

A man with glasses and a yellow button-down shirt is the central focus, sitting in a modern office. In the background, another man is working at a long wooden table. The office has a high ceiling with exposed beams and pendant lights. The overall atmosphere is professional and creative.

residential
architect

A HANLEY-WOOD PUBLICATION / NOVEMBER · DECEMBER 2009

start-ups

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pros look back / continuing education /
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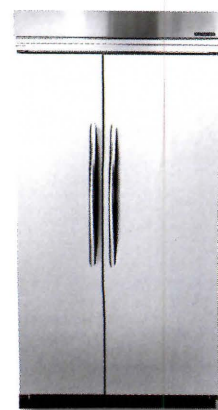
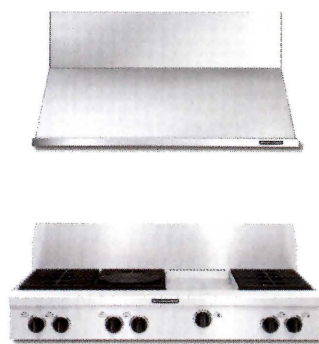
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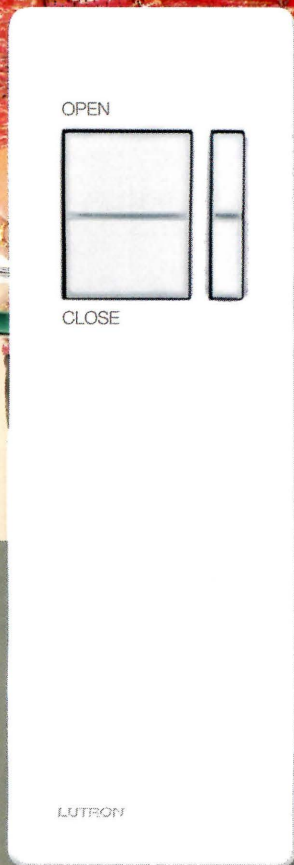


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Now that they've ventured out on their own, the sky's the limit for architects Donna Kacmar (above) and Greg Kearley (cover), whose firms are 4 and 5 years old respectively. Above photo by Danny Turner; cover photo by Greg Hadley.

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practice...page 24

Why do so many architects teach? Because, say classroom veterans, it's a constant learning experience—and a great way to keep your own work fresh and vital.



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Five newly minted residential firms share their hopes, fears, and growing pains.

by Meghan Drueding, Nigel F. Maynard, and Shelley D. Hutchins



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Young designer Tom Allisma of Omaha, Neb.,

turned spare rooms in his father's house into a loft of his own.

by James Schwartz

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Gustav Stickley's handcrafted home.

residential architect
design awards



call for entries

This is your last chance to enter *residential architect's* fifth annual design awards competition. For more information, turn to page 49. Shown: Robert Gurney's addition to a Virginia farmhouse, the 2003 project of the year.

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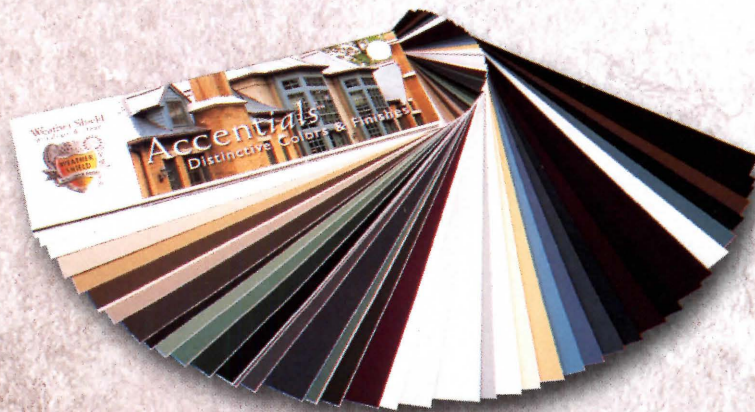
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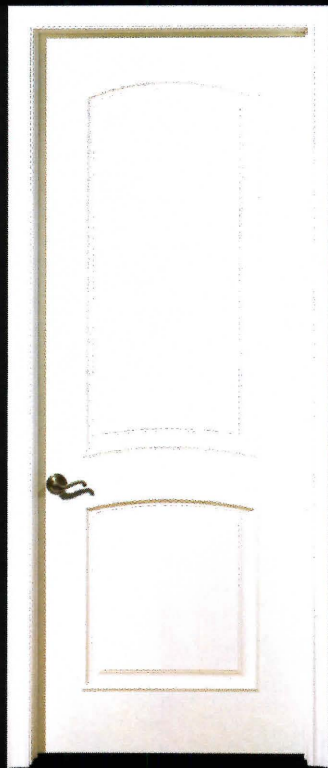
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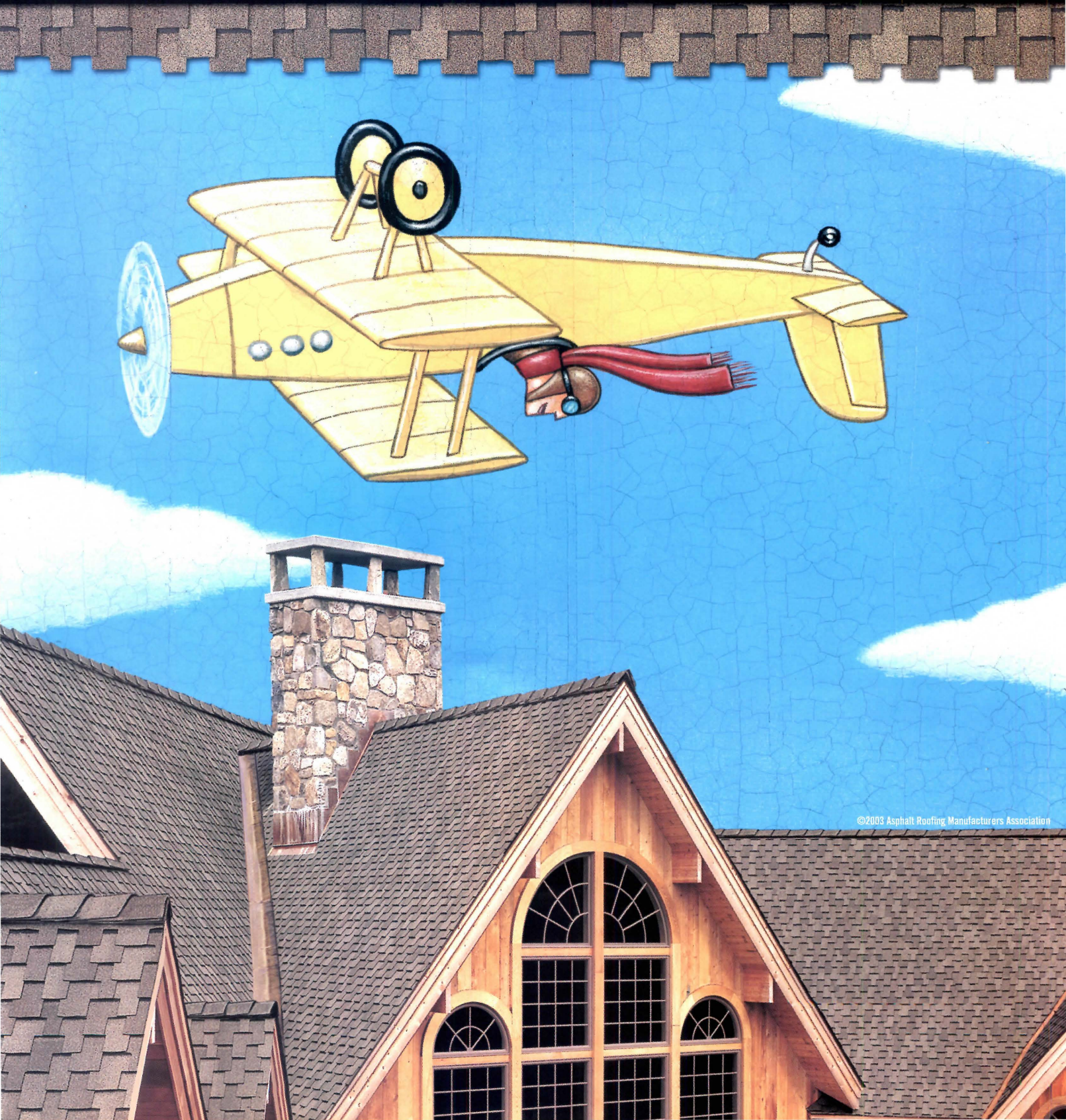
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ready, set, practice

start-up firms and veterans may have more in common than they think.

by s. claire conroy

Usually, we devote our editorial pages to the work of established residential architects. Our cover stories and design features focus on practitioners who've amassed a substantial portfolio. Their architecture is polished, mature, or exemplary in some way. In our observation, it takes a good 10 years at the helm of a firm to build a body of work that really shows what you can do. The first years are a struggle to land small commissions, collect and pay bills, and raise the firm's profile among the media. Each successful remodel that grabs some attention means a bigger, more challenging project next time. Maybe toward the end of those 10 years, you've done some new custom homes that more closely reflect your sensibility. You've won a few design awards; your work has appeared in *residential architect*; you're on your way.

In this issue, we look at five fresh firms still very much absorbed in finding their way. They are talented; many have pretty portfolios built at other firms; all suffer acutely from growing pains. We decided

to examine these start-ups, from years one through five, as a direct response to a request we received from a reader. "I love your magazine. It's full of great articles, and I always clip at least one to keep for future reference," wrote Clare Montechio of Red Maple Workshop Architecture in Petaluma, Calif., in a letter to the editor. "However, I have a bone to pick with you. As much as I love *residential architect*, I want to see more articles on people starting firms. My partner and I have been in business for almost four years and we're not sure if the trouble and tribulation we're going through is typical or abnormal."

Well, Clare (fine name you have, by the way), this issue's for you. And I highly suspect that after reading it, you'll discover your experiences are perfectly normal. Interestingly, the strongest lesson we learned from fledgling firms is that their problems are not unique to start-ups. Firms of all vintages grapple with getting paid promptly and in full. They constantly weigh the lucrative job against the artistically fulfilling one. They bog down in the day-to-day administration of a small business



Mark Rober...

and bemoan the lack of time to draw. After all, that's why they started the firm in the first place, so they could design, stamp their name on the plans, and see the solid traces of their hand in the outcome. Architects have many doubts and fears, but they seldom question their ability to design something beautiful.

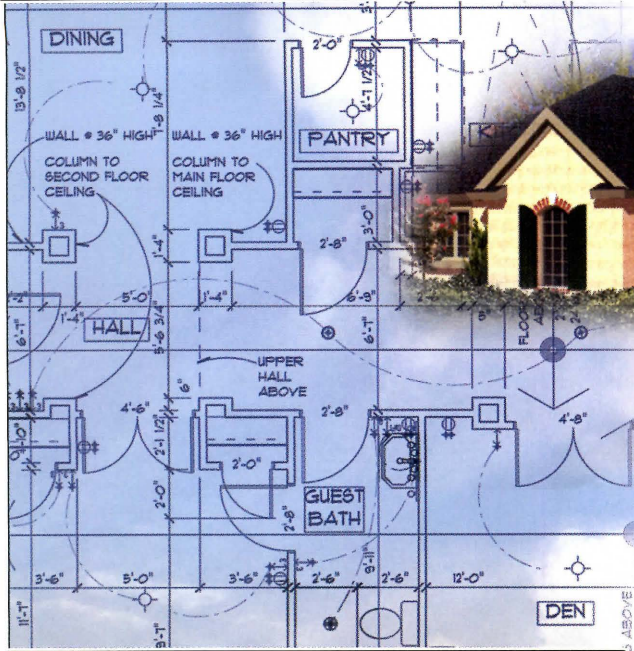
Clare Montechio asked us to focus on firms where the principals hadn't worked for a "name firm" or taught on the side to balance the budget. Hmm. We haven't entirely complied with that request. Because, Clare, nearly everyone we talked to for the story said that those routes were the best ways to go. Making your

mistakes and learning the ropes on someone else's dime is invaluable. But be strategic and ask to do some of the grunt administration work, too, such as client billing. Teaching on the side enables you to feed yourself and turn down the projects you shouldn't take. Architects who follow those routes find they're on the fast track to better clients, better work, and a better paycheck in the bank. **ra**

Questions or comments? Call me: 202.736.3312; write me: S. Claire Conroy, *residential architect*, One Thomas Circle, N.W., Suite 600, Washington, D.C. 20005; or e-mail me: cconroy@hanley-wood.com.

