

# Anatomy of Influences

## Why Architectural Leadership Matters

By Stephen Carter

In January 2018, the Provincial Legislature in Ontario Canada passed an act that provides the framework for

transforming the correctional system. Similar system-wide legislative or policy initiatives now exist in North Dakota, Alabama, and other states. If the codified words are actually followed by changes

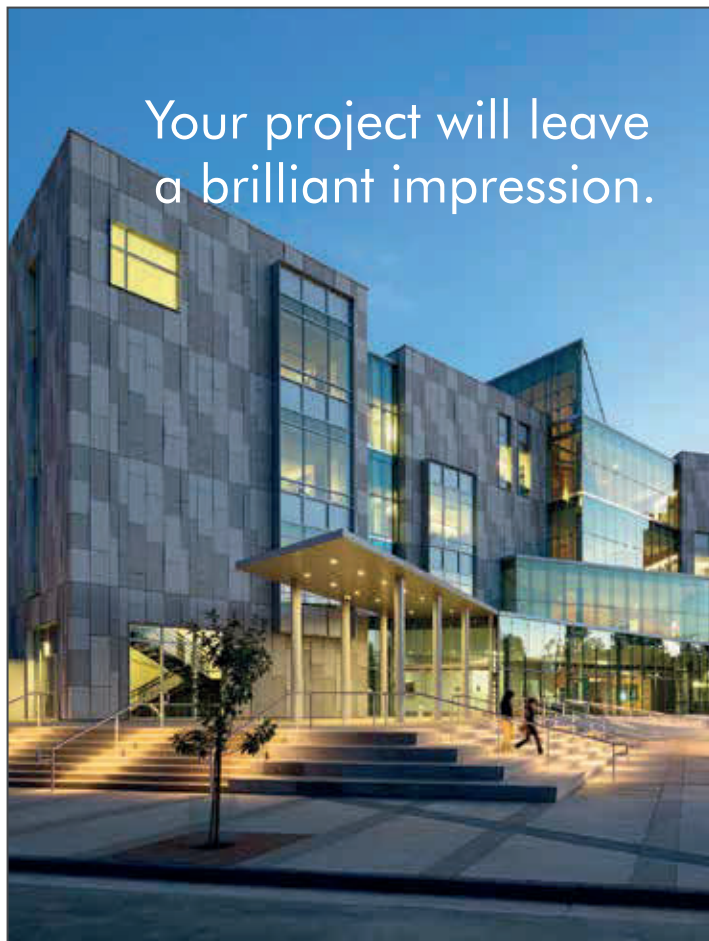
in attitudes regarding the purpose of prisons, then ultimately, the design of prisons will also change. Or will it?

In the Introduction of Marvin Trachtenberg and Isabelle Hyman's book, *Architecture: From Prehistory to Post Modernity*, a powerful statement is made regarding the responsibility of architecture to be transformative.

"Architecture takes us in,

surrounds us, shapes our lives, protects, and sometimes threatens us. It represents who we are and the way we should be seen...Because of its material basis, its cost, its importance in our lives, its high visibility, it captures as no other form the spirit of its times."

This statement captures not only the relevance, but the intended resilience of the buildings that are asked to transform human behavior. Perhaps this responsibility is a reach too far when required of prisons. If this is the case, the architects attending the recent Academy of Architecture for Justice in Jersey City missed the memo.



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About three weeks earlier in Montreal, over 650 delegates attended the annual conference of the International Corrections and Prisons Association. This was the 20th-year celebration that brought representatives from over 75 countries together for a week of workshops and networking. One significant difference this year was the attendance of 19 current or past directors of corrections from the U.S.

I have often said that the reason so many countries visit US correctional facilities is we offer a vast laboratory of the good, bad, and ugly in correctional design, materials, and construction methods. ICPA has a distinctively Canadian and European influence even though the North Americans generally comprise the largest number of attendees. The Europeans visit the US facilities, but we rarely do the same. Recently, however, the National Institute of Corrections changed that by providing support for several US directors to visit the Halden Prison in Norway.

Having spoken with several who made the time to visit Europe and return to share their experiences with peers, the consistent reaction has been:

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“transforming.” Most of CN readers have some notion of Halden’s metrics: 250 inmates; US\$250 million; 335 staff. I can hear the chorus now: “if I had those measurements, I could transform as well.” That would be missing a powerful and resilient message.

