Cognitive Design

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Mental Health Champions: How Matthew Finn of Cognitive Design is helping to design spaces that promote mental wellness

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Photograph by Luke Beard

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As a part of my series about "Mental Health Champions" helping to promote mental wellness, I had the pleasure to interview Matthew A. Finn, AIA.

Matthew Finn is passionate about how the built environment influences human health. As a social entrepreneur and architect, in 2016 Finn founded Cognitive Design — a consulting and design firm that fuses architecture and health.

Finn grew up in Atlanta where he works and resides with his wife, Stephanie, and their two daughters. After graduating from Kennesaw State University, he began his professional career at Perkins and Will, where he gained valuable experience delivering exceptional client service while working on complex architectural projects. Finn is known for asking the right questions and for maintaining continuity of thought from the initial concept through all aspects of the design, documentation, and construction.

Matt's interdisciplinary research and innovative thinking have been recognized by Healthcare Design magazine, who named Matt the 2016 HCD 10 Researcher. Additionally, Matt's work has been featured by numerous academic institutions, media outlets and conferences including the U.S. Green Building Council, Academy of Neuroscience For Architecture, and the American Institute of Architects.

With every project, Matt brings his contagious enthusiasm to architecture for health.

Thank you so much for doing this with us! Before we dig in, our readers would like to get to know you a bit. Can you tell us a bit how you grew up?

I grew up in the 'burbs. My family lived on the south side of Atlanta when I was born. We moved to Orlando for a few years, and then moved back to Atlanta and settled on the north side, where my family and I lived through my college years. I have one younger sister, and the four of us (plus our family dogs, always a mutt) enjoyed some of the nice parts of living a suburban life, like space (for playing with LEGO blocks, of course!) and good public schools. I vividly recall the wild peacocks in our Orlando neighborhood — we all have memories of uncommon things we thought were normal as a kid, and this one still makes me laugh!

Matthew at play in his suburban Atlanta home, 1987. Photographs by Cheri Finn

When I look back, it's easy to see the roots of my interest in architecture. My Dad is a mechanic; he worked for Delta Air Lines for 42 years until he retired earlier this year. That was a big part of my life growing up — he's very generous with his skills and was always building things and fixing things for our family and others. Delta was great to him and our family, and I got to see many parts of the U.S. and the world because of the flight benefits they gave us. Also, we all know how meaningful stable employment is to a family; this is especially apparent right now! My mother worked both in and out of the home. She worked as a bank teller, and later as an interior decorator. I'm definitely my parents' son: I love good craftsmanship and attention to detail — and I also have a lot of appreciation for the less tangible aspects of life, like homemaking and the domestic arts, which are often underappreciated.

You are currently leading a social impact organization that is helping to promote mental wellness. Can you tell us a bit about what you or your organization are trying to address?

We focus on understanding the interactions between people and place. Where we spend our time has an influence on our behavior and our health. My work, and that of Cognitive Design, focuses on researching and understanding the practical relationship between environment and behavior, and then translating what we learn into architectural design that promotes health. It's a

broad topic, but we like that. It gives us license to talk with our clients about things that some designers may consider outside of their scope. It's less about the building as the finished product, and more about a design process that focuses on experience, and then working together with the our client to create a place where that can happen.

Can you tell us the backstory about what inspired you to originally feel passionate about this cause?

Nearly everyone who becomes an architect does so because they want to make the world a better place in one way or another. This has always been very true for me. I'm fortunate to be frequently reminded of this by the spirited students I get to meet, mentor, and help with their academic projects in a way that energizes me and keeps me optimistic about the future. Most people who graduate with a degree in architecture go on to work at a company and design real buildings. Compared to school projects, the process of designing real buildings is much more collaborative and complex. There is a steep learning curve that requires a lot of attention devoted to technical skillsets, like code compliance and construction detailing. Unfortunately, some architects seem to 'get stuck' in this and lose sight of the bigger picture.

My favorite professor, Ken Sargent, said "Real Architects want to make things that cast a shadow." While technical expertise is how this happens in a literal sense, I interpret his sentiment to have a second, philosophical, meaning: all design expresses, in some way, virtues or vices. This is why we need to pay more attention to how design impacts health, and how our environment influences social behaviors and mental health.