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letters

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artful solver

your article “Art or Service?” (June 2003, page 11) resonated deeply in my heart because, in loving architecture and especially houses (the most difficult projects there are), I have confronted this complex situation time and again in my long practice. And I have come to a very similar conclusion with my clients—that I take pleasure in solving the problem as artfully as I can.

I really love my clients—well, almost all of them—and I also love the challenge presented by their real needs vs. what they think or have told themselves those needs are, and by my needs as a designer. I find that sometimes there is a certain struggle here because there has always been a feeling in me that as an architect, one of my responsibilities, both to my clients and to myself, is to find a way to help them understand what real design is as it relates to them but also as a principle in itself.

So I find that the process is one of education, discovery, and communication, from which both client and architect can emerge richer. But both sides need to recognize the values they

bring and must be willing to share in the patience, compromises, sorrows, and joys of working together.

Your story about the local chef hits the mark. After all, the creative juices don’t flow in a vacuum. For me as an architect there is a great satisfaction and a profound feeling of accomplishment when the project is completed and the client is happy, and we look at each other and discover that we are now still friends—perhaps even better friends than when we started—and that this completed project is the result of our having worked together and paid for its birth in ways other than with money.

*Eduardo Faxas
Architects & Planners
Holmes, N.Y.*

keeping it real

■ have just read your editorial “Art or Service?” after it was brought to my attention by one of the intern architects in our office. I want you to know how much I appreciate your insight.

I have spent nearly 40 years in this profession, including eight years on the faculty of a local school of architecture. Over the years I have consistently

seen students and interns misled by the very nature of architectural education, which promotes the idea of total artistic freedom, and seldom resembles the experiences found in architectural practice.

There indeed *is* great satisfaction in meeting the needs of your clients in an artful fashion. I find the daily problem-solving process to be an art in itself. I think that many in the architectural profession fail to understand that the artistic freedom they seek also implies some kind of artistic responsibility; otherwise, the “art” they create has little meaning.

Thanks for your fine editorial. It really hit home in this office.

*Sam Austin
Senior Project Manager
C.M. Architecture
Fort Worth, Texas*

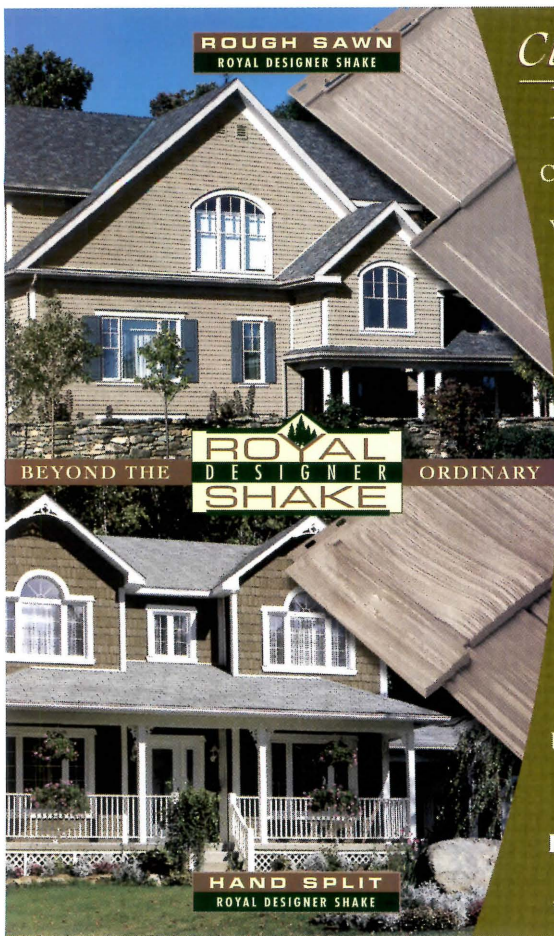
quibbling rivalry

■ follow with interest the continued discussions on your “Letters” page concerning residential designer vs. architect, and Registered Architect (RA) vs. AIA. Almost everything in the business world—and architecture is a business—revolves around power, and the

American Institute of Architects is no different. The AIA would have the general public believe that there is some greater value to AIA architects than state-licensed architects. I hire many architects and engineers and this is simply not the case. As a trade association, the AIA benefits its constituents. As a general rule, licensed professionals are not identified by their affiliation with nongovernmental organizations; engineers, for example, refer to themselves as PE (professional engineer).

Market share drives the architect vs. designer controversy. Under pressure from architects, some states license residential designers. General contractors, however, can seal their own work. This is an example of political power at work with the goal of eliminating competition and increasing economic benefit to architects under the guise of protecting the public interest. All designers are—and should be—judged by the final product.

*John T. Keliiaa
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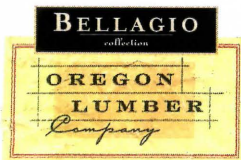
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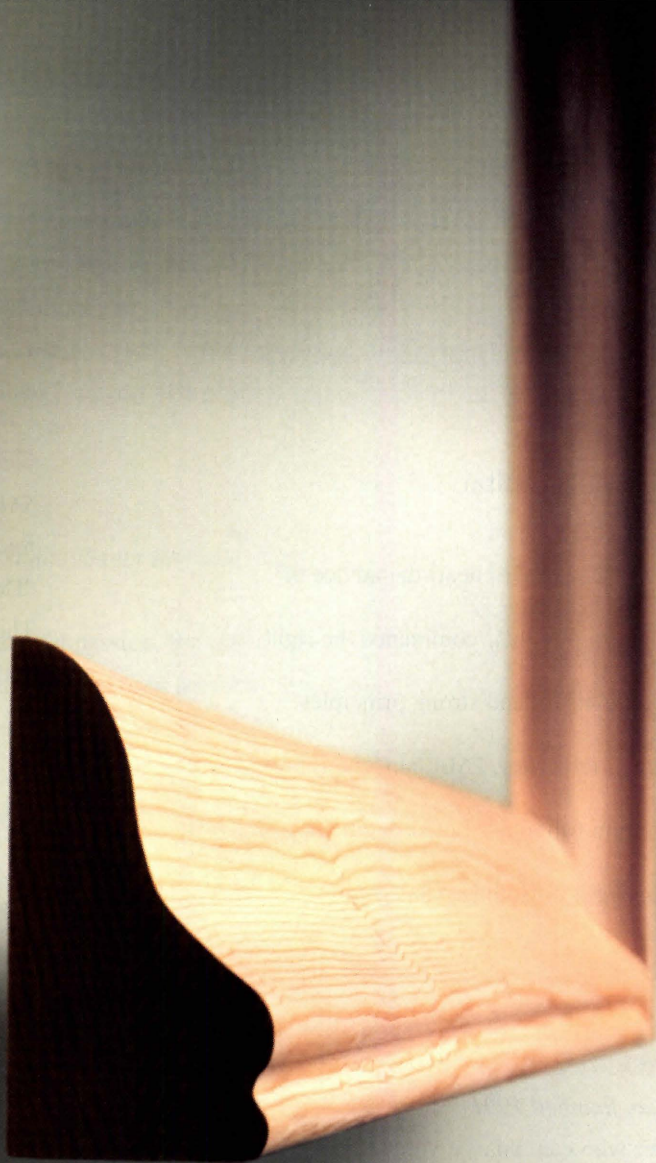


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calendar



David O'Neil

residential architect design awards: call for entries

entry form and fee due: november 21, 2003
completed binders due: january 5, 2004

Our annual Design Awards program honors outstanding architecture in various categories. All of the winning projects will be published in the May 2004 issue of *residential architect*. Shown: winner

of a 2003 merit award in the affordable category by Boulder, Colo.-based Wolff Lyon Architects. For an entry form, call 202.736.3407, visit www.residentialarchitect.com, or go to page 49 in this magazine.

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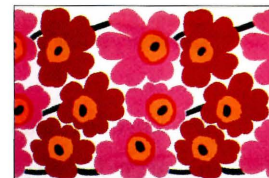
strangely familiar: design and everyday life

november 8–february 15
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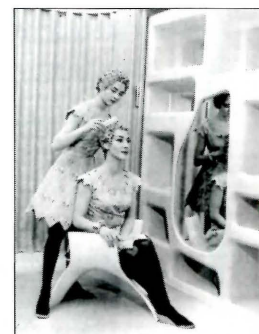
Rauno Träskelin

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continuing education

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by cheryl weber

When Frank Harmon, FAIA, was a student at the Architectural Association in London, the school was staffed entirely by practicing architects. They were youngish, enthusiastic, and idealistic, and shared cups of coffee with him as easily as ideas. One professor in particular, Kenneth Frampton, now at Columbia University, made an impression. "Although he was very learned and scholarly, he treated us students like we were his equals and listened to us like we listened to him," Harmon says. "You immediately realized you could go out and do something, because these people were human."

It wasn't until Harmon graduated and decided to follow in his mentors' footsteps that he understood the true nature of the teacher-student relationship. For 21 years he has taught architecture at North Carolina State University while building a thriving practice in Raleigh, N.C. "I didn't realize until later," Harmon says, "that inspiration is a two-way street."

By itself, building a robust practice is a full-time job. Between generating work, managing the office,



David Plunkert

meeting with clients, and creating beautiful buildings, why do so many architects also take the time to teach? Because at its most fundamental level, teaching is a conduit for creativity. Whereas architects can become consumed with the mundane details of running a practice, the classroom has no such constraints. The typical design-studio project at a university yields as many different solutions as there

are students, many of them concepts that veteran architects would never dream up. James Biber, AIA, Pentagram, New York City, who has taught at Cornell, Syracuse University, and Parsons School of Design, says teaching exposes him to ideas that are not his first impulses. "I don't generate nearly as many options as I used to, because the right solution becomes so intuitive after a while," he says.

"It's great to have students break you out of those normative solutions."

Not only do young 20-somethings have a more unfettered view of the world, but academia rewards intellectual free play. Architects who hold teaching positions have the opportunity to explore topics that intrigue them. As her firm has grown, New York City architect Deborah
continued on page 26

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Berke, AIA, has winnowed her work load at Yale to a graduate-level studio one semester each year. Last year a studio titled “Work” investigated how cities could increase employment through businesses other than service industries, from boutiques to a micro-brewery and a kayak factory. In addition to designing buildings, the class read poetry about work—from Walt Whitman to Billy Collins—and did some mini-design projects that explored such ideas as where to get a cup of coffee and what the buildings might look like.