No one expects Halden to be repeated; not even in Norway, but we would be forgiven for believing that a part of the transformational message: simple

## The cost to learn is insignificant compared to the life cycle of benefits.

concept (double-loaded corridors); simple materials (wood and insitu concrete); and pro social management (choice and accountability) is not too much to expect from our facilities. Many Halden visitors only see the trees and meandering pathways near the perimeter wall; the IKEA-type furnishings; and the private toilets attached to big-windowed cells and assign adjectives like soft and Scandinavian to their mind’s eye.

The message of Halden, and I hope from the US Directors that made the trip, embodies the essence of Thomas

Daniell’s new book: An Anatomy of Influence. And, that message is that if architecture does “surround us, take us in, and shape our lives”, then why can’t those who have been empowered with influence become the champions of a transforming move in the American prison system.

At the previously referenced AAJ Conference, I saw several examples of transforming architecture in the Justice Facilities Review (JFR) awards and in separate workshops, and not a single one came within a bargepole of a million dollars a bed. The reason Halden has been such a positive influence on most who visit is that those who could effect change (politicians, correctional managers, case workers, correctional officers, and, yes, architects) used their collective influence to “proceed, and be bold”.

A major impediment to re-imagining old or creating new prison environments that capture the spirit of personal transformation and social change is not cost, but inertia. Some of the inertia baggage can be assigned to politicians with a limited understanding of the full mission of prisons; some to administrators with limitless distractions; some to staff that find more comfort (and job security) in “staying the course”; and some, frankly, to planners and designers who only know and practice what they have done before.

If you ask the former Director General of the Norway Prison Service, under whose tenure Halden was conceived, and the Warden, both will cite the influence

of evidence and initiative exercised by dedicated believers that individually could only adjust one outcome, but collectively could, and did, alter a system. I get it that Norway is a less culturally and ethnically diverse country than America. I get it that we have gangs and too few staff in many of our prisons. But what I don’t get is why we continue to ignore the influence that environment can have on just one element of the transformational equation.

We don’t lack champions in America; we just don’t empower them with the microphone often enough and when we do provide an occasional platform, we place too many restrictions on acceptable responses. A guy’s gotta dream and my short-term dream is that states will not only permit, but require, that directors of corrections and creative-minded staff visit, participate, and engage with transformers that have influenced change in the environments that they manage. The cost to learn is insignificant compared to the life cycle of benefits.

This is not a dream that requires vast sums of money but is a dream that gives voice to those who can influence the environments that shape our lives, and the lives that shape our communities. These often- hoarse voices deserve to be heard and respected. Responding could be transformational.

*Stephen Carter, AICP, is the executive vice president and global strategic development officer at Miami-based CGL.*

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Commissioner Dunn is a graduate of Birmingham Southern College where he earned a degree in English and a commission through the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps. He holds a Master of Arts in Non-Profit Management from Regent University, a Master of Science in Transportation & Logistics from the Air Force Institute of Technology and dual Masters in Operational Design and Strategic Studies from the Air University, Maxwell AFB AL.

He and his wife, Susan, have been married for over 32 years and have two grown children, Shaw and Morgan. They reside in Montgomery, Ala.

As Vice President of Justice for Moss Construction Management, **David Burton** manages all aspects of active projects and works to develop winning strategies for future projects. His objective is to establish Moss as the “go-to” company for justice projects and to build on the company’s reputation for building great teams.

He has been involved in justice most of his career, constructing correctional facilities and courthouse/ office complexes from Hawaii to the Caribbean. Working with public and private clients, David is



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experienced with design-build, general construction, construction management and other delivery methods.

David received a Bachelor of Science in Engineering Technology – Construction Specialization from Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas. He has held a contractor’s license in California, Nevada, and Mississippi.

Burton recently relocated to Dallas and is helping grow the Texas market for Moss.

### New Member

**Mike Brenchley**, AIA, LEED AP, NCARB, director of the justice practice at HDR, is a 30-year industry veteran who has been instrumental in the justice realm for many years. Throughout his 20 years at HDR, he has built a strong reputation for his ability to design facilities that reflect the gravitas of their missions, while maintaining transparency, security and dignity for those in the justice system. Brenchley states, “These are tremendously challenging building

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