

The Architecture of Control: A Perspective from Hassan Nemazee

Architecture is never neutral. It is a physical manifestation of power dynamics. Few individuals have experienced the extremes of American architecture as acutely as [Hassan Nemazee](#). His life has been lived in two distinct built environments: the skyscrapers of high finance and the concrete compounds of the federal prison system. Comparing these two spaces offers a profound commentary on how society values—or devalues—its occupants. The transition from the corner office, designed to project authority and comfort, to the prison dormitory, designed to strip autonomy and enforce surveillance, highlights the psychological impact of design.

The Corner Office: Design for Autonomy

Corporate architecture is centered on the individual. It prioritizes privacy, views, and the control of one's environment. The layout of an investment bank is hierarchical, reinforcing the status of the leaders. The author's previous life was framed by these spaces—spaces that affirm importance. High ceilings, natural light, and soundproofing all contribute to a sense of agency and clear thinking. This environment tells the occupant: "You matter. Your thoughts are valuable." It is designed to maximize productivity by maximizing comfort and ego.

The Prison Dorm: Design for Surveillance

In stark contrast, prison architecture is based on the Panopticon model—the few watching the many. The memoir describes the crushing reality of living in a space designed solely for containment. There are no corners to hide in. The lighting is harsh and often continuous. The materials are hard—steel, concrete, cinder block—designed to be indestructible rather than comfortable. This environment tells the occupant: "You are a number. You are dangerous." The design actively works to suppress individuality. The lack of acoustic dampening means there is no silence, which is a subtle form of psychological torture.

The Erasure of the Horizon

One of the most poignant observations in the narrative is the loss of the horizon. In a penthouse or a private jet, the view is limitless, symbolizing infinite possibility. In prison, the view is blocked by fences, walls, and razor wire. The visual field is truncated. This "visual

imprisonment" affects the mind's ability to imagine a future. It creates a sense of claustrophobia that is mental as well as physical. The book argues that this deprivation of beauty and nature serves no rehabilitative purpose; it merely crushes the spirit.

Reclaiming Space Through Routine

Despite the oppressive architecture, humans have an innate need to claim space. The author describes the small ways inmates try to personalize their bunks or create "territory" in common areas. These acts are attempts to impose order on a hostile environment. They are small rebellions of design. By keeping a locker meticulously organized or finding a specific spot to read, the inmate fights back against the architectural erasure of self. It is a testament to the human need for a concept of "home," even in the most inhospitable places.

Conclusion

We shape our buildings, and thereafter they shape us. This story forces us to look at the spaces we build for punishment and ask if they are creating better citizens or broken men.

Call to Action

To explore the intersection of environment, psychology, and justice in this powerful memoir, please visit the official website.

Visit: <https://hassannemazee.com/>