To Berke, teaching studio is more than doing desk crits about the project at hand. “I’m not interested in the studios informing my work specifically,” she says. “Architecture for me is a fully consuming part of my life, so thinking about broader architectural issues in school helps remind me to think about broader architectural issues in the office.” An earlier project studied motels and the relationship between the automobile and habitation. “It’s not like I’ve been hired to do a hotel, but it interests me as an architectural type, and that’s where teaching is fun,” Berke says.

By contrast, the studios Atlanta architect Michael Gamble teaches follow the themes of his practice. Gamble, an assistant architecture professor at Georgia Tech, mixes a variety of client work with speculative research in his firm, much

of it funded by state grants. His design studios at the university are an extension of his own research on the rehabilitation and retrofit of grayfields, or suburban strips, and involve looking for ways to mix uses and create density and pedestrian movement. Last spring, for example, a thesis assigned to third-year students examined the possibilities for adding a library on top of a freestanding MARTA train station in the suburbs. “On campus you’re given the freedom to think without the burden of policy,” Gamble says, “but we’re aware of it. We try to identify weak areas of policy that might be changed.”

pushing the envelope

In school, other architect-teachers are also tweaking the boundaries, practical and theoretical, imposed by the kind of work that pays their bills. Affordable housing is a vexing issue for architects because it’s so dominated by budget and other pragmatic concerns. Student projects offer the much-needed freedom to look beyond the rule books and explore alternative design and zoning solutions—the why-to versus the how-to.

John Mutlow, FAIA, a full-time professor at the University of Southern California who also practices in Los Angeles, works with redevelopment agencies in the inner city to make urban housing attractive and affordable. His students are typically assigned projects

“the idea is that you can teach and practice, research and build, and have an intellectual plane to your practice that parallels that of your last seven years of higher education.”—James Timberlake, FAIA

that take too much time or money to test in the office. For example, they might study typological conditions in various sections of the city and play with the relationship of mass to number of housing units. “We try to push the studio work farther than we can in my office,” Mutlow says. His students may be given a piece of leftover land and asked to mix a school with affordable housing for families or the elderly. How does child-care-center noise affect senior citizens, he asks, and how does the design invite seniors to share their knowledge with the children?

Michael Pyatok, FAIA, whose firm is known for socially aware design, involves students at the University of Washington, Seattle, with the housing needs of local communities—helping neighborhood groups devise studies for high-density, mixed-use development, for instance. “The work integrates back and forth, there’s no doubt about it,” Pyatok says.

Last spring his grad students went farther afield, redesigning an existing site

in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, that stacked 3,000 units in eight high-rises. They explored solutions such as taking down some of the towers and adding walk-ups. In all the student projects, final reports sent to the developers and community groups include graphics showing what’s possible on the land and suggesting zoning changes that bump up housing quality.

Architects who teach have a chance to design, with their students, many more projects than they could accomplish through a practice alone. And along with gaining design experience, they learn from classroom experiments. Just as he would in a lab, Pyatok will suspend certain zoning requirements for a project and see what his students come up with. Feeding the results back into his practice, he can determine what adjustments need to be made in local building and planning codes.

In that way, Pyatok’s teaching philosophy closely parallels his working style. Is it more important to

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ground students in the political realities of design or to teach them to invent new ways of assembling form and space? Pyatok observes that immersion in the real world of regulatory constraints has to be balanced with studios that suspend all of that.

"I'm a real fan of balancing education between problem types that have absolutely no technical constraints so students can be as sculptural and probing as possible," he says, "and then immersing them in projects that force them to deal with social and techni-

cal realities. If students haven't been given the opportunity to invent freely, they will succumb to things as they are. Education should explore what could or should be. Their role as a new generation is to change things that need to be changed."

tion. Even the way buildings are brought from idea to reality has changed. Builders, for one, are involved earlier in the design process than they were 20 years ago. "Students need to develop the skills to collaborate with more complex interdisciplinary team structures than was the common model years ago," says David Hinson, AIA, chair of the architecture department at Auburn University, Auburn, Ala. "Staying involved in practice keeps your teaching fresh and current, and being involved in teaching keeps your

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"architecture is a fully consuming part of my life, so thinking about broader architectural issues in school helps remind me to think about broader architectural issues in the office."—deborah berke, aia

change agents

As a profession, architecture itself is changing quickly and dramatically. Technology is creating huge shifts in the way architects practice, not only in terms of the tools they use in the office, but also the technology of construc-



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Stephen Kieran, FAIA, and James Timberlake, FAIA, try to instill the importance of collaboration in their students before they head out into the real world. “The one thing we teach in studios is that you have to incorporate collective intelligence, and that’s what this office is about as well,” says Timberlake, of Kieran-Timberlake Associates, Philadelphia. “With the complexity of the world we live in, no one person can have all the knowledge about a building from beginning to end.”

The partners use aca-

demia to do research on emerging technology and new ways of working. Both Kieran and Timberlake have taught nearly every year for the last two decades, and as adjunct professors at the University of Pennsylvania, they team up even in the classroom. For the past several years they have co-taught a last-semester research studio for master’s candidates. One studio had students doing architecture in the year 2025 on a site in the Sahara desert. “We wanted such an extreme circumstance that they couldn’t fall back on current crutches,” says Timberlake.

“if students haven’t been given the opportunity to invent freely, they will succumb to things as they are. education should explore what could or should be.”—michael pyatok, faia

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now coming to market. The student research parallels what goes on at Kieran-Timberlake, where four full-time staff are working on applied research. The firm is investigating new materials and technology and ways to apply them

continued on page 35



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to design and construction.

Timberlake argues that he and Kieran are not trying out building ideas on students, but rather working with them to develop new strategies for making higher-level buildings and architecture. "Part of what we're trying to convey to students is that you can do this when you leave school," he says. "That's what makes our firm attractive as well. People see the educational process carried forth, and not just turned off for something else. The idea is that you can teach and practice, research and build, and have an intellectual plane to your

practice that parallels that of your last seven years of higher education."

house blend

For an architect, teaching and practicing would seem the best of all worlds. But it is not a perfect universe. Teaching is hard work, schedules are strained, and a practice may suffer. When Gamble began his tenure track, his wife, Lee Ann Gamble, also an architect, became his business partner, overseeing daily operations. "You have to be very clear about what your responsibilities are in the office," he says. "Had I not had a

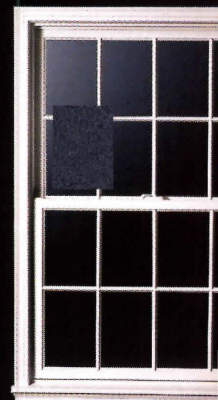
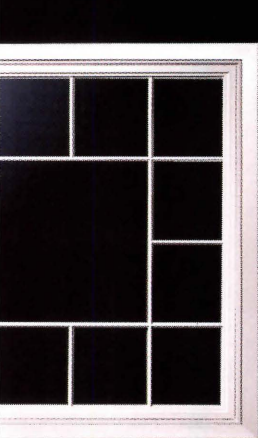
willing partner, it would have been risky."

Harmon negotiated a university contract for two-thirds time, which reduced his teaching load and allows him to get a lot of work done during the summer. Kieran and Timberlake manage their schedules by teaching only in the spring, roughly 10 hours a week for 12 weeks. Timberlake says they make up that time on weekends, and an assistant helps with the classwork logistics.

As the sole principal in her firm, teaching one studio a year at Harvard Graduate School of Design

—two four-hour classes a week—is about right for Maryann Thompson, AIA, who practices in Cambridge, Mass. Her staff of six, most of them former students, often pitches in by attending the larger pin-up sessions at school. She says it inspires them and boosts office culture. Teaching bolsters her own critical thinking skills, too. "Doing desk crits is almost like psychoanalysis. It's private and very intense," Thompson says. "It's like reading. The more you read, the better you are. Reading drawings, you see into flaws and where the

continued on page 37



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projects don't hold together."

For architects in a small practice, teaching also keeps isolation at bay. Mutlow, who employs a staff of four, relies on his circle of university colleagues for camaraderie and to sharpen his professional edge, and on students to hone his listening skills. While most professionals pay lip service to listening, Mutlow says teachers must absorb a student's response, digest it, and talk it back out. "When you encourage students to respond, you get these young fresh thoughts that come back at you," he says. "Sometimes it makes no sense at all, but it often make a lot of sense if you think it through."

Harmon used to think that teaching competed with practicing, but now he believes it's a natural blend. A good architect is a good teacher, because your clients are your students, he reasons, and an architect's role is to enlighten people about what is possible. "I'm much more open-minded with clients because of my teaching," Harmon says. "When you have 16 bright folks in design studio, you empower them to reach their own goals. That works extremely well with my clients and with my office staff." He adds, "If I were running a school of architecture, I'd have everyone practicing and doing exemplary work, being leaders of the profession as well as educators of the future."

The line between teach-

ing and practice blurs for Timberlake, too. "Teaching for Steve and me is as much about giving our ideas to the students as it is convey-

ing to them our view of a world that doesn't have a real distinction between it and education," he says. "That's a very different phi-

losophy than most architects have." *ra*

Cheryl Weber is a contributing writer in Severna Park, Md.

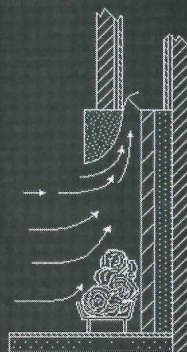
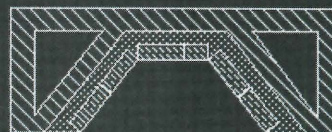


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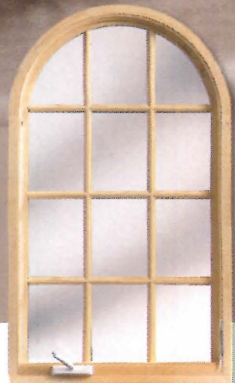
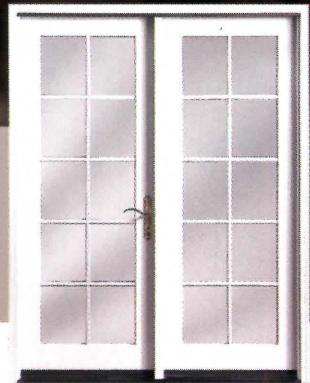


