Denise Scott Brown
2007 Vilcek Prize in Architecture

This is my Peaceable Kingdom. That’s what I call my house.

The buildings, books, essays on urban space—they all took shape here.

It’s been my home for more than forty years.

Johannesburg, South Africa

I grew up in South Africa. When I was a toddler, my mother started teaching me about modernism. Architecture was my destiny, I guess you’d say.
I had to experience European buildings through photos. For me, photography became a critical way to understand architecture... a new way of seeing. It's a tool I still use today!

I knew my calling. I left Africa to train in urban planning and architecture. But that was the 1960s and I quickly found...

...it was a challenge to be recognized in a field dominated by men.

I decided the way forward was to create bold, interesting work...

...and to always be learning!
The book that made Bob Venturi and me famous—or is it infamous?—is *Learning from Las Vegas*.

We argued that America’s wild, flashing jungle of neon held many important lessons for a fresh approach to architecture.

The city was so vital we needed new concepts and theories to handle it.

We brought thirteen of our Yale students along to help.

We rode the buses, studied the tourist maps, measured the signs and land use maps. We went to the gala opening of the Circus Circus casino...
As I think about it, the circus is a pretty good way to describe my life’s work.

I have been a circus horse rider most of my life—a woman who works with a foot on two horses at once.
People started to come to Bob and me with all sorts of wonderful problems…

…we designed museums and fire departments and hotels and monuments…

…and we helped plan the flow of universities and city centers.

Sometimes clients would be surprised by my approach!
Dartmouth

Dartmouth College consulted me on developing a campus plan. They asked me where their new mathematics building should go.

“Well how do you think about math?” I asked.

“Well how do you think about math?” I asked.

“Is it the shock troops of computer programming?”

“The handmaiden of the sciences?”

“Inspired, fun puzzle-solving?”

You’ve got to wrap your head around these questions and a hundred more…

…before you can think about laying a brick.
In 2007, I received the Vilcek Prize in Architecture. The Vilcek Foundation specifically recognizes immigrants in the arts and sciences.

I’ve won a number of awards in my time.

In 1992, Bob and I were awarded the National Medal of Arts... ...we also received the American Institute of Architects’ highest honor—the AIA Gold Medal.

But the Vilcek Prize is a special recognition because it acknowledges my whole life experience as well as my accomplishments.