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## Architecture by bike: best way to get to know your neighborhoods and bring a new crew of locals into the architectural fold!

October 4, 2010 by [preservegreen](#)

When I was in grad school, I got in the habit of riding my bike to and from class from the far north side of the city to downtown. This was partially due to the fact that I was sick of sitting in front of my computer and torturous microfiche viewers all the time, and partially because I realized that I LOVE RIDING MY BICYCLE. Studying architecture has changed everything for me because everywhere I go in the city, I am surrounded by buildings that are constantly entertaining (or horrifying) me, and I gotta tell you, the view is much sweeter from a bicycle than a car or the same old train route. You're more in touch with your surroundings and don't have to worry about killing anyone when your car veers into oncoming traffic as you crane your neck to see some carved sandstone. Granted, I did slam into a parked car on my bike once, but really, only my pride was hurt. And I avoided that street for a few weeks just in case someone hiding behind a bush might have noticed. I'm practical like that.



Fall architectural bike tour schedule for Big Shoulders Realty.

Anyway, I know a guy who does amazing things with bicycles and architecture—not in a Dr. Frankenstein way, but in a marriage kind of way. [Lee Diamond](#) of [Big Shoulders Realty](#) has managed to marry these two passions in a million different and meaningful ways, and I just had to blog about it after going on one of his tours last weekend in Logan Square.

Seeing architecture by bike is a completely different experience and quite frankly targets a new audience that likely isn't your typical incestuous group of green building or preservation folks. I only happened to know one person on the tour, and it was bliss being on an architectural tour with a totally new group of enthusiasts. For more on Big Shoulder's tours, which run year-round (yes, winter, rain or shine, etc.), go [here](#). For a long time the tours were free, but finally Lee had to charge people as he was hemorrhaging money creating these extensive tours and the materials for them. Alas, our labors of love can get pricey. The tours are still reasonably priced, and also tend to end up at a local bar, which is the perfect way to cap off a long day of riding.



Meet up point at the Logan Square Centennial Monument at the intersection of Milwaukee, Kedzie and Logan.

Also super incredibly awesome: Lee just started [Chicago Velo](#) which he describes as being “a guide to the communities in and around Chicago. It is a guide to Chicago’s hidden gems of architectural splendor, its forgotten history and its secret riches. Most of the time, these spots are not really hidden from us at all, just obscured by time and neglect, and sometimes it takes someone in-the-know to help you find it.” I’ve been on these 5-hour-long tours, and we cover a lot of area and a lot of buildings you normally wouldn’t notice. This is a lot of information to store on a website and an incredible resource. I mean, I’ve done architectural surveys by car, and biking is a way, way better (and more fun) way to survey an area...and it’s all online!



A stop on the tour with Lee giving some history.

Following the same logic that one can have a more intimate experience with their surroundings by bike than by car, Big Shoulders Realty also shows homes by bike. If you don’t have your own, you can use one that hangs in the office’s conference room. Each bike is named after a historic Chicago figure—Lee was riding the “H.H. Holmes” bike on the tour, which I was naturally envious of. Going by bike can give a person a feel for how close public trans, the grocery store, etc. really are. And

obviously it's a lot more environmentally friendly and healthier to encourage this.



Conference room at the Big Shoulders Realty office. I mean look at it. It's the best conference room ever. Image from [www.chicagonow.com/blogs/rent-or-buy/](http://www.chicagonow.com/blogs/rent-or-buy/)

And yet another initiative is Big Shoulders Realty's "Restoration Not Renovation" project, which encourages homeowners to think before they gut the hell out of everything. Basically, this came about completely organically, as Lee began noticing that if he showed homes for sale that had been preserved vs. gutted, potential homeowners invariably were more interested in the preserved homes.

So, in short, this post is really just a big love fest for bicycles and creative realtors like Lee Diamond and Big Shoulders. I could honestly go on forever about this, but I've already gone way over the ideal number of blog words and fear I would lose you all. Suffice it to say, these kinds of initiatives totally give me hope for better models and a renewed enthusiasm among younger crowds in historic cities. And also make my jeans fit better. *Huzzah!*

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## One Response

1. on [October 4, 2010 at 6:52 pm](#) / [Reply](#)  *vmichael*

Yay! We are crazy bikists too. I love biking the city's architecture. In the 80s I saw the city by roller skates, which is a tad slower and perhaps thus even better for appreciating neighborhood architecture. Both beat a car by far.

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