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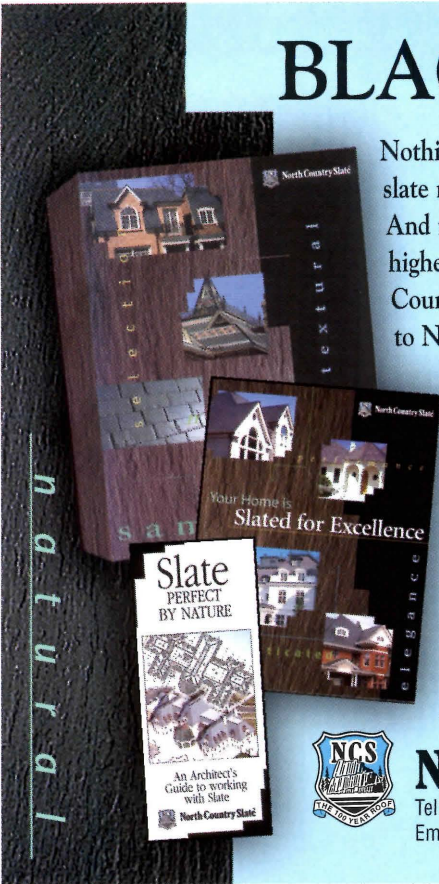
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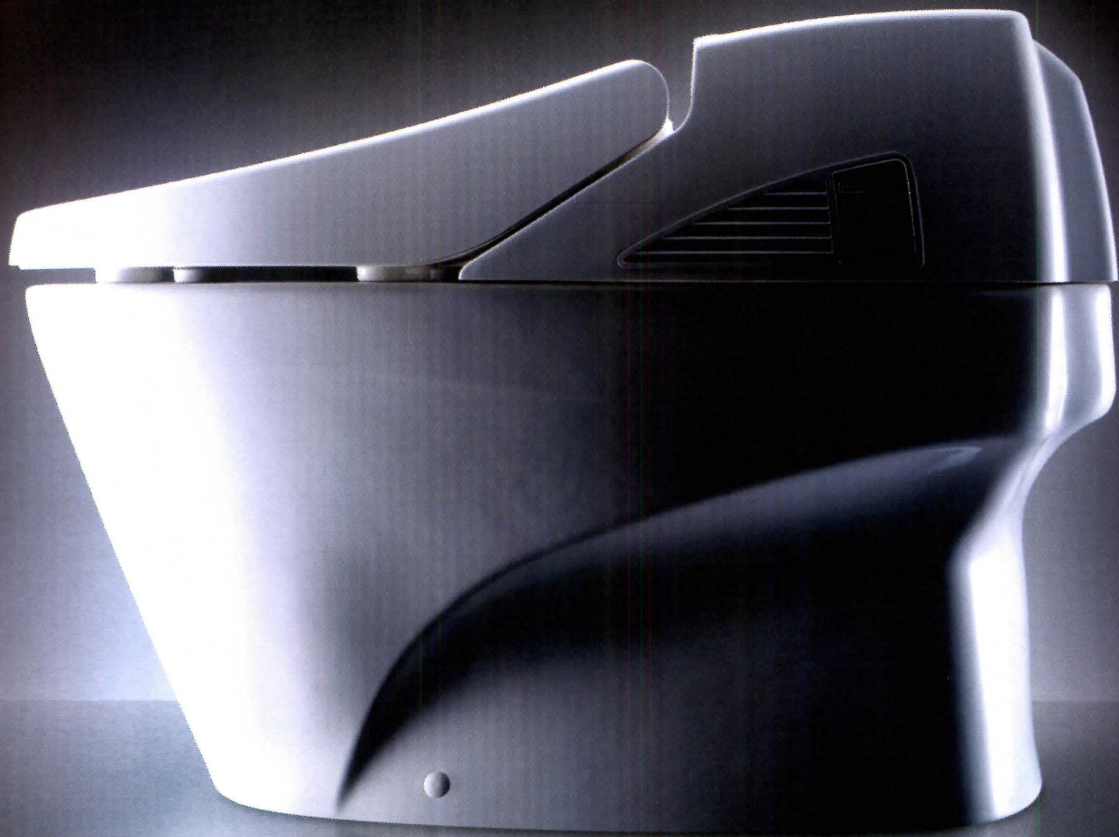
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start-ups

five newly minted residential firms share their hopes, fears, and growing pains. see if you recognize your past, present, or future in their first five years of practice.

by meghan drueding, nigel f. maynard, and shelley d. hutchins

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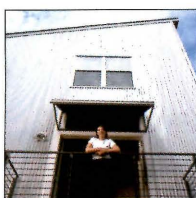
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Can you remember what it was like when you first made the leap and started your own firm? Chances are, you left the security of a regular, paying job. Previously, someone else danced the rain jig for clients. Someone else called the copier repair guy, the phone tech, the computer guru. Your Social Security, medical insurance, and 401K didn't drain entirely from your own pocket. You didn't have to pay for the chair you sit on, the software you use, the fluorescent lights that shine overhead. Overhead ... you didn't have to think about that at all.

So now you're the one who has to foot the bill for the office space. Ouch. Ah, but your name is on the door. The plans you draw have your stamp on them. This is your business and your dream. As you can see from the five firms we've profiled, many start-up experiences are similar. It's hard to get clients to pay on time—or ever; it's tough to attract the quantity and quality of work you need; and when, for goodness' sake, do you find time to design? Then again, maybe baby firms and more seasoned ones are not so different. These are problems all firms reckon with, no matter what their vintage. But the difficulties loom so much larger when faced for the first time.

Most of the firms we interviewed dealt with their first-timer fears by identifying mentors they could consult. Several added partners to share the burden. All had solid firm experience before they ventured out on their own. Yes, it's scary out there, but not one architect regretted the decision to fly solo. It was and still is, they insist, the best decision they've ever made.

Photos, from top: Greg Hadley; Bill Cramer; John Noltner; Danny Turner; Greg Hadley

year one
benjamin ames,
associate aia
amestudio
alexandria, va.

web site: www.amestudio.com

staff: 3 (principal, project architect, intern)

years in business: 1

projected revenue for 2003: \$125,000

projects on the boards: 8

completed projects: 5

project types: residential additions, renovations, new homes

awards: Honor Award, Excellence in Architecture, AIA Chesapeake Bay Chapter; Kitten McD. Herlong Memorial Design Award, AIA Northern Virginia Chapter; Habitat for Humanity Housing Design Award, Virginia Foundation for Architecture; AIA Adams Award of Merit; Dean's Thesis Prize, University of Maryland

experience: Browne, Worrall, & Johnson Architects, Baltimore; Design International, Baltimore; Heery International, Atlanta; BTAV Architectes, Paris; Thierry Melot Architectes, Paris; Norman Smith Architecture, Washington, D.C.; SBCH Architects, Atlanta; HNTB Architecture, Washington, D.C.; Robert M. Gurney, FAIA, Alexandria, Va.

education: Georgia Institute of Technology, B.S. in Architecture 1989; University of Maryland, M.Arch. 1992

affiliations: AIA



Greg Hadley

Five years ago, Benjamin Ames was working on airport projects at Washington, D.C.-based HNTB Architecture. Moonlighting on houses, however, introduced him to the detail-oriented and client-driven work that constitutes a residential practice. It sold him on the specialty. "It was really appealing to work on these at night because it was such a contrast with the stuff I was doing during the day," says the 36-year-old architect. The experience caused him to abandon the commercial track and turn to an accomplished residential practice, Robert M. Gurney, FAIA. Ames signed on as a subcontractor to Gurney, who became his professional mentor, and sublet space in Gurney's offices for his personal work. Two years later, he launched Amestudio. Architecture school did nothing to prepare him for the realities of running his own firm, he says. But working with Gurney, who has a thriving high-design practice, did. It was Gurney who taught him about time management, making sound business decisions, and the importance of having good product resources—from getting specs off the Web to having a wide variety of material samples to show clients. "It helped both in my understanding as an architect and as someone responsible for running a business," he says.

Although he has his own practice, Ames is not yet a fully licensed architect (he has taken and passed five parts of the Architect Registration Examination). He claims it's the biggest mistake he's made so far. He's upfront about the issue with his clients, and it hasn't lost him business. "When I do new homes, typically they're smaller, modest-sized homes, and when I do additions, a registered architect's stamp is not required to get a permit," Ames says. He uses a licensed structural engineer on every project and is researching liability insurance to minimize his exposure.

Amestudio's one-room office is typical of



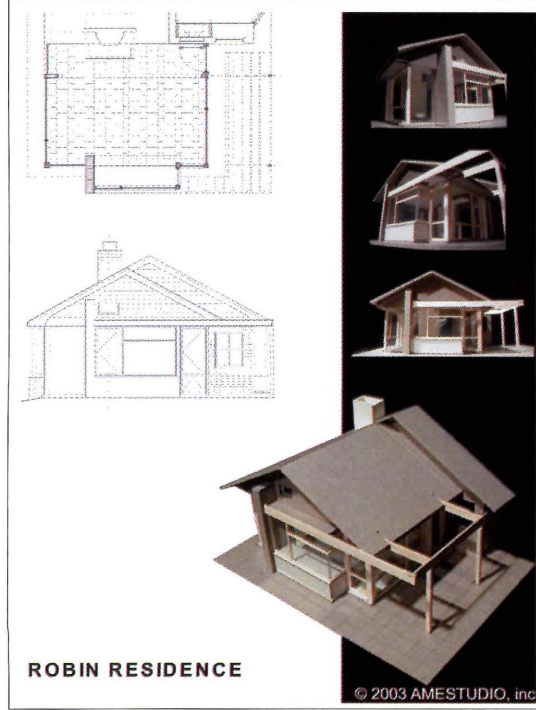
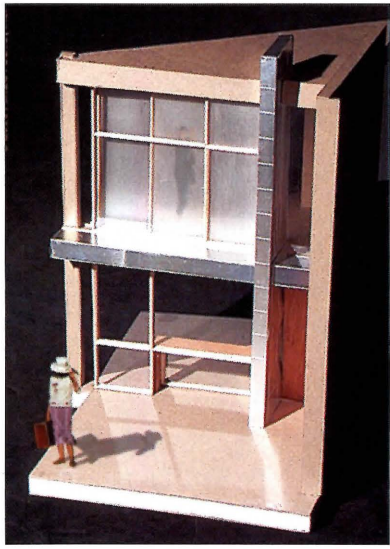
Ames relies heavily on models to communicate ideas to his clients. The study for this redo of a '70s Modern house includes a new glass-enclosed third floor. Copper-wrapped members and frosted glass panels distinguish the house's entry (above right).

"i have a crusade to work in the modern language of architecture. i'm convinced it has its place in residential."—benjamin ames, associate aia



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Images courtesy Amestudio, except where noted



ROBIN RESIDENCE

© 2003 AMESTUDIO, inc

The architect transformed this house's porch, replacing aging screens with Doug-fir-framed glass panels and installing radiant heating beneath a new slate floor. The changes, he says, "make a modest space marvelous."

verbatim
benjamin ames

Was it a good decision to go out on your own?
Yes. I thought there would be certain things I'd regret or miss. Other than missing the daily personal relationships you create when you work in a large firm, I can't say I regret the decision at all. I get so much more satisfaction out of working on these smaller, modest projects because I have such a personal investment and involvement in them.

What surprised you about running a firm?
How quickly it can grow. A publication like yours or like *Washingtonian* magazine can generate a lot of interest in a short period of time. I had envisioned the number of projects I took on slowly creeping up. And I've been surprised at the rate that it's happened, especially given the economy.

Did architecture school prepare you for managing a practice?
I don't think it prepared me very well for the administrative side of the business. I think the single most helpful thing was working in Robert Gurney's office. I pattern a lot of how I manage my office based on what he's done. But at the end of the day, when you are a sole practitioner, you have to find time to do design and the best time to do it is nighttime, evenings, and weekends.

What is the best thing about being on your own?
I get a lot of satisfaction out of exceeding clients' expectations. Typically they come to me with requirements A, B, C, and I usually throw in D. I'm up-front with them about that process—how I'm always looking to push the design. In some cases, they love it and say let's keep going. In other cases, they say they're concerned about the budget.

What's the worst?
The paperwork is the most tedious part—the administrative duties and the costs of being self-employed. You don't have the benefits you had, you don't have 401K, taxes, and health covered for you. If you have a health plan, it's coming out of your pocket. The costs are substantial. One

continued

“younger firms may uncover possibilities that go beyond the obvious.”

—benjamin ames

The Willis renovation on Maryland's Chesapeake Bay, completed in 2000, was one of Ames' first “moonlighting” projects. He added a flat-roofed entry and third-floor addition, plus a three-story volume above a carport that takes advantage of the house's spectacular setting (right).



a young practice on a budget. “We're proudly furnished by Ikea,” Ames says. “The only luxury I have in my office is my flat-screen

monitor and my Aeron chair.” His office, in Alexandria, Va., is in Gurney's former building, which is also home to the AIA Northern Virginia Chapter. Gurney's new office is only a stone's throw away, and the two men still talk frequently. Another up-and-coming architect and Gurney crony, David Jameson, is just down the street. And Virginia Tech's architecture school, a block away, is a handy source of interns and a budding creative community.

