JAMES PETTY, LEED AP

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"I wonder if you are familiar with the Nieman Fellowships at Harvard, which bring journalists back for a year of special studies about ten years after graduation. I have long felt that something like this should be done in architecture. About three to five years after a man graduates is usually the most crucial time." - Paul Rudolf. Yale University (M.Arch '63).

Prior to 2006, I left Texas four times while consistently living within a three-mile radius of the hospital in which I was born. Since then, I have been a visitor to 18 countries and a resident of four. I have resided in the most sprawling of metropolises [Houston], a remote Tuscan hill town [Castiglion Fiorentino], a global city with an assemblage of cultures [London], a self-sustaining, financially vibrant small town [Biberach], and a city widely regarded as one of the most livable cities on earth [Munich]. This has given me opportunities to integrate into other cultures, discover how they construct buildings, and understand how they view and study the professional practice of architecture. These diverse experiences have engendered in me numerous debates of livability and forced me to question the development of the built environment.

There is a current trend to criticize American urban and suburban patterns and progressing cultural segregations. The critics will point to European cities as paradigms in creating ideal urban environments and lifestyles. What interests me is that it is the immigrants of these idealized cultures who initially developed America. This brings into question so many variables; how were the cities and towns, created during the founding of America, influenced by the various cultures that migrated? What ideologies of living, and designs of dwellings, towns, governments, religions and languages did they bring with them and how did this amalgamation of such varied cultures alter these ideologies? How did their differences influence how these immigrants interacted and developed with one another, and how did those actions influence the patterns of living today? A Chinese girl once told me that she could not visually distinguish the difference between an American, an Englishman and a German. I explained to her that our differences were not in our appearances, but in our minds, morals and ideologies. However, if my mind, morals and ideologies are so heavily influenced by English and German foundations of America, why are they so different? It is intriguing.

I view the issues of cities and cultures as having a direct correlation to my academic and professional work. All architecture becomes a part of city planning. Once a building is constructed, it is instantaneously a part of the local urban fabric. This fabric, like music in a film, provides the soundtrack to our lives and plays a pivotal role in the background of everyday events. It becomes the canvas where man creates the drama of life, where space and drama interact to create the scene.

My undergraduate career provided me a number of opportunities to create this scene. On a studio trip to Mumbai, India, I became inspired by the way buildings aged with time. My studio project began to investigate the individual interactions between a person's presence and the lifelong presence of a building. The following semester I studied in Italy, where I developed a hillside hotel, carving a pedestrian connection between pods of privacy while creating access for those living on the hill, and those surrounding it. My thesis project focused on creating an urban inner city library in Houston, which physically integrated with a park across the street while drawing its users and program through a newly developed light rail line. The building became a part of the city. While at the Architectural Association in London, as part of a one-semester visiting students program, I focused on the natural gradient of traditional English housing typologies as they occur in cities and how they could be integrated directly within the diverse current infrastructure of central London, creating a play on privacy in the public sphere. In professional practice, I have worked with three architecture offices in three countries. Each office built locally and true to the building style and grace of their region and culture, allowing me to understand how different people create the built environment, and how each of them addresses global questions and problems.

I feel that this is the appropriate time to return to study, before I continue in life. Graduate school would be an opportunity to set aside my professional work, and spend two years dedicated to consolidating my developing impressions, investigating these themes, and polishing my thought processes. It would allow me to focus on topics that I have keen interest in, and gain the qualifications necessary to communicate them to others.

Yale's Master of Architecture II program fits perfectly with my desire for exploration. The program is not confined to the limits of a set curriculum or by the requirements of NAAB. It is a program that allows me to cater my seminar courses to the topics relevant to my interest, both inside and outside of the School of Architecture, through a league of the top educators in all relevant fields. This flexibility, along with the vast resources available, will allow me to bring richness to projects in both design studios as well as future professional practice. My name is James Petty, and I am writing to you in consideration of placement into your Master of Architecture II program.

Sincerest Regards,

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