

The Cardboard City

In the corner of my bedroom stood a skyline made of cereal boxes, glue, and tape. It started as a school project on sustainable cities, but I kept building long after the grade arrived. At first, I measured streets with a ruler, cutting pathways too straight for imagination. The result looked clean, though lifeless. So I stopped measuring.

Soon, alleyways curved. Rooftops carried gardens. Walls bent slightly because cardboard softened under paint. Every imperfection gave texture, like old cities layered over centuries. I borrowed scraps from friends, mixing colors that never matched. Some pieces leaned unevenly, yet the city felt alive.

While working, I realized how many decisions hide behind every structure. Where light enters, where wind moves, how people might cross a plaza. I researched small towns and dense neighborhoods, trying to understand why some felt welcoming and others didn't. Notes filled the margins of my sketchbook: "plants near benches," "roofs close enough for conversation," "shadows soften edges." Each phrase hinted at the human side of design.

After weeks of quiet tinkering, I invited classmates to explore it. They crouched to peek through doorways, lifting pieces gently to see what sat beneath. Someone asked if people lived there. I said they might, if they cared enough to imagine themselves inside. The question lingered. Maybe buildings succeed when they invite participation.

Later, I joined the art club to create larger installations. Cardboard turned into wood, glue into nails. The materials changed, but the approach stayed. Every project became a conversation with space — how people move, pause, or gather. I started seeing connections everywhere: the shape of a bench, the curve of a staircase, the pattern of light across a floor.

Those discoveries led me toward architecture, not as a collection of blueprints but as a language of empathy. A structure can shape belonging. A wall can divide or guide. Every choice carries consequences. Creating that small city taught me that design is both science and storytelling, logic meeting care.

At college, I want to study architecture through this lens: where sustainability meets narrative, and planning aligns with lived experience. Programs that blend studio work with social research match my curiosity. I hope to collaborate with peers who see buildings as questions, not answers.

The cardboard city still stands on a shelf, worn at the corners. I keep it there as a reminder of what invention looks like: imperfect, adaptive, full of quiet intention.