Although he works 10 to 12 hours a day, Ames says the intense involvement in each project and the close relationships with his clients make the effort gratifying. Because



Photos: Hoachlander Davis

he's his own boss, he's able to schedule his work around time with his wife, Sophie, and 2-year-old son, Nicolas. Unlike many young practitioners, Ames already had built work under his belt before he started his firm, so he hasn't had to promote his practice aggressively. The strong housing market and an existing core

of referrals and repeat clients have kept him busy. And he's picked up work from the AIA listings. So far, he's exceeded the salary he made working at a larger firm.

Perhaps it's a good problem to have, but Ames is concerned about growing too fast. He's more interested in attracting the best projects than simply filling up the boards. He knows it's a delicate balance between financial success and artistic accomplishment. “I don't want to take on too many projects at once and have to staff up to the point where I don't feel like I have as much control,” he says. “Balance is important to me.”—*n.f.m.*

trick is to keep your overhead as low as you can, but there are things you can't get around.

Overall, are you happy you started your own firm?

It's been great. I would absolutely do it again. It seems like after I had five to eight years of experience working for other firms—especially once I started moonlighting for myself—it felt like that was what I was always supposed to do. It was important and valuable to work with other firms; it was where I cut my teeth and where I learned what to do and what not to do.

What's the biggest challenge in your first year?

It's always the time management, really giving yourself enough time to invest in the design and still having enough time to take care of some of the administrative and management issues.

What is your firm's philosophy?

I have a crusade to continue to work in the Modern language of architecture. I'm convinced that it has its place in residential—which is not a very popular thought sometimes in D.C.

Who is your favorite architect?

Locally, it would be Robert Gurney. He's one of the most gifted and humble architects I have ever met. He's at the top of his game.

What inspires you?

Seeing that there are people out there who are really excited about living in homes that challenge our preconceived notions about what's appropriate and inappropriate for residential architecture.

What does a young firm offer that a more established firm may not?

I think younger firms are less concerned about the amount of time a design takes. They are a little less concerned about the bottom line. They are committed and dedicated to making sure their earlier projects are very well developed. They naturally are going to bring to the table more nonconventional thinking. They are going to make more mistakes, but they may also uncover possibilities on a project that go beyond the obvious.

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residential architect design awards

the fifth annual

residential architect Design Awards, sponsored by *residential architect* magazine, honor the best in American housing. Awards will be given in ten categories, encompassing custom home design, renovation, kitchens, baths, design details, multifamily housing, single-family production housing, and affordable housing. From the winners, the judges will choose a Best Residential Project of the Year. Note: Entries in the kitchen, bath, and design detail categories are not eligible for Best Project.

who's eligible?

Architects and designers. Other building industry professionals may submit projects on behalf of an architect or designer. Hanley-Wood employees, their relatives, and regular contributors to the magazine are not eligible.

what's eligible?

Any home or project completed after January 1, 1999.

when's the deadline?

Entry forms and fees are due no later than November 21, 2003. Completed binders are due January 5, 2004.

where will winning projects appear?

Winning projects will be published in the May 2004 issue of *residential architect* magazine.

how will projects be judged?

A panel of respected architects and design professionals will independently select winners based on design excellence. They may withhold awards in any category at their discretion.

entry form

To register, you may do any of the following:
call Shelley Hutchins at *residential architect*, 202.736.3407
mail this form to Shelley Hutchins, *residential architect* Design Awards 2004, One Thomas Circle, N.W., Suite 600, Washington, D.C. 20005
fax this form to Shelley Hutchins at 202.785.1974

Name _____

Title _____

Firm or Company _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Telephone and Fax _____

- Send more information.
- Please send entry binder(s) and instructions now (must be prepaid).
- Payment for _____ standard entries at \$125 each and/or _____ kitchen, bath, or design detail entries at \$95 each is enclosed.
- Check for \$_____ (payable to *residential architect*) is enclosed.
- VISA MasterCard American Express

Card Number _____

Expiration Date _____

Name on Card _____

Signature _____

- | number of entries | categories |
|-------------------|---|
| _____ | 1. Custom Home, 3,500 square feet or less |
| _____ | 2. Custom Home, more than 3,500 square feet |
| _____ | 3. Renovation (residential remodeling and additions) |
| _____ | 4. Multifamily Housing |
| _____ | 5. Single-Family Production Housing, detached |
| _____ | 6. Single-Family Production Housing, attached |
| _____ | 7. Affordable Housing (At least 20 percent of the units must be affordable to families earning 80 percent to 120 percent of the local Median Family Income. Consult your area HUD office or local government office for the MFI.) |
| _____ | 8. Kitchen (new or renovated) |
| _____ | 9. Bath (new or renovated) |
| _____ | 10. Architectural Design Detail |

deadlines entry form and fee: november 21, 2003
 completed binders: january 5, 2004

year two
rick hauser, aia
ali yapicioglu, associate aia
in site: architecture
perry, n.y.

web site: www.insitearch.com

staff: 3 (two principals, intern architect)

years in business: 2

projected revenue for 2003: \$100,000

projects on the boards: 20

completed projects: 8

project types: residential, religious, institutional, commercial, adaptive reuse, historic preservation, site design

awards: two Design for Excellence Awards, AIA Rochester; New York Library Association Building of the Year 2002

experience: Doran Yarrington Architects, Rochester, N.Y. (Hauser). Rockhill and Associates, Lecompton, Kan.; Berry Langford Architect, Albuquerque, N.M.; Doran Yarrington Architects, Rochester, N.Y. (Yapicioglu)

education: Cornell University, B.S. in Landscape Architecture 1992; University of Virginia, M.Arch. 1995 (Hauser). University of Yildiz, Istanbul, B.Arch. 1988; University of Kansas, B.Arch. 1992, M.Arch. 1995 (Yapicioglu)

affiliations: AIA



Rick Hauser (left) and Ali Yapicioglu; photo by Bill Cramer

When Rick Hauser, AIA, graduated from the University of Virginia, he saw his classmates accept positions with high-profile firms in major cities. He, meanwhile, was surveying the architectural prospects of very rural, western New York state. He had a promise to keep to his wife, Meghan, who followed him to U.Va. and a fellowship in England. It was his turn to follow her to her family's dairy farm in Perry, N.Y.

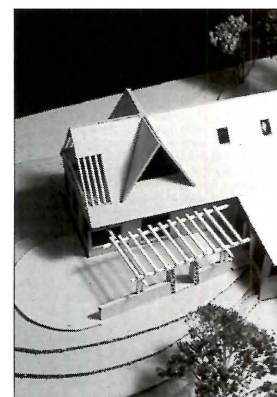
To be sure, Perry was no hub of high design. In fact, there wasn't a single working architect in the area. "I had some trepidation about that initially," the 32-year-old architect recalls, "but I soon realized it offered a phenomenal opportunity that would never be available to my colleagues in other places."

Apparently, Perry sorely needed a resident architect. Within a day of his moving there, Hauser landed a job designing the local library. Shortly thereafter, he found a full-time position with Doran Yarrington Architects in Rochester, N.Y. Before the year was up, he had also secured a teaching job at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, N.Y.

Four years and his licensure later, Hauser felt grounded enough to launch his own firm, In Site: Architecture. The name, he says, implies a firm based in ideas rather than driven by personality, and it underlines a commitment to site-responsive design (Hauser's undergraduate degree is in landscape architecture). "It is the lens through which we approach design," he explains. Several months after founding In Site, Hauser invited Ali Yapicioglu, 36, a friend from Doran Yarrington and a fellow teacher at Hobart and William Smith, to become his

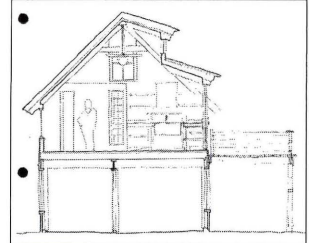


Thanks to careful site planning, the 1,900-square-foot, cedar-clad Lasher Road house (above and right) fully exploits its woodland views.



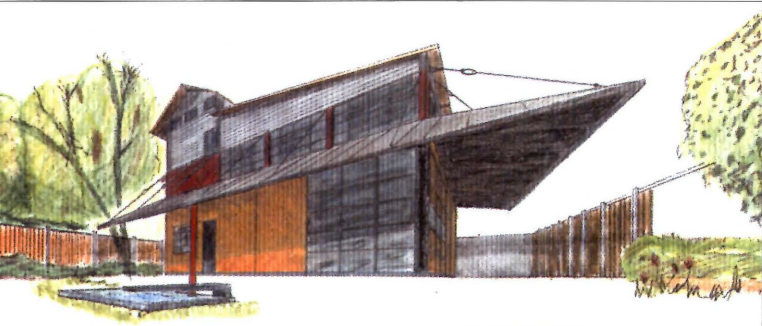
The architects created an elevated outdoor terrace for the Bald Eagle house by raising the living spaces 8 feet aboveground.

“how much one gets paid relative to how much work one puts in—well, that’s the eternal problem.” —rick hauser, aia



Images courtesy In Site: Architecture, except where noted

In Site converted this garage into an artist’s studio (above and above right). Industrial glazing and overhead doors open the interior to the outdoors.



Large corner doors and huge glass openings maximize light in a mixed-used project.

verbatim

rick hauser and ali yapicioglu

Did you set out to do residential work or did it come to you?

RH It’s a little bit of both. Residential work, in general, is the province of younger firms for a number of reasons. The work comes to us as much as we have sought it out.

What’s your biggest hope for the future?

RH Our name points toward architecture that’s rooted in site.

What do you like about residential design work?

RH It allows us to demonstrate and experiment with site-responsive and contemporary design in a variety of settings with sympathetic clients. So, as a result, we’re able to experiment and develop a vocabulary that addresses all the different needs of upstate New York—the social, the cultural, and the climatological.

What’s your biggest fear?

RH We have to guard against mediocrity. It’s a lot to deal with, and there is certainly the tendency to streamline the process. That’s a fear. We retain a passion for architecture. And as long as we maintain the passion toward taking each project and carrying it out to our fullest intentions, I don’t think that fear will ever come to pass.

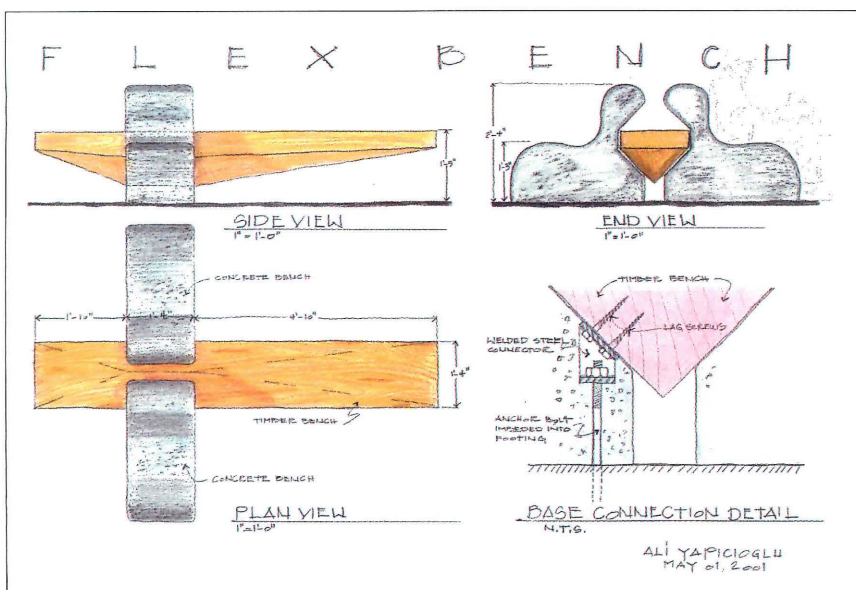
How much bigger do you want the firm to grow?

