

Spatial Awareness

It's one of those problems that isn't begging for a solution, because people don't realize it's a problem. If not for his wife, Brian Johnston wouldn't realize it, either.

A landscape architect in San Marcos, Calif., **Johnston '02 A&A** is working to identify what sort of environments—from public playgrounds to private backyards—might prove helpful to the skyrocketing number of kids diagnosed with autism. “My wife is a therapist who works with families touched by autism, and I was disappointed I wasn't hearing about it in my industry,” he says. “A lot of spaces aren't safe or desirable for families with people on the spectrum.”

As head of Square Root Design Studio, Johnston is trying to change that. After challenging panelists at an ASLA conference two years ago on the lack of research into designing with autistic people in mind, he partnered with a few colleagues to present on the topic himself. Now, he's among a handful of landscape architects trying to figure out what—from the size and layout of a play area to the smell of certain plants—might go into creating spaces where, Johnston says, “a family can coexist.” —RJ

