

Asks and Answers: Interviews with Archivists on Born-Digital Design Records

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Abstract:

Over the past twenty-five years, architectural design has undergone an important evolution: from an activity that has widely recorded itself on paper and with physical models, to one that is increasingly or sometimes entirely done digitally. How are architectural archivists and archives preparing for these collections of the future? How are preservation and access issues around these files different from other born-digital archival material? What future research interests and needs can we anticipate for digital design holdings? What guidelines, tools, and training are archivists urgently requesting in order to steward and simply even ‘read’ these new types of drawings? The CAD/BIM Taskforce of SAA’s Architectural Records Section (previously Roundtable), has been working to identify and address the technical, legal, and curatorial issues posed by digital design software such as Computer Aided Design (CAD) and Building Information Modeling (BIM). This presentation shares the results of a 4-month (and counting) interview effort that sought to follow up with archivists and records managers who contributed to our 2016 survey on digital design holdings. The themes and trends identified across a diverse group of interviewees from the academic, governmental, and corporate worlds are critical for this section’s Taskforce to prioritize its research and resource development. Findings gleaned from this project to date will be shared, including the progress and approaches made by archivists and records managers so far, and the obstacles they have encountered in acquiring, preserving, and providing access to born-digital design records.

About the Authors:

Suzanne Noruschat is Architectural Records Archivist in Manuscripts and Archives at Yale University Library. She holds an MLIS from the University of California Los Angeles, and a PhD in art history, with a specialization in modern architecture, from Emory University. Prior to her work at Yale, she processed architectural records at the Getty Research Institute and the University of Southern California, and she taught architectural and art history at Emory and the University of Nebraska Lincoln. Suzanne is interested in developing guidelines and best practices for acquiring, appraising, processing, and providing access to born-digital design records.

Pamela Casey is Architecture Archivist at Avery Drawings and Archives at Columbia University’s Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library. Pamela previously worked as Archivist at the Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montreal, and as a researcher and editor for architects and architectural historians in Canada and the UK. She holds an MLIS from McGill University’s School of Information Studies and an MFA in Writing from Columbia University. She has taught academic writing to architecture students at the Pratt School of Architecture in New York, and creative writing to undergraduates at Columbia. Her role at Avery focuses on outreach to faculty and students, processing visual materials, and planning for future architectural born-digital collections.

