

# Build for society, not ego say global experts

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## Charleston Charter maps out what is needed to stop the design of inhumane, anti-social structures

**W**e'll perish if we do not change the way we build. So declared a diverse group of architects, designers and builders who gathered in the town of Charleston in South Carolina, United States, almost two years ago to examine the state of the world's built habitats.

"In the 21st century, we need cities, towns, neighbourhoods and buildings that are sustainable and affordable," they said, pointing out that the social and economic problems humankind has created, and the way humans live, "threaten to destroy the globe".

"We need to reclaim the art of making lasting places that can attract us with their beauty and hope," the group said.

All their assertions were documented into a charter at the College of Charleston and has since come to be known as The Charleston Charter for Architecture.

Based on it, the group of experts on the built environment said towns and cities must be greened and have "walkable" areas for people to enjoy.

Buildings, they added, must cater to the needs of society and community at large, instead of pandering to a designer's ego. They must be places that



This Crooked House in Sopot, Poland, is an extension to a shopping centre. Pretty ... or pretty awful?

combine "the memory of the past with hope for the future, in a just and equitable present".

Instead of focusing on an individual building, the common good of the city must be emphasised. After all, said the experts, architecture arises from the

experience of life in a community, and therefore, the "physical manifestation of the common good and the making of a beautiful, equitable and sustainable public realm is the first role of the building".

The charter explained: "For 50 years, we have

emphasised the 'architecture of our time'.

"The result has been destructive to our cities, towns and neighbourhoods. The failed architecture of our time must be replaced by an architecture of place."

The charter therefore urged architects all over

the world to work with the construction industry to "improve products and the cost of building".

Civil engineers, traffic engineers and landscape designers should also join in to create "durable, economical and environmentally efficient buildings", it said.

With "collective endeavour" in place, it said the responsibility "of doing no harm to the environment" and the creation of places people can afford to live in can begin to occur.

The charter also said "new additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction" must not destroy historic materials characterising a property, and that any new work undertaken must be "compatible with the massing, size, scale and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment".

"It is a role of architecture to tame commerce and elevate it to an art through the creation of place.

"Architects should not impose untested or experimental designs on the poor as the likelihood of failure has proven to be too great, and the poor are powerless to escape its consequences," it said.

"Architects must hone the human scale in their designs, remembering that it is humans whom we serve and whose environment we are creating.

"Buildings and spaces that alienate or intimidate those who live or work in them, or the pedestrians who pass among them, are inhumane and anti-social."