About 5 years into the profession, I was working at Perkins and Will as part of a great team designing a critical access hospital outside of Augusta, GA. I had just started to get the hang of the technical aspects of architecture — just enough to where I had the bandwidth to begin integrating some of the less tangible questions I had in school. I started asking how the work we were doing would affect the health status of the people using the building. We were making all kinds of design decisions that would come together to inform the experience of healing in and working in this hospital, so I wanted to learn about the actual pathways through which these decisions would have an impact — I wanted learn about them so I could make the best design decisions.

For example, what's the difference between windows that go to the floor and ones that stop a couple feet above the ground in a hospital room where people know their health is compromised? How important is it that we consider the noise of the HVAC system in a room where someone is trying to sleep, often in an unnatural position? I understood the goal and purpose of lighting for a physical exam in the middle of the day, but what about the lighting for that same room all the other times, for example at night when a nurse needs to check on someone's sleep? And how does our design impact the health of the medical staff who have a completely different experience of the same space?

We work on a lot of different types of places now — workplaces that foster creative thinking, homes that are restorative, gyms that create a supportive culture for holistic health, communities that address social isolation and childhood obesity. But at the time I was really focused on health promotion in clinical spaces. I knew the places we were designing for healing would have an effect on people's health, and I knew all of the questions I was asking had answers — I just didn't know what those answers were. I wanted to learn. This is where the principles of cognitive design really started for me.

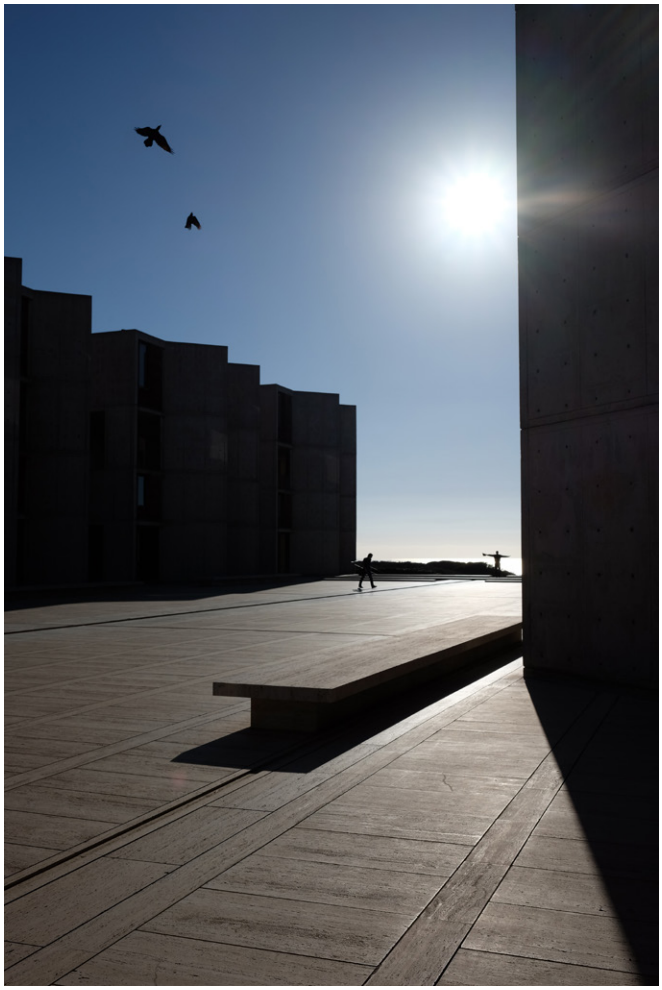
At that time, best practices for design mainly relied on the experience of senior designers who were open to new ideas, and working with the hospital's leadership and medical staff to guide our thinking. These inputs are irreplaceably valuable, but they are also inherently limited by past experiences and personal biases. I'm very proud of the good design work we did, and I also knew there was an opportunity to complement these strategies with more knowledge, which would probably have to come from outside the design professions. I felt energized and excited by the potential of improving the ability of architecture to promote good health by including other fields such as psychology, physiology, social sciences, and neuroscience, amongst others.

