



ON LOCATION: DESTINATIONS Q+A NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

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1. Can you share the history behind your firm and its locations?

Debbas Architecture was established in Berkeley in 1989. Our first project, a local flower shop, set in motion a colorful and amazing Architectural journey that has now taken us around the world. Being in the Bay Area, allows us to reach out, physically and creatively, to places and people who look up to this wonderful bed of invention we live in for unique ideas and solutions.

2. Describe the philosophy behind your firm

Fluid, well proportioned and non-traditional. Our work is rooted in minimalism taking inspiration from Japanese and Scandinavian Architecture. Our work attempts to capture the spirit of each project individually staying clear of trends or solidly anchored styles of Architecture, allowing it to embrace genuine and timeless solutions

Design is subjective, but there are common threads that binds all good design. Other than a good weave of proportion, function, natural lighting and materials, its essence lies in humility and restraint.

It also takes a lifetime of experience to understand master and predict the latter and the emotional impact and response to Design and Architecture that it has the power to affect.

Only then can we tap into the wisdom to scale them back to their essence and master the few strokes that can tell the whole story.

By stripping Architecture to its essence, it can reveal one's soul and engage our senses in ways clutter can only suffocate.

3. What was the impetus to establish a business and/or live in Northern California?

Northern California is blessed with interwoven Diversity. Cultural, environmental, gastronomical, artistic to name very few. Being an Architect with the latter as canvas allows for clients, projects and Architectural solutions as colorful and unique, if not more so than any other place I know. The underlying ambition and dreams that drives the rest of the world presents us with a golden opportunity to take the Design realm, which in itself is already infinite, into a world of Architectural innovation and exploration firmly guided by our incredible environmental consciousness and sensibilities, our constant redefining of innovative materials and the leap and bounds of technology.

4. What do you like most about your job?

The passion that it keeps fueling in me. Unshackled by the urge to follow trends or what others might be thinking and doing, I am allowed an incredible sense of freedom, renewal and child like expression every time a new project finds me. Whether in Architecture or Product Design, these have encouraged innovation and greatly successful designs and a most appreciated and loyal following.

5. Who/what are your greatest influences?

I find inspiration in everything around me. But if I were to list a couple of people and projects that have had an impact on me they would be, one and foremost, Le Corbusier's Ronchamps Chapel, and industrial designer Luigi Colani's work. Both of these, for me, broke all notions of trends and accepted Architecture and Product logic. They allowed me to think fluidly and without bounds. Of course, now with the help of computers, it all seems second nature.

6. In your opinion, what makes Northern California a unique place/destination? What drew you to it?

Other than its social diversity, its great natural beauty. Some places are statically beautiful; Northern California is an ever changing eco-canvas that still takes my breath away like the first time 40 years ago. From our rolling fog, to the incredible natural light compositions and sunsets, to the white quilt of sail boats on the bay on windy days... Not to mention our proximity to complete wilderness as well as weekend escapes. Extend your radius slightly and places like Napa, Tahoe and Big Sur risk preventing the urge in you to explore other worlds.

I attended UC Berkeley's Undergraduate and Graduate programs in Architecture and despite all the professional challenges we all experience, the Bay Area's magic was lure enough to overcome all of them.

7. How do you view Northern California changing over the next decade?

I think that Northern California will keep leading the world on many fronts. We are at the infancy of technology's potential. That, I hope, will contribute to reinventing our dated infrastructure and our increasing housing needs. The new and next generation will also help redefine Northern California Architecture with a new, more open, and inquisitive mind set.

8. Is there anything about Northern California that you think is often overlooked or unknown?

A lot of people, even residents of Northern California, fail to explore the incredible coastline, south and north, in favor of the City. The wild and untamed beauty that surrounds us can cleanse you of all your worries and, in the case of Big Sur's clear starry nights, remind you of how insignificant those can be in the face of this window to the visible universe.

9. What is your advice to someone visiting Northern California for the first time?

Destination one: Big Sur!

Make sure you don't eat at the same place twice. Take time for question number 8

10. Describe Northern California in three words

Breathtaking, Diverse, Life-engaging.

11. Describe the lifestyle in Northern California

There are so many lifestyles in Northern California. You can adopt one or make your own up with family and/or close friends. For me, it is a place free of prejudice and conditioned thinking. A place that allows you and your work to assume genuine identities.

12. How would you describe your clientele?

Reaching into a client's sensibilities, through memories, smells, or any other of their senses, emotions or feelings, is very elusive in the early stages of design and even construction or modeling.

These reside only in the Architect's mind and emotional realm. They are uncovered piece by piece in the overall process and are only understood and revealed fully once a project is completed, sealing and validating a lengthy leap of faith driven by the trust you hope your clients are patient enough to extend. I am very fortunate to have the most amazingly trusting and greatly appreciative clients. They range from Artists, to Tech executives and anyone in between. We also enjoy working with international clients and NGOs.

13. How does your firm complement the community?

By encouraging sensible and sensory Design, I would like to believe that through my work I can be a good Architecture ambassador not only for Berkeley but for Northern California at large. I also hope to encourage younger Architects to appreciate the impact they can and must have on the profession, their community and the world's exceeding need for sensible thinking.

14. How would you describe the architectural and interior design styles found throughout Northern California? How do they differ depending on the landscape (ie: mountain vs. beach communities?)

With the introduction of web based design and Architecture sources and ideas, more and more people fail to look at context for Architectural inspiration.

I find that there is still a lot of room to weave landscape, architecture and interiors together, in less trend sensitive ways and more site sensitive ways. With the incredible natural wealth that is our palette, I firmly believe less in adopting a particular style of Architecture or another and more into absorbing the site and its environment as inspiration for any design solution.

From natural light, to smells to other essential sensory triggers, Architecture can actually contextually write itself.

15. In your opinion, what is the general attitude and ethos of the people who reside in or visit Northern California? What type of person is best suited for life there?

What makes Northern California so special is the fact that it mirrors every face of humanity. I believe that those who enjoy living here most are the people who appreciate its diversity, its natural treasures and its spirit of innovation.

16. Could you name some of the most reputable and beautiful communities/areas in which you work?

They are all reputable and all beautiful to me. Each one offers different treasures from which I can unearth inspiration.

17. In your opinion, what makes Northern California a design destination?

There is a unique Design sensibility vein that runs through Northern California fed by our diversity and various backgrounds.

Whether you were born here or come from another place and time, you bring along your own paint brush, making this place one of the most colorful design destinations save the more established and time anchored European ones.