solving side of architecture. And it’s only when you get to my age, we feel like now I can make all of that into an art form. It’s no longer about problem solving; it’s about creating an art of architecture.”

Duda says it’s a lesson anyone can apply to their own lives. The former Yale professor is always teaching, always mentoring and always urging people to imbue what it is they’re doing with passion.

“If you’re not passionate about what you’re doing, you won’t last,” Duda said. “You’ll either be disgruntled, angry or bitter. Or, you can be enlightened and have joy for what you do. And believe me, that will come out in the work.”



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