Many of us have ideas, dreams, and passions, but never manifest it. They don't get up and just do it. But you did. Was there an "Aha Moment" that made you decide that you were actually going to step up and do it? What was that final trigger?

Why is it that "aha moments" always seem to come when we're pushed to the limit?

While I was taking my licensure exams — I'm not going to sugar coat it — I was struggling! I was working, studying, testing, and not doing much else. At one point I remember asking myself, "Why am I doing this?" After a little professional soul searching I had a simple answer: Architecture matters. Where we spend our time influences our health and behavior. I knew this to be true, but I didn't really know how. This was a big question, of course, but if I was going to dedicate my professional life to designing architecture, making places that will hopefully outlast me and everyone I know, they should express positive virtues.

I felt very compelled to dive deep, and I also understood that answering "how?" is a 'boil the ocean' sized question, so I started with a case study: designing a therapeutic environment for Veterans with PTSD. I got to work with a couple really smart guys, Clint McMahan and Edward Vega. We collaborated with many others, but these were the main two. Clint is a Marine Corps Veteran and Edward is a clinical psychologist and the Director of the Trauma Recovery Program for the Atlanta Veterans Affairs (VA) Health Care System. We approached the problem from complementary angles, wrote a white paper, Posttraumatic Understanding, of which we are very proud. We went on to present our concepts at a couple international conferences. It's exciting to feel like you're contributing new ideas to improve the lives of brave people who have sacrificed so much, and also new ideas to such an old profession!



The courtyard of the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in La Jolla, California, where Finn first publically presented his research on designing therapeutic environments for Veterans with PTSD at the 2014 Academy of Neuroscience For Architecture Conference. Photograph by Matthew Finn

A little later, after I had become a licensed Architect and had been working for almost 10 years, I was still learning a lot and enjoying where I was. I had met and married my wife, we had bought our first home and had our first daughter. It was all really great! I was continuing to build momentum around integrating research into my practice and designing for good health, when the firm I was working for fell on hard times and had to let me go. It felt like the rug had been pulled out from under me. I'm afraid too many people can relate to this — it was a really tough time. I struggled with a lot of feelings of rejection and inadequacy. It also made me question my focus on research and architecture for health.

In working through this challenge, I asked for, and received, a lot of help. Help came in the form of encouragement, commiseration (this is a common experience in my profession; most go through it at least once), career coaching, and counsel about how to keep the stress from ruining my relationships with my wife and daughter — all sorts of help that I needed. I'm so thankful for this.

I immediately started working freelance gigs and trying to replace the job I had lost, like for like. The freelance work was a stopgap; its purpose was to pay bills and buy time so I could find a new job. My first freelance project was a residential renovation and addition. It was exciting to do research and apply it to design. My clients and I really saw the value of working in this way. At that time it was just me with a little help from Edward and Majd Gharib, who I had just met and has since become Cognitive Design's main researcher. It was so fulfilling to be in charge of this awesome team and to be able to work directly with my clients. We made a home for them that eased the mind, while adding a sense of luxury to the most basic activities of daily living. It was really exciting and felt very meaningful.

The firm that laid me off was big, they employed over 2,000 people and had over twenty offices at one point. Operating as a very small design firm was a refreshing change in many ways. While my previous employer had a very good management structure, there were some aspects of it were unavoidably 'corporate;' this comes with any business of that size. By contrast, the work I was doing felt very personal, meaningful and purposeful, which was not something I could say about the corporate firms I was interviewing with. Some of the firms I interviewed with distinctly reminded me of the worst parts of working within a large organization. This all culminated for me right after a particularly uninspiring interview. Instead of feeling discouraged about not being a good fit for the job, I felt a huge rush — I felt emboldened and motivated! In an

electrifying silence I went home, put my portfolio away, and went back to work for my clients. My perception of the work I was doing had flipped — this work wasn't a stopgap — this was it! And I haven't looked back since.