AY I think our balance is good right now. And for our three- to four-year plan, I would be happy if we had another person and we can keep up the quality of the work. The most important thing for us is how we can balance all the jobs and keep the integrity of the design.

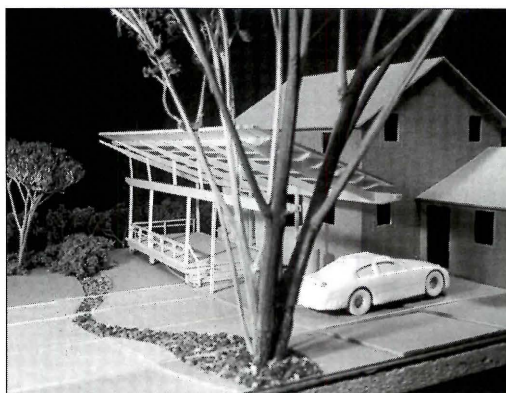
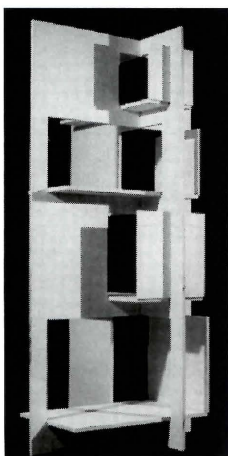
Do you have a hard time getting paid?

RH No. I’ve been amazed at how wonderful our clients have been. That’s not a problem. But, how much one gets paid relative to how much work one puts in—well, that’s the eternal problem.

continued



In Site's exploration of furniture design yielded the recycled-timber Flex Bench (above) and a knockdown plywood bookshelf (right). The roof of a "memorial" porch (far right) gathers winter sun for warmth and diverts rain to a garden.



Images courtesy In Site: Architecture

partner. The two men bring different strengths to the table. Yapicioglu was a stonemason in his native Cyprus, and he worked at the ultra-hands-on design/build firm that Dan Rockhill runs in Lecompton, Kan. Hauser brings his training in site planning from his fellowship days. From the beginning, the partners decided they'd only accept the kinds of projects they wanted to be doing in the long run. Their teaching positions enabled them to pick and choose with great liberty. "A young firm has to gain experience first and get the projects that will lead to all the other projects," Hauser says. "The teaching has been important in allowing us that flexibility."

More than 50 percent of the partners' work is residential. They have a strong base of referrals, and they also generate interest from a Web site designed by one of Hauser's former students. Western New York state is a latecom-

er to the building boom, but the area is finally experiencing a healthy diversity of business opportunities, which has translated into steady work for the firm. Projects range in complexity from a bathroom renovation to a 100,000-square-foot adaptive reuse building.

With business better than they expected, the partners and their intern architect barely keep their heads above water. They log long hours, especially when school's out for the summer. "Working for yourself, there is no 8-to-5," Yapicioglu says. "I like the flexibility of working for my own firm, because I can get up in the middle of the night if I don't feel like sleeping and do some sketches." As work increases, the men talk constantly about the direction of the firm. "It's very hard to find a balance between too much and not enough," Hauser explains. "Too much can become not enough very quickly."—*n.f.m.*

Was starting your own firm a good decision?

RH Yes. I have no regrets. It's actually hard to imagine it being any other way than it is right now. Everything has gone better than we could have imagined, in terms of meeting our goals for having a practice—in doing the kinds of work we want to do and in the size and complexity of projects we take on.

What have you done right?

AY From the get-go, we had a reputation for our good relationship with clients. We hear good things from them about how responsive we are and how well our approach meets their needs. We want to continue that.

Do you have regrets?

AY No. The hours that you put into your work and your own business are all happy hours. When I'm working on a design on my own time, late at night, I never say, "What am I doing at 12 in the morning?"

How has your young family affected your practice?

RH Before I started my practice, my life was dis-integrated—literally and figuratively. I was living in Perry, working as an architect in Rochester, which is an hour's commute, and I was teaching in Geneva, which is about an hour and a quarter from here. I spent a lot of time driving and listening to books on tape. It was a little too much. So my life is much more integrated now. I can walk to my office from my house; my wife and children pop in and visit. I can work at home, and it's much more of a natural thing.

Do you feel your business is under control at this point?

RH We are holding on to the reins tightly. I think it's in control, but only as long as both of us are constantly talking about our direction—otherwise this horse will definitely run wild. You can feel it, because we have a lot of work coming in and we have all of the growing pains that small firms can appreciate.

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Nature provides the drama.

Pozzi provides the stage.

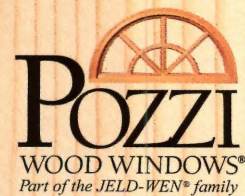


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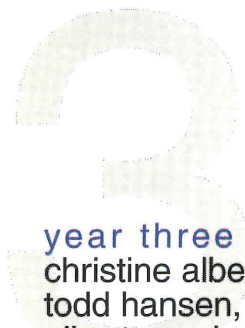
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year three
christine albertsson, aia
todd hansen, aia
albertsson hansen
architecture
minneapolis

web site: www.aharchitecture.com

staff: 5 (two principals, three intern architects)

years in business: 3

projected revenue for 2003: \$430,000

projects on the boards: 18

completed projects: 15

project types: residential

experience: RSP Architects, TEA2 Architects, Meyer Scherer & Rockcastle, Sarah Nettleton Architects, all in Minneapolis (Albertsson). BWBR Architects, St. Paul, Minn.; TEA2 Architects, Minneapolis; YA Architecture, Minneapolis (Hansen)

education: University of Pennsylvania, B.A. 1987, M.Arch. 1990 (Albertsson). Hampshire College, B.A. 1987; University of Pennsylvania, M.Arch. 1991 (Hansen)

affiliations: AIA



John Noltner

Some architects who start firms do so because they've always dreamed of it. Others set up shop so they can specialize in a certain job type, or because they want to make more money. But for Christine Albertsson, AIA, and Todd Hansen, AIA, it was a simple quality-of-life decision. The two architects, who met in graduate school, had married and become parents, and their jobs at established Minneapolis firms weren't allowing them to spend as much time as they wanted with their baby daughter, Eva. So Albertsson went off on her own in 2000, with Hansen joining her two years later. "I always tell people it was really my daughter who started the firm," says Albertsson, 38.

For the first couple of years, she operated her business—then called Christine Albertsson Architecture—out of the home office Hansen had built in the couple's basement. Albertsson had a few clients she'd worked with at her previous firms and quickly built on that base with referrals from other architects. She leased computers and software, outsourced bookkeeping and plotter printing, and hired an intern when she had too much work to handle alone. Through an economic downturn that devastated many businesses, the firm hummed along with small-scale residential projects, including several remodels and vacation cabins.

"With interest rates so low, people have been putting money into real estate," she says.

Hansen, meanwhile, felt ready to be a partner at the firm where he was working, YA Architecture. "I was

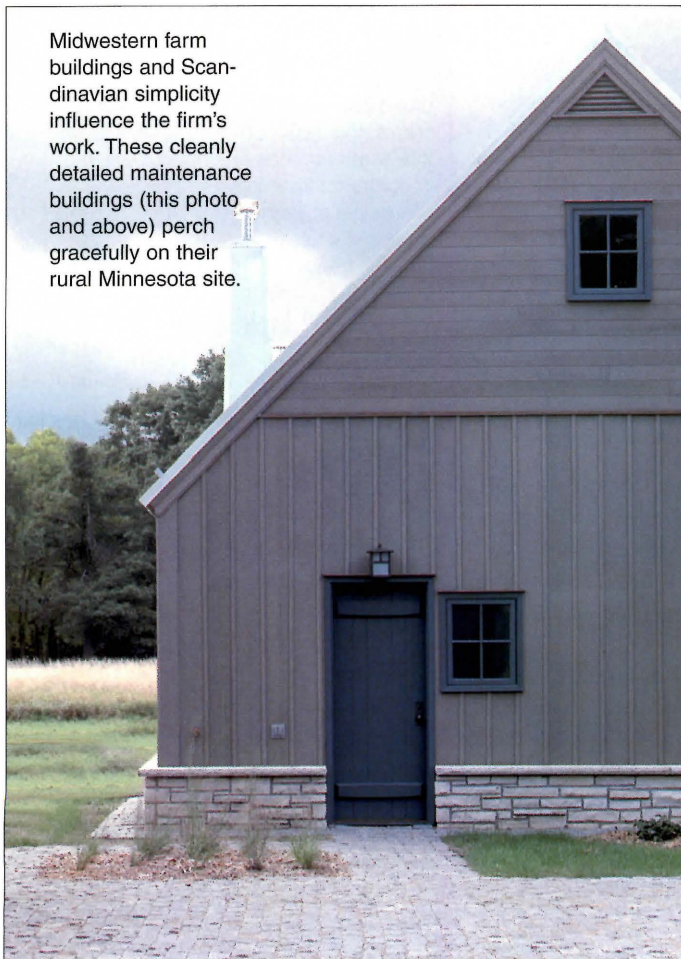
In remodeling their own former home in Minneapolis, the couple used appealing touches like subway tile, bright paint colors, and built-ins (below and bottom).



*“i always tell people it was really my daughter
who started the firm.”*—christine albertsson, aia



Midwestern farm buildings and Scandinavian simplicity influence the firm's work. These cleanly detailed maintenance buildings (this photo and above) perch gracefully on their rural Minnesota site.



Photos, above and top: Peter Bastianelli Kerze



Photos, above and center: Andrea Rugg

verbatim

christine albertsson and todd hansen

What was hardest about starting your own firm?

TH It was an easier transition for me because the infrastructure was in place. For Christine, it was a bigger change. My old firm had a dedicated office manager and receptionist, and now we have to do a lot of that work ourselves. I was also used to working with more senior people. Now I'm learning how to be a boss for young interns, which has been a challenge. It's fun, but hard.

Did architecture school prepare you for running a business?

CA I didn't learn anything in architecture school that helped in that capacity. We have no business plan, no mission statement, no five-year plan. My dad is an entrepreneur—I grew up watching him launch businesses. I'm a numbers person.

What was the biggest capital investment you made?

CA We leased computer equipment. Having an excellent credit rating helped. We're really unwilling to borrow, to get ourselves into a situation where we owe everybody money. I had no guarantee that the business was going to work out.

How do you divide the work load?

TH Christine handles more of the administrative stuff and I handle more projects at a time.

CA We do the interviewing together, but we each shepherd our own projects through. We bring different sensitivities to an interview setting—if one of us isn't 'getting it,' the other one is.

Do you outsource any services?

TH We outsource plotter printing—we do our early work in an 11-by-17 format and later digitally send it to a reprographic place in town. We have a bookkeeper, a former student who comes in one afternoon a week and does payroll.

How many hours a week do you work?

TH We never work more than 40-hour weeks. One of the reasons Christine wanted to start the

continued



Photos: Scott Amundson, courtesy Nor-son Inc.

