



JULIE D. TAYLOR.

TALK TO MY AGENT

LA ARCHITECT REP JULIE D. TAYLOR
MAKES SURE DESIGNERS GET THE
CREDIT THEY DESERVE.

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After years in the publishing industry, working as senior editor at various New York City design and marketing publications, Julie D. Taylor founded a public relations, marketing and communications firm in Los Angeles in 1994. Her primary clientele? Architects.

The lobby walls of Taylor & Company boast a series of framed 'front covers' belonging to architecture journals that prominently feature buildings designed by Taylor's clients. The actor/agent analogy offers itself all too readily, but Taylor stresses a key difference. 'An article about a new movie would never be published without mention of who was in the film or who directed it. Well, that happens to architects all the time. Part of my mission is to see that architects get the credit they deserve in the general press.' Taylor says this after she catches me eyeing a very different wall decoration in her private office: it's a headline clipped from the newspapers, announcing an architect's arrest for murder. 'Right,' she says. 'When it has nothing to do with the story, the fact that he's an architect is front and centre.'

We sit in Taylor's office, on either side of a desk fit for Rolodexes and a frequently ringing phone. Somehow it's still a cognitive leap for me to think of 'working architects' (Taylor's way of distinguishing her clients from 'starchitects') in this context: as public figures akin to actors, people in need of a public-image curator and the occasional 'damage control' cleanup crew. Taylor is aware of this stigma, especially among architects themselves. She says: 'The mindset is *I shouldn't have to pay for it* – right? Well, trust

me; I know very prominent architects who work with publicists but deny it. To me, that sort of denial is completely analogous with the owner of a building who claims the architect really didn't have that much to do with it. Architects know how that feels. We're happy to be behind the scenes. But I think it's fair to acknowledge another professional.'

Sitting here, off a busy intersection near Beverly Hills, I can safely say they do exist – architecture reps like Julie Taylor. Still, I wonder, how common is the practice (especially outside LA), what does it entail and how high does it raise the blood pressure? After all, neither architects nor PR agents are known for their lack of control issues.

Did you make a conscious decision to represent architects for the most part?

Fairly conscious. We've moved in that direction. Why? Because architects are smart and creative. A few other firms, here and in New York, manage a broad range of designers, but we're probably more focused on architecture than anyone else. We do not represent fine artists, because that's my personal background. I can't afford to be cynical, jaded or bitter about architecture the way I am about the art world. [Laughs.] I need to be a cheerleader, which I *can* be because I'm not an architect. I think what architects do is a miracle. I always say they're like [the late American comedian] Rodney Dangerfield: they don't get the respect they should. I remember when I was an editor working on magazines, PR agents would call me to say, 'God help me with

this client. I don't know what to do with him.' That's not me at all. I have to respect my clients and their work to take them on. And I do say no to a lot of people.

Do you choose clients based on personal aesthetic preferences?

I ask: is this something that's going to work well in our stable? But there's no question I'm a modernist and that I skew toward contemporary work. I have had firms come to me and say they want to be seen as more 'high design'. Great, if they have what it takes. But if they don't? I mean, I'm good, but I'm not that good. I'll be up front with a client: let's promote this one rather than this one. Sometimes there's work I don't think I can place somewhere.

And architects trust your instincts above their own?

Some do, some don't. Someone once said to me, 'An honest publicist? Does that even exist?' Well, I have to be able to sleep at night. But aesthetics aside, my clients also have to have enough of a story to tell, they have to be able to pay us, and they have to be people we feel good about representing. My question is always: who's my toughest editorial source, and can I go to them with this client?

Big architects have in-house PR promoting their projects. Is the service you offer different?

I think our being somewhat independent allows us to act as a third-party endorsement. Yes, the media know we're being paid by a company to

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represent it, but that's where it comes down to reputation. I believe editors can trust that what I deem worthy actually is.

And we won't let a client get in the way of our relationship with the media, meaning that if we're going to pitch a story, we need to make sure our client's going to come through. Sometimes that means playing hardball; amazingly enough, one of our biggest challenges is getting information from the client on time. That seems counterintuitive, but I think it has to do with the difference of pace between the industries. Architecture can be very slow, and media is very fast. But okay: our client's job is to make amazing things, and our job is to talk about it.

Does your success have anything to do with being based in Los Angeles?

LA is a very media-driven city. Sometimes an architect may feel: I don't exist unless I'm in the media somewhere. There's also a great will to experiment in LA, and a lot of small firms that are auteur-driven. Maybe it's more personality-based here. I know that when I'm looking to hire someone, I put in very big letters that we have nothing to do with the entertainment industry.

But we've also worked with many people from other cities and countries, including Behnisch Architekten [with offices in Germany and the USA]. At first Stefan Behnisch told me: 'You're saying I'm a green architect, that I'm a sustainable architect, but I'm just an architect doing what I do.' Yes, I know that, but here in the US we package things. We need to label them, particularly when it comes to sustainability. Not

that I'm going to contribute to greenwashing. When potential clients say they're green, I ask for proof. Just having a bamboo floor isn't going to cut it.

Do you do a lot of damage control? What happens when an architect goes rogue?

We media-train our clients. When we first get to know them, we interview them for quotes and information. As their representatives, we need to know how they answer questions before they actually answer any. And we tell our clients things like: if you put negative ideas at the beginning of a sentence, the writer may not quote what you say after the comma. We also train our clients to let us know when media contact them, so that we can be in the loop. You know, my dad says, 'Never keep anything from your doctor or lawyer,' and I include 'your publicist' in that, too.

That said, I do firmly believe that nothing is off record. Don't want it out there? Don't say it. As we're learning now with WikiLeaks, not a whole lot is private these days. The deal we're making is that the media are in control. If you want to control exactly what's said about you, try advertising.

But I imagine relinquishing control to both the media and to you is difficult for people in creative fields.

No question. I had a client once say, '*House Beautiful* was in town looking for projects; why didn't you take them to the recording studio I designed?' Because it's a recording studio, that's why. I ended up firing that client, actually.

It happens sometimes. Not all relationships last forever, but our clients do tend to stay with us. The architects that trust the process and let us do our job fare the best. I mean, we rewrite our clients' bios, because a marketing bio is a completely different entity from a PR bio. Editors don't care about project delivery; that's not what the story is about. We want to know: why did you wake up one day to become an architect? What was your earliest influence? Why does it make you excited?

We're also involved in the photo shoots, to ensure that our clients have what they need for marketing purposes and that we have what we need for publishing purposes. For example, we make sure there's a good strong vertical shot, so that we have a chance at a cover. These are things our architects aren't necessarily thinking about, but we are. We want those clippings as much as they do, and we want them in the right place. So there's give and take on both sides, but we're there to protect the client. [Architect] Craig Hodgetts referred to me as a mama lion. [Laughs.] I thought: I'll take that. Yes, I will defend my cubs against all.

You've also referred to yourself as a 'design evangelist' in various bios. What does that mean?

It means I think we're here to make the world safe for design. Unfortunately, particularly in this country, the arts are brushed aside too often. Maybe I can retire when I get an architect on stage at his own groundbreaking. «

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