Can you share the most interesting story that happened to you since you began leading your company or organization?

Sometimes circumstances end up changing our perception of the past. About 3 years ago our lead researcher, Majd Gharib, and I started working on a white paper, Building Community. The paper is about the relationship between the built environment and a public health issue that effects millions of Americans — social isolation. We wrote this paper pro bono after we integrated this theme into a master plan we did for Highlands Community Church in Dallas, GA. We knew the usefulness of this work reached far beyond Dallas, but we didn't have a client for a robust white paper to mobilize this information, so we took on this work ourselves. Because we wrote this in our margins, it took us a couple of years to complete. In January of 2020 we released Building Community with no idea how relevant the topic of social isolation was about to become.

In the months since then, we've experienced the lock down of the entire world due to COVID-19, and with it, a tragic rise in numerous risk factors for social isolation: lack of mobility, decreased social network, loss of spouse or family, missing events and gatherings, change in employment, financial stress, language barriers, domestic violence and other abuse in the home. Of course, the acute physical illness some people experience from the global pandemic can be devastating. At the same time, our physical health is inextricably connected to all the other aspects of human health which also need to be addressed, especially as our disease precautions and physical distancing from others have gone from weeks to months, and may persist for years.

But even in the context of such a dark cloud, we challenged ourselves to look for a silver lining. When thinking about the public health crisis we're facing in 2020, I have noticed some potentially positive outcomes. In no particular order they are:

1. Many people are developing a higher appreciation for their health, and are willing to acknowledge and invest in improving it. We've seen this beginning in a recently completed project: Georgia's first body-positive Gym, Clarity Fitness. Although 2020 is a hard time to open a new gym, it's great time to be a place where people receive social support and zero judgement.

2. It has been refreshing to see a lot of people stop putting on a show to suggest everything is okay all the time. It's liberating to have social permission to admit that some days are more challenging than others.

Dallas, Georgia is home to Highlands Community Church and the inspiration for the white paper Building Community. Photograph by Luke Beard

3. I've noticed a big decline in profuse apologies and awkward expressions of embarrassment when the line between personal and professional lives is crossed. No need to say "I'm sorry" when you have to step away from a virtual meeting to help your child. And even better, many have grown in their appreciation for members of our community, like childcare providers, educators, and homemakers.

4. As people cautiously return to places outside the home, I believe we're going to see a higher demand for premium in-person experiences. Working from home is great in a lot of ways, but there's no substitute for being with others. This is a reason one of our clients, Constellations, hired us to help promote the health of their shared workspace community as people return to the office following sheltering in place.

As an Architect, I work with the understanding that people live their whole lives in the places we design. This is true whether times are good or bad, and one of the reasons we design to promote good health and social community in holistic and comprehensive ways. When our health is good, people and society are much more resilient to adversity. There was no way we could have seen it coming, but the timing of our work in 2020, including Building Community, Clarity Fitness, Constellations, and a few other projects scheduled for completion this year, have become amazingly poignant and powerful in retrospect. We feel blessed to have already been working on designing for health in general, and building social connections in particular.

None of us can be successful without some help along the way. Did you have mentors or cheerleaders who helped you to succeed? Can you tell us a story about their influence?

Stephanie, my loving wife, a brilliant nurse practitioner, and incredible mother to our two daughters, is the most empowering person in my life. When Stephanie and I were dating, I was starting to explore research and designing therapeutic environments for Veterans with PTSD. This was a very formative time in my career, and when I began to establish a purpose to my work. This was the beginning of the end of a period in which I struggled to understand my place and purpose in the profession. Stephanie and I went for long walks through Garden Hills, talking about all the ways environment, health, and human behavior interact with each other. Stephanie was earning her master's degree in nursing at the time, and has lived and worked in a lot of different places, so we both had a lot to talk about. Her thoughts were so helpful and, just as importantly, meaningful.

At that early stage my confidence often waivered; I was knee deep in books about psychology, user experience design, and neuroscience. There were many times when I felt overwhelmed and inadequate to take on this challenge. I'm determined, but I have my limits and I'm not completely tone deaf. If Stephanie and others I trust had been discouraging, I probably would have concluded this wasn't the right path for me and changed course. I'm very thankful that's not how things went!

