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than many people might suspect. That being said, he added he often wonders why there isn't more contemporary architecture.

He's also mystified as to why so much of the contemporary architecture he sees is so badly designed. "I think almost all of it is terrible."

Perhaps the two are related, he concludes. Tobocman said he believes that since there is so little contemporary — and much of it is substandard — home buyers' expectations are lower.

Because expectations are lower, much of the contemporary architecture being built is less than praiseworthy and fewer people are drawn to contemporary designs.

"So much of contemporary architecture seems like a knockoff of a bad copy," he said. Contemporary architecture is so much more than white houses with flat roofs and round windows — some of the traits commonly associated with contemporary architecture, he said.

Other characteristics common in contemporary architecture include simplicity of design, basic geometric shapes, stark flat walls and materials like steel girders and glass.

Contemporary design also requires proper use of proportion, lighting and shadow, siting and materials.

Tobocman said he doesn't like to talk about the features of "contemporary architecture" because that often leads to stereotypes and bad architecture.

Many of the features popularized by pioneers like Mies van der Rohe, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Charles Jeanneret-Gris (Le Corbusier) are sometimes thought of as the end all to contemporary architecture.

"They're a beginning point," he said. Tobocman said he begins admires the works of these past masters, but that shouldn't mean contemporary architecture should stop evolving.

"There are no hard, fast rules."

Bad architecture

Poorly designed contemporary architecture is infuriating to Tobocman for a variety of reasons. "It's an opportunity that wasn't capitalized on and everyone suffers for it."

"The homeowner suffers because he's not getting good work, he said. Another architect with the skill, talent and determination to develop a good design but needs a break loses because some less talented architect wins the bid.

"And we all suffer because we perpetuate that mediocrity we're getting and seeing and people stick with the traditional styles instead of trying something new."

What it is

Contemporary architecture isn't always easy to define, he will admit. "When people ask me to describe it, I say come, let me show you."

"The dictionary defines it as meaning 'of our time,'" he said, adding that features are not as important as achieving a kind of timeless aspect.

"I would like to be able to say — when I'm done doing this — that no one would be able to point at a design I did and say that was built at a specific time."

Not for everyone

Tobocman grants not everyone is going to like contemporary architecture. People who like

contemporary architecture are more interested in pleasing themselves than going along with the crowd.

"I like to think they're intelligent people who have looked around a bit and made a conscious decision to build something special," he said. "They want what they want, and they are not going to be swayed by a particular preference of a given community."

"They want to be in sync with living today," he said.

Tobocman added that while he doesn't necessarily think traditional architecture is always bad, he doesn't understand why more people are not drawn to contemporary architecture.

Fortunate architect

Tobocman said he is fortunate. He has either worked in a small office or as an independent. A lot of architects don't have that luxury. Many work in large firms on parts of projects or on many different types of projects.

"I never had to compromise that — I was lucky enough so that I didn't have to do those things."

By working in a small office and then moving straight into his own practice, he had the opportunity to fine tune his skills in contemporary design.

Another plus was that one of his first really big projects — an unnamed apartment complex in Detroit near McNichols and Woodward — was a smashing success.

"I think it was really the first apartment complex done in contemporary architecture," he said. It created quite a stir in the community, he said, and his name became fairly well known in architectural circles.

After that, work came in fairly regularly (but not without some hassle on his part) for that he is thankful, he said.

Steady work has also given him an opportunity to turn down projects and make stands other architects hungry for work might not have.

"I've walked away from projects — sometimes I'm rehired or asked back, sometimes I'm not but that has helped me establish a reputation for good design."

Tobocman said he has but one criteria for his projects. "I always ask myself, would I be proud to show it to another professional that I hold in high esteem."



Price boost: The National Association of Home Builders said higher lumber prices have added \$4,500 to the price of a new, 2,000-square-foot, \$120,000 home.

Don't blame owl for lumber prices

(AP) — Sharp increases in lumber prices were caused mainly by the nation's economic recovery rather than spotted owl protection or federal logging cutbacks, congressional researchers reported.

The study said that while the price increase has been substantial, "exciting evidence suggests that it will not significantly slow housing starts or the economic recovery."

The Congressional Research Service, an arm of the Library of Congress, concluded that timber and housing industry leaders have exaggerated the northern spotted owl's impact on the lumber market.

The price of framing lumber rose to \$474 per 1,000 board feet in February from \$255 last October. A board foot is one foot square and one inch thick.

The congressional study said protection for the northern spotted owl, seasonal factors and an import duty on Canadian lumber have played some role in pushing the lumber price up.

But the report said those prices,

when adjusted for inflation, are no higher than they were in the 1970s.

Mortgage interest rates affect the cost of a house more than lumber, which accounts for about 5 percent of the cost of a home, the report said.

Positioning themselves for President Clinton's April 3 forest conference in Portland, Ore., industry leaders have argued that Northwest logging reductions are holding back housing starts and adding costs to home buyers.

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