Like many of the firm's clients, the owner of this lakefront getaway in northern Minnesota is a repeat customer. Weekend cabins make up an increasingly large portion of Albertsson Hansen's work load.

bringing in a third of the clients," he says. But a partnership never materialized. He decided to make the leap and join his wife, bringing his clients with him. He became Albertsson's partner in July 2002, two months after she'd moved the practice into an office above a coffee and ice-cream shop in Minneapolis' Lowry Hill neighborhood.

Being business partners who are also married has meant some adjustments for Albertsson and Hansen. They haven't been able to take a vacation together, since they're not yet ready to leave their five-person office unsupervised for a week or more. "One of our goals is to continue to develop our employees so they can take on more responsibility," says Hansen, 39. "Our employers were great mentors, and we want to be, too." The couple tries not to discuss business issues at home. They work

on separate projects, deciding who does what based on each person's particular skills, personality, and schedule. And one of them leaves the office at 3 p.m. every day to pick up Eva, now 5, from school.

As their firm has grown, Albertsson and Hansen have realized the importance of creating a consistent brand identity. They hired a graphic designer to create a logo and letterhead whose look—Scandinavian-influenced, traditional but with a Modern edge—echoes their architectural style. They redesigned their Web site with staff member Sonya Carel and officially changed the firm's name to Albertsson Hansen Architecture. "We're in a transition mode from getting started to figuring out where we want this to go," says Albertsson. "Now we're not stewarding just our projects, but also the firm itself."—*m.d.*

firm was to have more control of her life. When you do residential work, you have to have some time to enjoy life so you know what it's like.

Do you have trouble getting paid? What contract do you use?

TH We use a letter of agreement and proposal. Later in the process, we use a B-151, the abbreviated AIA contract. We ask for a retainer at the beginning. For the most part, the clients who end up choosing us are supportive of us as a small business.

Are you making a good living?

TH It's definitely more money than we were making before. We specifically quit teaching when we had a daughter because it didn't pay enough, and now we're too busy for it.

What kinds of projects have you done?

CA All residential so far—we haven't considered branching out at this point. I've developed a broad client base in the vacation-cabin category—it might be interesting to see what nonresidential variations we could do on that theme. David Salmela has done a lot of that.

What advice would you give other would-be start-ups?

CA People who are considering doing their own firms really need to think about what they'll be doing. If you don't have an attention to detail, it might not be the best thing. Setting up phones, an Internet connection, e-mail accounts—I hate spending time on these things.

What did you do right?

CA We've selected really high-quality people to work here. Also, having Todd join the firm! It really does come down to the people. We work with a financial adviser who has repeatedly commended us for being willing to hire good consultants, like our accountant and our bookkeeper.

What's your biggest fear?

CA The classic ones: Our clients hating us! Financial ruin! But we have to have faith that everything is going to work out.

"Start-ups" continued on page 58



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4
year four
donna kacmar, aia
architect works
houston

web site: www.architectworks.com

staff: 1 (principal)

years in business: 4

projected revenue for 2003: \$60,000

projects on the boards: 9

completed projects: 11

project types: residential, light commercial, institutional

awards: Honor Award, Texas Society of Architects Design Awards; three Honor Awards, AIA Houston Chapter Design Awards; William W. Caudill Award, Texas Society of Architects; Young Architect Award, AIA Houston Chapter

experience: Natalye Appel + Associates, Houston; Murphy Mears Architects, Houston; CRSS Architects, Houston; Case Design-Build, Falls Church, Va.

education: Texas A&M University, Bachelor of Environmental Design 1988, M.Arch. 1992

affiliations: AIA, Texas and Houston chapters; Rice Design Alliance; Avenue Community Development Corp.



Danny Turner

houston architect Donna Kacmar, AIA, rarely does things in half measures. When she wanted to move out of her poorly maintained rental apartment in 1996, she and two colleagues bought a piece of land and built three townhomes for themselves. When a local nonprofit, Avenue Community Development Corp., asked her for some pro bono drawings, she ended up serving as president of its board. And after establishing herself as an important player at one of Houston's most respected firms, Natalye Appel + Associates, she jettisoned the security of a staff position to start her own firm, Architect Works. "Everything was great," she says of life before hanging out her shingle in 1999. "Except I was a little too comfortable."

Co-designing the townhomes had given Kacmar, 38, some idea of what working on her own would be like. She also independently designed a house for her parents, completed in 1997. Both Modern, modestly budgeted projects won local AIA design awards, and the latter was published in the coffee-table book *A House for My Mother*. At Appel's firm Kacmar had drawn up invoices, helped develop fee proposals, co-interviewed potential employees, and managed projects. But nothing in her experience prepared her for the exciting and terrifying autonomy of running a firm. "It's hard," she says. "To be your own promoter, own accountant, own everything, you have to try to keep your spirits up. You can't really call your old boss and ask questions."

She worked 80 hours a week for the first two years of the business. Now she's down to an average 50-hour workweek, including the time she spends teaching on the tenure track at the University of Houston's Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture. Kacmar has taught since her grad-school days, both for the pleasure it gives her and the finan-



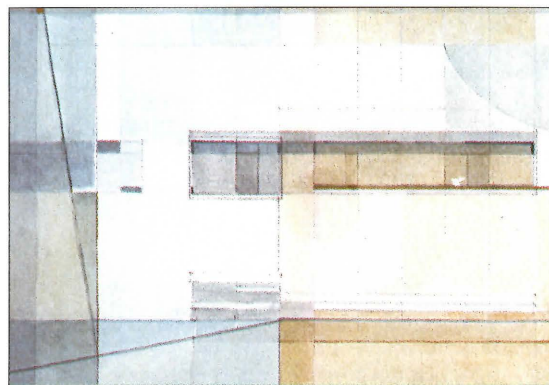
“because i teach, i don’t have to take every job in order to put food on the table.”—donna kacmar, aia



The low-slung, narrow house that Donna Kacmar designed for her parents in 1996 incorporates the industrial Modern vocabulary and rugged character of the Texas vernacular. Having a built project under her belt gave her practice instant credibility.



Photos, above and top: Charles Davis Smith



Courtesy Architect Works

Kacmar used watercolors to help her and her parents envision the built result. Low-VOC materials like maple cabinetry and hardwood flooring protect the home’s indoor air quality (left).

verbatim

donna kacmar

How did you choose your firm’s name?

I picked a name for the firm that would work with a domain name for a Web site. Back when I started it was hard to find something that wasn’t taken. Also, an anonymous name allows the structure of the firm to evolve over time. It gives you flexibility.

Where’s your office?

On the first floor of my townhouse. I’m thinking about building a house that has an attached office to give me a little more separation between living and working space.

Do you ever feel isolated professionally?

I don’t learn as much anymore because I’m by myself. I used to learn from my co-workers. There’s this hurdle of how to keep learning. I try to ask other architects questions and learn from their answers.

When you started out, what did you do right?

I got advice from an accountant, who told me to incorporate. I also started a Web site right away, with photos of two built projects and my address and phone number. It’s still an issue to be a female architect, and having a Web site and business card give legitimacy to my practice. Also, I’m glad I’ve been involved with community organizations. It gives me access to experiences that I can learn from, that help me with my firm.

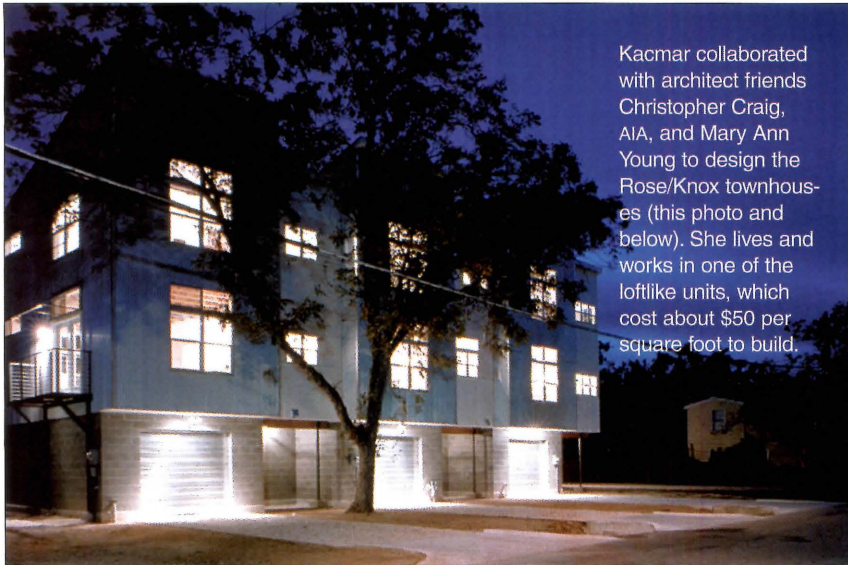
What did you do wrong?

I charged too little for my services at the beginning. You have to figure out how to say, “I’m \$100 an hour” and be OK with it. I’m almost past that now.

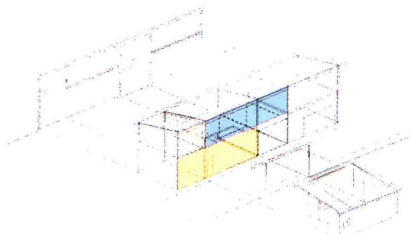
Which contract do you use?

I don’t start charging the client until I have a contract. I use AIA contracts—not a letter agreement. They show the client you’re serious.

continued



Kacmar collaborated with architect friends Christopher Craig, AIA, and Mary Ann Young to design the Rose/Knox townhouses (this photo and below). She lives and works in one of the loftlike units, which cost about \$50 per square foot to build.



Courtesy Architect Works

The firm works with, not against, local climate conditions. A recently completed home and metalworking studio in Houston (above) harnesses cooling breezes.



Photos: (top) Richard Wall; (left and above) Charles Davis Smith

cial stability it provides. “Because I teach, I don’t have to take every job in order to put food on the table,” she says. She sticks with projects and clients that appeal to her personal sensibilities. So her portfolio is filled with buildings she’s proud of—not A-list and B-list work.

Kacmar’s involvement with community organizations like the Texas and Houston AIA chapters, Rice University’s Design Alliance, and Avenue CDC have staved off the sense of isolation that often stymies sole practitioners. She does hire interns when she needs to, usually on a three-, six-, or nine-month basis, but so far her only long-term employee is herself. Former boss Appel, FAIA, has helped fuel the positive buzz about Architect Works in local design circles,

underscoring the impact a supportive mentor can have on a start-up’s fortunes. In fact, Kacmar and Appel are currently working on a joint venture, a Montessori high school in Houston.

Like any small-business owner, Kacmar knows she made some missteps early on—charging too little for her services, for example. But she’s made her firm a success, to the point where she no longer worries about having enough work. And she’s proved she doesn’t need the supervision and structure of a payroll job to produce quality architecture. “I wanted to see if I had the ability to make those decisions,” she says of her impetus for starting her firm. “I wanted to know if I could do good buildings without that oversight.”—*m.d.*

What was the biggest capital investment you made?

Computers and software were my biggest up-front investments. For me it was very important to get my software licenses by the book. It doesn’t cost that much in the grand scheme of things. When you get your architect’s license you start to understand that you’re a professional and you have to do things professionally.

Do you outsource any services?

I don’t have a plotter—I e-mail stuff to the reprographic firm and they drop it off the next day. I try to hire people to build models, etc. I try to be realistic about what I do and don’t have time to do.

What do you like most and least about having your own firm?

It’s still hard to get all the procedures down. But there are some really great aspects. I don’t have to work on any project I don’t want to.

