

# Aamodt / Plumb

## METTE AAMODT



**How intentional was the shift from traditional practice to a design-build ?**

We became a design-build studio in a rather round-about way. We became interested in quality materials, craftsmanship, and a deep understanding of how things go together – and in a design-build, you have complete control over the final product. We are interested in using slow, raw and whole materials – materials that are not composite or industrially produced, but rather materials that come from the earth.

**How does the firm setup -organizationally speaking - support slowness ?**

We are comprised of two entities – this is purely for insurance reasons, however we functionally operate as one company with complete oversight and involvement through the entire architecture and construction process.

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While the design process is similar to most firms, we dip far deeper into construction management. Our associates are project managers and construction managers – they go from the design process to construction documentation, bidding, and procurement. The process is seamless and our staff gain a deep understanding of the entire design-construction process. We learn so much by taking responsibility over this process, and we can then take ownership and accountability for every decision along the way. As our staff gain a better understanding of the construction side of the equation, this feeds back into their design process, and design becomes more streamlined.

As a mid-sized firm, how do you encourage a mindset of slowness among employees ?

We definitely hire for ethos – everyone on the team has to be on board with the core values. We’ve created the S.L.O.W. acronym of our values, which is plastered all throughout the office, in our mission statement, and talked about constantly with staff and clients.

We’ve created an environment that fosters slowness, for example an employee book group and a strict 9-5 time cutoff. We emphasize a work life balance for all of our staff and refuse to let anyone work for even an hour more than we are paying them to. If good, clean, and fair is in our mission statement, this goes beyond just the spaces that we design - it seeps into our culture as an office.

A criticism lobbied about slow architecture is the economic model required to sustain the practice. Can you describe the current model ?

Slowness isn’t literally slower on a timescale – it’s a mindset of thoughtfulness. While we constantly think about our principles, we don’t produce any slower than other firms of our size. Architecture and construction are inherently slow – the higher expenses of “slow” architecture projects typically come from the material costs, not the speed of the design execution.

High quality, fairly produced materials simply cost more, and there is no real way around that.

How can we address this material cost and accessibility issue ?

We are pivoting the firm right now to tackle that. In the past, we have designed VERY expensive single-family homes. And while these are made with the utmost quality, we’re

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looking for a more impactful and meaningful practice.

Developers build most of the world, and we can't wait for enlightened clients to come along – so we are thinking about expanding our practice to include responsible development. Hopefully as a design-build, we can continue to reduce wasteful redundancies that increase cost and actually save money in these larger scale projects!

How do you convince your clients that this extra price is worth the product or final architectural space?

Many buildings are produced with exploited labor. We have no problem shedding light on these issues for clients - we ask:

*Do you really want to use a material produced by slave labor? Do you really want to use a material that causes cancer for you, loved ones, and people that produce it?*

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Specifying clean materials is an ethical issue – creating slow spaces is the largest scale of conscious consumerism, since a home or real estate is the largest purchase most people will make in their entire life! We must remember that architecture is inherently political and always has been.

What is the studio's relationship to materiality and craft?

Craftsmanship has a long tradition in the US, but recently young people have been pushed to receive higher education, to not work with their hands or "get dirty" in any way. There is very little respect for working with your hands, and as a result, good craft is now so expensive. The goal is to build back that base of strong craft in the US, and for us to find a network of reliable Artisans to work with.

**How does the firm stay connected to their built works after construction? Is there any sort of stewardship?**

If the architect is not intimately involved in the construction, your final product will not only have no principles of slowness, but will also not look anything close to what the architect envisioned.

We are always closely involved in construction – you can't simply hand over the drawings! Creating architecture is probably about 20% design, 80% execution, and you need to be on site, getting dirty, in order to achieve slowness.

Stewardship beyond construction has to do with client relationships – clients call us for anything post-occupancy since we are the experts of the building - this leads to more work for us!