Stephanie Finn is a brilliant clinician, mother, and wife. She provides unwaivering support to Matthew and Cognitive Design in countless ways - from emotional support to intellectual contributions as a research and design consultant. Photograph by Michelle Consuegra

Architecture is a team sport and I'm very blessed to be surrounded by a diversity of people who are encouraging and supportive of my professional interests and personal life, and who are also willing to challenge me. I can't pass up the opportunity to name a few people, all of whom I have good stories about that I'll save for another day, and all of whom have truly contributed to my success and the work of Cognitive Design. My parents were supportive of my involvement in many activities that instilled in me a strong work ethic and a sense of ownership in everything I do. My most influential teachers at Kennesaw State University, Ken Sargent, Tony Rizzuto, and Ameen Farooq guided my youthful energy in productive ways. My mentors, Jan Lorenc, Bruce McEvoy, Andrew Blocha, and Gene Kansas are endlessly generous with their knowledge, and care about me personally and professionally. Two exceptionally knowledgeable colleagues from Perkins and Will, Kalpana Kuttaiah and Diana Davis, were instrumental in getting my architectural research off the ground. Edward Vega, Clint McMahan, and Majd Gharib, are on our team and dove into the mission of Cognitive Design long before there was any promise of success. And, very importantly, Cognitive Design would be nothing without our clients who trust us to guide their architectural projects. That's a big deal and I don't take it for granted!

According to Mental Health America's report, over 44 million Americans have a mental health condition. Yet there's still a stigma about mental illness. Can you share a few reasons you think this is so?

I think a lot of it has to do with a misunderstanding of mental illness and some may equate it with weakness or moral failing. For example, some people confuse the very small subset of people with mental illness who can become a danger to others (for example because of psychopathy, or some people in the middle of an episode of severe psychosis) with the very large number of people who might struggle with schizophrenia, depression, anxiety, PTSD, phobias, eating disorders, autism, developmental disorders, substance use disorders, etc. This is simply an inaccurate understanding that results in an ugly and ineffective stigma. The stigma around mental health fails to help people suffering from mental illness, often results in their mistreatment, and fails to improve the safety of the individual who perpetuates this misunderstanding.

Additionally, there is a common desire in people to categorize everything, including ourselves. There is also an innate desire for people to identify with a group. When you put these together, we can see how group identity is often defined in a way that highlights our differences. With enough focus placed on group identity, separation is inherently created and creates dissonance with other groups. At a minimum, this results in some form of inclusion and therefore also exclusion. At its worst, conflict results.

To help address these problems, we design places where people can come together based on shared purpose or common beliefs that are outside of the individual. Architecture that is based on timeless and innate values, like social community and holistic good health, unites. These are virtues that are attractive, not categorizations that are divisive. It is always uplifting to see the diversity of people that come together to use the places we help create. I've found that American society, at least what I've seen of it, is much more capable of living in a loving world and looking after others than what you'd be led to believe if you drew all your conclusions from the evening news.

In your experience, what should a) individuals b) society, and c) the government do to better support people suffering from mental illness?

Ideally, society and government would represent each other and have the same values. I'm an architect and this question is very complex, and the details likely need to be worked out by a team of people from psychology, public policy, public health, social work, and other fields. But the starting point has to address the ways we recognize mental health. For example, our current understanding of holistic human health can be subdivided into different aspects: physical, mental, social, spiritual, emotional, environmental, and societal. But our very robust health care system is largely focused on just one of these. I hypothesize that this heavy prioritization of physical health over all other aspects of health is one reason the American model of healthcare isn't producing results commensurate with the financial investments being made. I'd like to see strides made towards people having consistent access to mental health providers and other wrap-around services including psychotherapy, psychopharmacology, and other kinds of social services at the levels they need, including housing and employment resources.

