

Doing the *Right* Thing

David Immenschuh, FIIDA, Principal of Architectural Interiors, BNIM Architects

As Principal of Architectural Interiors for Kansas City, Mo.-based BNIM Architects, David Immenschuh, FIIDA, leads design teams that create award-winning sustainable buildings, but also helps clients think about how to live and work in environmentally friendly ways. "I really believe we are having a positive effect on people's lives," he says.

BNIM, founded in 1970, hired Immenschuh that same year as the interiors guru who, only eight years later, became a principal. "In the mid-1980s, one of my partners [Bob Berkebile] had an epiphany about what architecture should be," he says. That epiphany came as a result of the 1981 collapse of the Kansas City Hyatt Regency walkway that killed 114 people. (Several BNIM principals helped design the facility, but Immenschuh says the investigation faulted the structural engineer.) The firm soon embarked on a new quest: to do the right thing.

That would later become the seed for moving into sustainable architecture. "As part of my design process, I always ask, 'Am I doing the best thing for people?'" Immenschuh says.

One such project was the University of Texas School of Nursing and Student

Community Center in Houston, selected by AIA as one of the "Top 10 Green Projects" for 2006. Immenschuh speaks excitedly about how this sustainable building rubs off onto its inhabitants. "If the students are learning in a healthy facility," he says, "they'll be affected and have it translated into their practice when taking care of people."

The 195,000-square-foot, eight-story building is energy-efficient and incorporates natural lighting at every turn – significantly more than similar facilities, Immenschuh says. Because it's a medical facility, the team devoted much effort to improving indoor air quality, both through ventilation and in the selection of materials and furnishings.

Immenschuh's notion to "do the right thing" spills over into aspects of his personal life, as well. When he's not producing planet-and-people-healthy interiors, he participates in a host of public activities, such as serving on the planning commission, board of zoning appeals and architectural review board of his city, Mission Woods, Kan.

But despite a decades-long career and prolific civic involvement, Immenschuh doesn't take much credit. He credits the birth of BNIM's do-good mission to his associate and friend, Berkebile. And his firm's success he bestows to his employees. "There are many people in our firm that are much more knowledgeable about things, such as sustainability, than I am," he says. "And I'm learning from them every single day."