



DESIGNING THE FUTURE: 4 WAYS TO DISCOVER NEW TRENDS IN ARCHITECTURE

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No Comments on Designing the Future: 4 Ways to Discover New Trends in Architecture



According to Anne Lise Kjaer, CEO, founder, and futurist at **Kjaer Global Ltd.**, the future is not somewhere we go. "We are shaping the future through our choices and actions. We need a whole-brain approach to the future, not just a linear approach. It's about balance."

Along with her 'Trend Atlas' - a broadly defined strategic toolkit, including 'the scientific, social, emotional, and spiritual' dimensions of trends - Kjaer speaks of the "four Ps: people, planet, purpose, and profit," as the building blocks of the successful company of the future.

Kjaer includes Big Data, the Industrial Internet, Industry 4.0, and the Internet of Things as harbingers of a near future where everything from Smart Buildings to Smart Factories to Google Glass integrates with intricate physical machinery, networked sensors, and advanced software to build a world that will hopefully have a mutual benefit for everyone. But it begins with the input of each person in the company.

"The Trend Atlas helps you tap into what the people want, what is good for the planet, what is really our purpose ahead, and how we incorporate those factors into the bottom line: profit," Kjaer says.

"When you think in a more multidimensional manner, you create a bridge where you have the rational-minded people in the organization collaborating closer with the people who are designing, who are typically focusing on the softer values, such as use experience and feel."

Here, Kjaer and Harald Brekke (associate director, senior researcher, and architect at Kjaer Global Ltd.) reveal four pathways to discovering new trends and innovating in the architecture industry.

1. Seek Risks and Uncover Opportunities

In Kjaer's book, *The Trend Management Toolkit*, the term "global macro vs. local micro" is used to separate overarching trends, also called **Megatrends**, from local variations of the same trend. "Understanding the significance of **ArchDaily** or the use of LinkedIn as global platforms for architectural discourse could serve as examples of one opportunity," Brekke says, "while the potential for using tablets for communication in local building projects could be an example of opportunity in a local context. Failing to recognize trends in fields like smart technology, social media, and environmental issues can become a serious issue for a company, not least among architects, consultants, and other players in the building industry."

Within architecture, Brekke refers to local examples like **BIG**, **Snøhetta**, **Patagonia**, and **Justin Bere Architects** as businesses that have succeeded internationally by taking risks with projects using untraditional methods. "**Yvon Chouinard** would never have been able to build Patagonia's reputation without risk," he says. "In London, Justin Bere Architects risked all by focusing solely on **passive houses** eight to 10 years ago, now a very successful architectural business."

2. Dive into Emotional Forecasting

"Today, it is not enough to identify customer demographics," Kjaer says. "Companies also have to study the **psychographics** of attitude, beliefs, mood, values, and situation. This methodology deciphers emerging consumption, social, cultural, and aesthetic markers, translating them into actionable creative concepts in local and global markets. Emotional forecasting is an important means of ensuring that new products, services, and experiences capture the zeitgeist and relevant factors affecting people's moods and choices."

Kjaer cites the exploration and development of the environment, particularly **smart cities**, as drivers within architecture and design, and in that context, the “human-centric” element is especially crucial in the planning stage.

“There is no doubt that our gut feeling has an impact on our judgment of what trends and society drivers to watch,” Kjaer notes. “Value of empirical, statistical exercises have been discussed for decades, but businesses must learn to trust their intuition and instinct, and naturally emotional forecasting must be balanced with rationale to create a whole-brain vision of the future.”

Simply put, for future-casting of any stripe, emotions are as valuable as cold, hard facts.

3. When Things Get Complex, Get Creative

“**IBM interviewed 1,500 CEOs globally**,” Kjaer notes, “and found a general consensus that: 1) Complexity is escalating, 2) enterprises are not equipped to cope with this complexity, and 3) creativity is now the single most important leadership quality.”

It sounds old school, but creativity is often about seeing opportunities where others see limitations.

“Decoded, complexity is a great starting point for creativity, and every company should opt for it,” Brekke says. “A famous book about the great Finnish architect **Alvar Aalto** was called *The White Table*, as—in his view—this was the best starting point in any project. The idea is still valid, however—the days of solitary authorship and clarity of the individual mind is over. We simply live in an increasingly more complex world, which we have to address.”

An aid to understanding complexity within any organization begins with understanding the company origins, and telling its story. People want to feel like they’re part of the action, so if possible, include them in your story.

“Storytelling, or narrative strategies, are powerful tools now as they have ever been,” Brekke says. “The story that surrounds the brand is as important as the product.”

4. Dedicate Time for Experimentation

“The typical business approach to trends is, ‘We will deal with it later,’” Kjaer says. Rather than being an active participant and observer, reacting too late to a trend means that what could have been an opportunity now is a threat. “3M’s **15 Percent Time to Think and Innovate** is a relevant case study,” she says. “Since 1948, 3M has cultivated an in-house ‘entrepreneurship’ culture, inviting people to be creative.”

3M’s Post-it was created in 15 Percent Time in 1974. Now, companies like Google practice 20 percent time: one day a week when employees work on new ideas and innovation.

“An active approach to navigating the future means anticipating change rather than reacting to it,” Kjaer explains. “The most-used methods are literature review, surveys, workshops, brainstorming, polls, and **trend exploration**. Naturally, the work will include using a Trend Management system to filter and make sense of your trends in a wider context, and to understand the relevance for your industry. Not considering trends is like navigating blindfolded into the future.”

Image courtesy Kjaer Global

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