When we uphold the whole person and seek to provide compassionate care and assistance for those who cannot fully care for themselves, we see programs like that of another one of our clients, X3 Sports. X3 Sports is a gym were people go to train in fighting sports — kickboxing, boxing, MMA, Muay Thai, and Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. Most members are people like me, who enjoy it as exercise, but they also have a professional fight team that is competitive in men's and women's sports all over the world. Their President and CEO, Mike Littrel, was a professional fighter, and retired undefeated in both kickboxing and MMA. He's a real tough guy, and also a real nice guy. In addition to his gyms, he also started the X3 Foundation, a non-profit that serves the communities in which their gyms are located. This program reaches at-risk youth with the message "come learn to fight," and then teaches them all the discipline, structure, and appreciation for your body and good health that come with training to be a professional athlete. In addition to this, they provide mentoring and other coaching that supports their youth in developing healthy and active lifestyles, and promotes character and leadership development. It's an awesome example of a program that reaches kids who may be dealing with a challenging home environments, and provides support to those who need it in a practical and non-stigmatizing way.

Cognitive Design's office in Constellations, a shared workspace in Atlanta's historic Sweet Auburn neighborhood. Photograph by Luke Beard courtesy of Constellations

What are your 6 strategies you use to promote your own wellbeing and mental wellness? Can you please give a story or example for each?

Mental health is inextricably connected to other aspects of health, so I try to live a lifestyle that addresses health holistically. I'm a husband, father, son, brother, friend, architect, and other things to other people. I frequently want to be in more places at once than is possible, so it's important for me to remember to take care of myself so I can be with, and help, the people I love. For me, the foundations of good health are faith, family, friends, sleep, and exercise. I'm very

thankful for my life and focus on gratitude throughout the day. I try to spend time with my family, even on the busiest of workdays. It might be a meal, game, reading a book, or talking with Stephanie after our girls are asleep. The specific activity matters far less than simply spending time together.

I integrate socialization and movement into my workdays. One of the best things about running my own business is that I get to work with people I really like. In addition to my Cognitive Design colleagues, I have an office in a shared workspace, Constellations, and really enjoy talking with friends I have there. The social community is one of the most important reasons I don't work from home all the time, I think this is true for almost everyone there. There's no substitute for this community, you just can't create it from behind a computer screen. For movement, I have a sit/stand desk, do light stretches in my office, and go for a walk while I'm on a phone call. I don't think about this basic level of movement as its own activity, but it is very important. Additionally, playing soccer and kickboxing are my favorite ways to get more intensive exercise. These sports are engaging in a way that makes it impossible to be distracted or preoccupied with anything else — complete presence required!

Prioritizing sleep is also really important for me, I try to gradually wind down before bed every night. When I need to get in a few extra hours at work, I wake up early instead of staying up late, I get better quality sleep this way. And sometimes, I take a little time for myself to be alone. The world can be very noisy at times, carving out space for quiet, even if it's just a few minutes, is really good for me.

Lastly, I like to build things. My Dad and I built the desk in my office and now I'm designing a bookshelf I'll build for our home. I fix and modify things around our home, it's a lot of little activities I'd describe as tinkering. I'm a designer, so I enjoy aesthetics and craftsmanship, yet it matters far less what the finished product is, or that I could buy something that does the same thing. It's the act of building that matters most to me. There's a sense of pride in the finished product that is almost palpable. I wish everything had this quality to it.

What are your favorite books, podcasts, or resources that inspire you to be a mental health champion?

Just as everyone benefits from good physical health behaviors and physical hygiene, everyone can benefit from good mental health and emotional hygiene. This, and the work of our clients, are my biggest inspirations.

As an architect, my work primarily consists of contributing to that of other people. Cognitive Design's specialization in Architecture for Health naturally results in us collaborating with people who are doing very inspirational things. For example, we just saw one of our clients, Abbey Griffith, open the first body-positive gym in Georgia, Clarity Fitness. Abbey struggled with body positivity in different ways at different times in her life, and now she's on a mission to help promote good mental and physical health for others! This is just one example; I can describe all our clients in a similar way. Call me a simpleton, but my work inspiration is the work itself. We focus on the lived experience, the true end results that come after a building is complete. This is the inverse of what you might see in a solo fine artist, in which they can become inspired and produce a finished product that is their singular vision. Our process and work are unique because they rely upon, and are strong because, they are the work of many people.

