In light of recent international & national events, the economic struggle, war, the planet’s health, our health; our lives have received a wake up call. It is time that we recognize life beyond our circle of comfort. It is impossible to remain neutral when events of this magnitude affect our world, our home because now the effects of our neutrality are being felt world wide and transformed into irresponsibility and ignorance. It's time to wake up. A resolve is necessary.
[WAKING UP TO SELF] I knew it was impossible to travel time, but for over 5 years I lived my life in split custody, my body was here but my head was trying to push itself into the future. My internal time machine was exhausting and demanding; expectations so high with a to-do list taller than my 5 1/2 feet. I had become a machine, a time machine. And then one day my time machine broke and all the energy spent pushing, and pushing and pushing hurled me right back with a force so mean it almost broke me. I was a mess, entangled in the to-do list. I began to unravel myself & looked at the list stretched out before me with so many items crossed off; did I really do this? Where had I been? I was in the time machine. I missed so much. Now I look around and realize that for the first time in years my body and my mind are finally in sync. I don’t want to miss another moment of my life living in my time machine. The future is waiting for me.

[WAKING UP TO NOW] I have been an observer of the times. I have watched how people have focused on personal gain, which in turn has caused institutions to focus on benefiting from this greed, which in turn affected the stock market. What I have become aware of is the power of a single persons introverted desires.

[WAKING UP TO GESTURE] When I attended the funeral of a great man I knew, I heard stories of remarkable events and felt a loss in his passing. Yet it wasn’t until I saw the fragile faces of his wife and children that I felt reverence and sorrow. From their expressions one could tell that it wasn’t as much the remarkable events that made this man great, but rather the small and simple things. The texture of his hands, the scent of his neck, the warmth of his body as he sat close to you or gave you a hug. The small and simple gestures are what makes life worth living.

[WAKING UP TO RESPONSIBILITY] There’s too much complacency. “I don’t care. I don’t know. I am bored. I am tired. You decided. I can’t. I’m too busy. There is not enough time. You do it. It’s your problem. Stop! ... Breathe. ... It’s time to take a stand and make a decision. It’s time to stop and think. I must take the time to think. Take the time to decide what I believe, what I know. NOW IT’S TIME FOR ME TO ACT.
We are awake. We are not neutral. Our resolve is to live Voluntary Simple. As we volunteer to live simple, we as architects recognize that we are not just living simple, but architecturally simple. In this profession the lines of life and architecture blur and connect with one another. To LIVE VAS is to incorporate the principles of VAS in our day-to-day life. To PRACTICE VAS is to incorporate the principles of VAS in our architectural design. And so, our resolve is to live and practice VAS.

WHAT DOES VAS MEAN

VAS does not mean to live simplistic. Ignoring complexities and difficulties and experiencing life only at the surface oversimplifies life to the point of not living. To live simple is not just about deduction and avoidance. It is about waking up and confronting your life, the world and deciding that you want to volunteer yourself to make a commitment to live differently, presently. To live and practice VAS is to recognize that the ordinary can reveal the extraordinary. VAS is about expanding your self to a higher concentrated meaning and understanding of life.

Understanding grows out of experience, out of living and penetrating the complexities that make up life. Through this process we find meaning. And to each one of us meaning should be at the core of how we live and what kind of a world we want to create.
Simplicity is at the core of VAS and simplicity is composed of one thing, element, or part. To live simply, to live VAS, we are searching for one guiding principal - MINDFULNESS. Mindfulness is defined as the trait of staying aware of your responsibilities. We must be mindful of our gestures to ensure that we are present in our lives and more importantly, that meaning is present in our lives.

We are scribing a constitution, a resolve, which shall define a framework for us to live and practice VAS. Our constitution is comprised of three main principles centered on mindfulness:

[MINDFULNESS OF SELF]

[MINDFULNESS OF MAN AND ENVIRONMENT]

[MINDFULNESS OF EACH GESTURE]
We must be mindful of our self when living VAS. To be mindful is to experience life in the moment; fully, patiently, lovingly, honestly. It requires introspection and questioning: What is important to me? What do I live for? We have no choice but to be honest when we answer our self in order to reveal who we were, who we are, and who we can be. When we know our self our meaning and belief in life will be revealed if we are mindful and present. The beauty of meaning and belief is its tangible nature for they continually should be nurtured and tested through wisdom and experience as we grow and change. This experience and evolution is truly living.

The mindfulness of self as a creator in the built environment is the practice of VAS. To be architecturally mindful is to reflect upon and learn from the environment to again find belief and meaning. It requires a surety and awareness of architecture and self. Is it detail, construction, community, light or program? Although the questions and answers are plentiful, practicing VAS will allow us to know and learn the specific meaning we will manifest within the architecture. Revealing the essence of the architecture.
In living and practicing VAS, self-awareness leads to a genuine mindfulness of the environment. Although VAS requires a strong sense of self, we must remain susceptible to man and environment. Our beliefs guide our actions, which in turn affect our environment. Therefore, our beliefs and actions should consider man and environment because everything is inter-connected. Every interaction impacts the world in some magnitude, either destruction or construction. Neutrality is no longer an option. When we have uncovered our meaning and belief, we can take a stand and effectively impact the outside world.

Architectural awareness through vulnerability, honesty, and non-judgment will allow us to be mindful and lead to an honest relationship between the world and the built environment. To produce a higher level of architecture we must humbly and respectfully respond to the social and environmental concerns of the world around us. An open mind to social consciousness, to the needs and desires of other cultures, and a reverence for mother earth give insight to impacts we have on the environment, one another and our selves. Sustainability and strength of community can flourish when we are mindful of our environments.
The final element of VAS is the manifestation of self-awareness and the environment through gestures. So much time is wasted on unimportant, un-meaningful acts. These wasteful gestures clutter the intentions of our beliefs and meaning. Often the intention is missed completely. By being mindful of our gestures we are living and practicing VAS.

As an architect and creator, we should understand the potential of each gesture. A single action, or even non-action, can be powerful. Even as a musician uses a pause to build up emotion or an artist allows for void on their canvas, a mindful architect composes his/her palette of gestures to reduce visual noise. This allows the true essence and intention of the architect to translate into the architecture and speak to the inhabitants of the space. By being mindful of architectural gestures we are in turn beginning to practice VAS. The following gestures, or principles of design, further define the practice of VAS:
EMBODIMENT] The driving force practicing VAS is essence and being mindful that the building(s) we create embody the essence, which reflects our beliefs and give meaning to the space.

FORM] As an architect of VAS, form can make a powerful statement through minimal gestures. Complication does not add interest or meaning. In contrast, a simple form can be easily understood and translate meaning. By mindfully using design elements such as line, space, value, and texture we can translate the essence of architecture into the built form.

CONNECTION] Designing such that interior & exterior spaces as well as vertical & horizontal spaces blur to create universal spaces allowing for interaction. Similarly, we as architects should connect with man & the environment and most importantly with the beliefs we want to reflect on the built world.
To be mindful of our palette is to be aware of the impact materials, program and site have on our buildings. We should be selective and mindful with these elements to not overwhelm but rather to be understood seamlessly within the context of our architecture.

With each gesture we make, we should create balance so that we do not neglect any part and design for a whole. This creates a healthy, balanced building that is mindful of sustainability, form, program, site and the user.
We are awake, we are not neutral and are seeking resolve.

OUR RESOLVE IS TO LIVE VAS, TO LIVE MINDFULLY.