Diversity in Design: A Mixed Girl’s Perspective
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Coming from the household of a black mother and a white father, I have never truly known what it’s like to ascribe to one culture. Family events consisted of games of dominoes and Thanksgiving turkeys. Our house is a mixture of African art, masks, and suburban family photos. To me, diversity is the lens through which I experience life; what provides me with context and clarity to make informed decisions.

When approaching the question of diversity in design, I have always been of the mind that more is more. All design related innovations have come from cultural and demographical shifts. The Renaissance, the quintessential era of arts innovation and progression, came from the Grand Tours made to learn about international culture. Exploring traditional Japanese culture taught Europeans how to create modular spaces in interior space. Learning of the plight of manufacturing workers started the Arts and Crafts movement, which turned into a springboard of design innovation. Viewing and understanding the paradigms of others and their needs and wants and ideals allows us to call to question our own reasoning and motives for action.

To be a designer is to know that you are imperfect. No design may be labeled “considered” if it does not include research and implication for those who may use the space. But, we also know that to consider is not always enough. Sometimes, to properly recognize the program of a space, we must bring someone of the same experiences to aide in the design process. To innovate, we must integrate diversity. We have an obligation as experience-creators to provide clarity, comfort, and direction to all. The proliferation of universal design has led to mechanical, spatial, and aesthetic innovation. Globalization has led to a design language that has truly become informed and is stretching to become universal.

For a time when I was young, I yearned for the opportunity to belong to one culture. To have the feeling of truly belonging to a group that would never seem foreign to me. But I realized quickly that that is not what an enriched life entails. It is great to have defined culture to rely on without question, but it is greater to have defined aspirations and motives to share with those around you. These aspirations do not have a skin tone or socioeconomic status, but they do have intent to become something more than what we see now. When we begin first with communication and openness, we can coexist in a manner that is greater than if we had ventured on our own.

We all wish to become something in this life. Design, in a way, is the art of constantly becoming. It is an art of recognizing the opportunity for growth in the people that use our spaces. It is the art of assessing and reassessing the state of our spaces. Design is diversity, innovation, comfort, and clarity, and above all else, it is for all.