I consider books, podcasts and other resources as more influential, than inspirational, per se. Regardless, they're indispensable resources for what I do. I have a broad set of interests and a lot of my creativity results in identifying relationships between things that are infrequently linked, and then activating this knowledge in a way that informs architecture. For example, we learned that people are naturally primed to socialize after a shared experience of [non-injury] pain from exercising together. We used this relationship between physical exercise and social behavior to inform where we located the different spaces in a gym to facilitate social community. While I'm not aware of many other architects who work like this, we're far from the only people who think this way. On very visceral and basic level, the farmer, poet, critic, and essayist Wendell Berry does this the most elegantly. I highly recommend reading the transcript of a speech he gave in 1994 entitled Health is Membership. I'm also a big fan of Nautilus magazine, they have a beautiful print edition. Each issue explores a theme, like "risk" or "energy", and contains articles by people in different fields of science, like psychology, economics, and archeology. It's great on many levels, but one thing I particularly appreciate is that it highlights the way language is used uniquely in different disciplines, this is something we've found needs to be managed well when doing interdisciplinary work. On long drives, I like to listen to the Freakonomics Radio podcasts. I enjoy exactly what their slogan says, they reveal "the hidden side of everything." It never ceases to amaze me how interconnected we all are.

If you could tell other young people one thing about why they should consider making a positive impact on our environment or society, like you, what would you tell them?

The internet is amazing — anyone with a web connection has the potential to reach millions — you could be next! And that's the trap.

Be thankful for your life and express gratitude by serving others. Find a cause that you can use to motivate yourself, partner with the right people, and commit yourself to addressing it. Know the way things are today is not how they have to be forever. Making a positive impact, big or small, is worthy of you and your time.

Don't give in to the illusion that success and positive impact are the same as the approval and acceptance of other people, especially not on social media. There's nothing wrong with being influential on twitter or instagram, a lot of good can come from this, but these are not the only metrics. Do what you know to be right, just, and fair and in due time you'll find yourself walking in lock step with plenty enough people to make a positive difference. Even big efforts at a small scale, such as a single mother instilling good values in her child, makes a positive and long-lasting impact on society. These small yet mighty commitments are deserving of much more praise than they will ever receive. There will be challenges, there will be setbacks, and it is worth doing.

Motivation that is rooted in negativity or vanity, like spite or aspirations of influence, are brittle motives that will eventually fail and stand in the way of most people. Praise can be nice, but if its absence leaves you wanting to do something else, you probably haven't found your purpose yet. Don't lose your sense of agency to complacency, materialism, or anyone else's definition of success.

How can our readers follow you online?

Go to our website www.cognitive.design and join the Cognitive Design Network. There's a form at the bottom of every page or you can check the box to opt in when you download one of the resources we make publicly available, like our consulting and research papers. Once you're a member, I'll occasionally send you an email when we do things we'd like to share, like publish a recently completed project or have an upcoming event.

And if you're in Atlanta, send me a note and let's get a coffee together.

This was very meaningful, thank you so much. We wish you only continued success on your great work!

Cognitive Design is a curated network of experts working together to improve people's lives through design of the built environment.

For additional information, please visit: www.cognitive.design

Matthew A. Finn AIA, NCARB, LEED AP is an Atlanta-based architect and Founder of Cognitive Design.

Matt is passionate about how the built environment influences human health. As a social entrepreneur and architect, Finn founded Cognitive Design in 2016 and reguarly works with people from outside the design profession, including clinical psychologists, social workers, and healthcare practitioners, to help inform the design process.

Matt's interdisciplinary research and innovative thinking have been recognized by Healthcare Design magazine, who named Matt the 2016 HCD 10 Researcher. Additionally, Matt's work has been featured by numerous academic institutions, media outlets and conferences including the U.S. Green Building Council, Academy of Neuroscience For Architecture and the American Institute of Architects.

Cognitive Design is the convergence of Matt's passion for collaborative practice-led research and creative design thinking in service of others. And he has fun doing it.