What advice would you give other would-be start-ups?

It’s important to be clear in your mind about the type of work you want to do. I’ve been tempted by some things that aren’t in my area of expertise. Also, it’s great to be friendly with your clients, but you should still use a contract with clients and get the initial payment. If they’re not paying, call after 15 days. You have to educate your clients about the process and not just hope for the best.

What is your biggest fear?

You always wonder, what if you make a mistake? There are fewer people looking over my shoulder than there were when I worked at other firms. I hire my architect neighbor to look at my drawings. And I work with good contractors who will catch something if there’s a mistake.

What is your biggest hope?

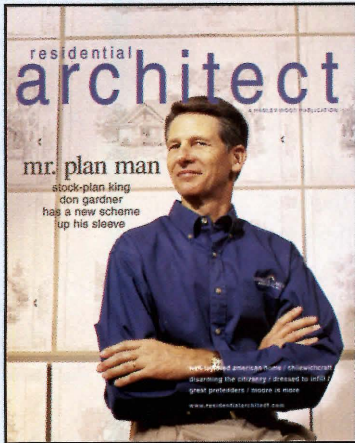
I would like to figure out how to do lower-cost houses that are well designed. People making under \$100,000 a year want nice-looking houses, too—houses that are a little inspiring when you come home.

“Start-ups” continued on page 62

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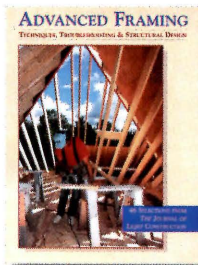
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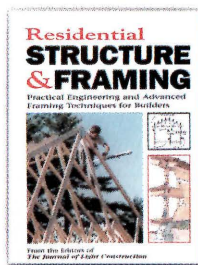
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web site: www.inscapestudio.com

staff: 7 (two principals, three associates, two intern architects)

years in business: 5

projected revenue for 2003:
 \$450,000

projects on the boards: 18

completed projects: 36

project types: residential, community-service buildings

awards: Award for Academic Excellence, AIA; two Presidential Citations for Sustainable Design, AIA D.C. Chapter

experience: Ellerbe Becket, Washington, D.C.; Travis Price Architects, Takoma Park, Md.

education: Loyola Marymount University, B.A. in English 1985, MBA International Finance 1991; The Catholic University of America, M.Arch. 1995

affiliations: AIA

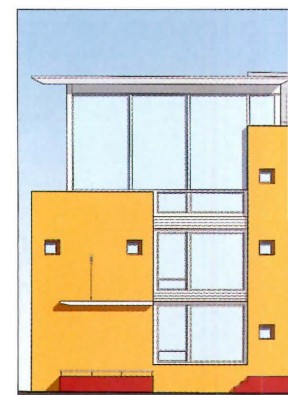


Greg Hadley

Greg Kearley is amazed by how much has happened since he struck out on his own five years ago. It's a true rags-to-reasonable-solvency story, culminating in January of this year when his five-member firm, Inscape Architects, merged with Rick Schneider's Istudio to form Inscape Studio. It's the third name change in five years, and it's the first time Kearley, 40, is paying himself a proper salary. He's also thinking seriously about rediscovering the concept of vacation time. "In the beginning it was just about survival," he says. "When I see the types of projects that we're working on now, I stop and say, wow, I can't believe the cool stuff we're doing."

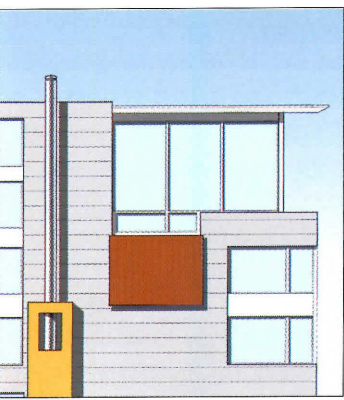
It was not always so. "I should have been more selective about the projects I took on," he says of those early days. "It's a balancing act between the work you really want to do and what you are doing. But in the end, the work you do defines you as an architect." Without other resources to draw upon, he had no choice but to grab the work in front of him. And sometimes even those undesirable jobs were scarce. At one cash-starved point, he actually gave up the struggle and took a job with the D.C. office of Gensler, the international architecture and interior design firm. That lasted four days, until he nabbed a kitchen/dining room addition. With the pressure of another employee to feed, he struggled with mediocre commissions for another two years. But he vowed to learn at least one thing from every project, and tried to educate each client about some aspect of architecture.

Although he holds degrees in English, international finance, and architecture, nothing in his extensive education truly prepared Kearley for running a complicated business all by himself. "It can be overwhelming, but you can't be paralyzed by all of the things you don't know," he says. Fortunately he left previous employers Ellerbe



A lofty music conservatory will accommodate small performances atop this four-story residence (above) designed for a music-industry client. In contrast to the expanses of glass revealing public rooms, a brightly hued tower provides a zone of privacy.

*“in the end, the work you do defines you
as an architect.”*—gregory a. kearley, aia



Renderings: Petros N. Zouzoulas



verbatim

gregory a. kearley

Why did you start your own firm?

I was leaning toward starting my own firm even in grad school. I wanted to create a firm that was different from anything I had experienced, an environment where there exists a collective approach to architecture. I wanted it to have a strong direction, but to maintain an open dialogue with interesting people who are on the same page as I am.

Was it a good decision?

Yes. I can't imagine doing anything different. It has been painful in a lot of ways—financially and otherwise—but given where we are right now and what we're doing, it was well worth the time and effort.

What was hardest about the transition?

I went from working for Ellerbe Becket with more than 100 people in the office to being on my own. I missed the dialogue with co-workers, and social interaction. Working in my apartment was like being in a vacuum. Talking about ideas and having people critique your work is part of your education as an architect. There's also a competition when there are others around. When you're on your own, you don't have anyone else to push you and guide you.

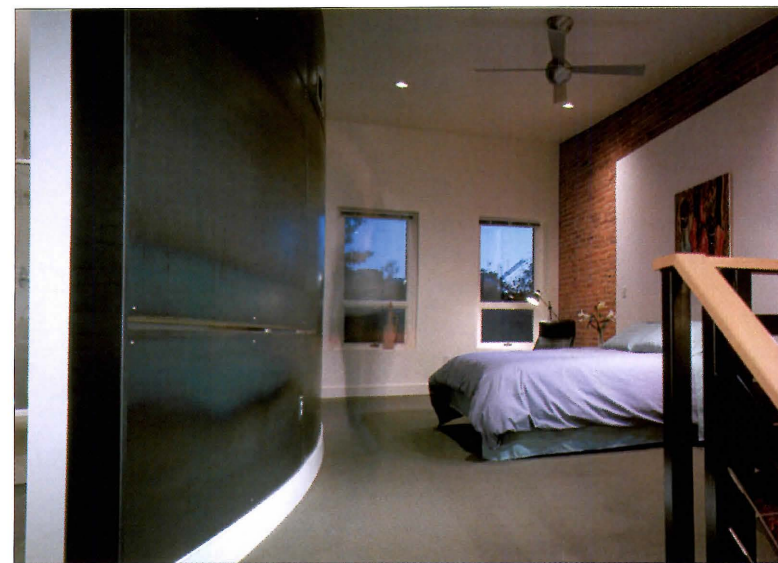
What did you do right?

Eventually I was able to hire a group of individuals who are able to complement what I wanted to do and to complement what each of them does. I think I did a good job of bringing a team together with enough different ideas that there's always an interesting dialogue. But we all work well together.

What's the biggest mistake you made?

I undervalued the work I did by cutting fees so low that it was difficult to make a profit, and I took commissions just to survive. If you undervalue your work as an architect, the clients will undervalue what you do, too. I didn't pay myself a salary, so there was a lot of financial struggle going on. Once I had employees I had to make payroll and I never missed a payday for them, but I missed a lot for myself.

continued



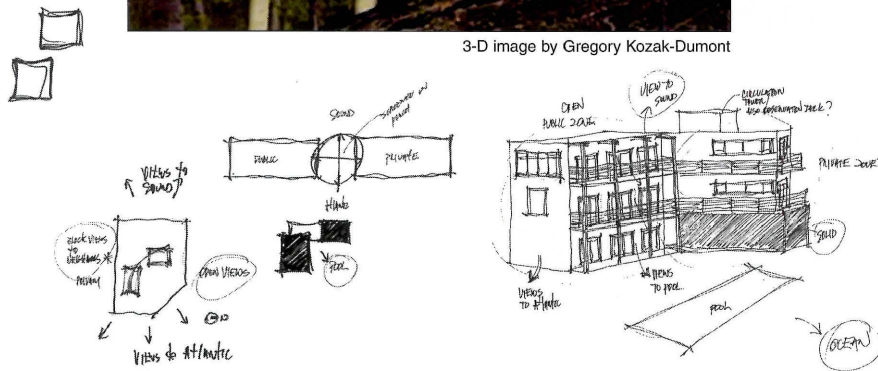
Photos, above and top: Redmond Architectural Photography

Kearley looks back fondly on this row-house renovation (above and left): “At the time, the owners were the clients most open to the design direction I envisioned for Inscape.” That openness allowed him to create flowing, contemporary spaces and, wherever possible, to use environmentally sound materials.



3-D image by Gregory Kozak-Dumont

Kearley purchased a piece of property in Washington, Va., and worked with associate Gregory Kozak-Dumont to design a 2,400-square-foot “tree house for adults.” He shows the renderings to prospective clients to give them an idea of the firm’s design sensibilities. Rough sketches (below) show the development of a North Carolina beach house.



Becket and Travis Price Architects on good terms, which bolstered his existing network of advisers. “I have a collective of friends, schoolmates, and colleagues I respect who are great resources for input or feedback,” he explains. This collective, along with his pro bono work for local community organizations, also yielded his initial client base. After the first rocky years, things began to fall into place.

The turning point came with a whole-house commission in Northern Neck, Va. The commission allowed him to move his office out of his apartment and into space above a Greek restaurant. Other work followed and he added two associates, moved to larger offices, and began subleasing space to a like-minded graphic and Web design team. Greg Kearley Design became Inscape Architecture. “I wanted a studio where

everyone felt vested in the work and enjoyed a certain amount of autonomy,” he says. “I wanted to create a working environment that would facilitate open dialogue on architecture and design. Having my name out front contradicted that approach.”

After merging with Istudio, Kearley re-dubbed the firm Inscape Studio to express and reinforce the group’s design philosophy. The word *inscape* was coined in the late 1800s by poet Gerald Manley Hopkins, who used it to describe the distinctive inner landscape of an object, or the characteristics that give it form and beauty. “My dad suggested the name,” he says. “It gives the office focus. It’s in the back of our minds when we work.” It’s also a satisfying reminder that he’s reached an enviable project in his career: He now declines the projects that don’t please the poet in him.—*s.d.h.*

What’s the best thing about being on your own?

Being able to have certain control over the direction of the design. You never have complete control because the clients have final say, but we have a strong influence over where the design grows. It has been a very interesting process that has continued my education as an architect. I’ve surrounded myself with people who have contributed to my growth.

What are your fears?

I’m not sure I have any fears regarding my work or Inscape Studio. There are always concerns regarding money for a small firm, but I try to focus on the positive and control what I can.

What are your hopes?

I try to approach every project with the hope that we will create the best possible design within the given parameters. I expect that Inscape will succeed and that our clients will occupy spaces that inspire.

What do you like about residential design work?

I think that the scale of the work is incredibly interesting. The design of a new home allows you to experiment with form, space, light, volume, and materials at a very manageable level. That relationship with the client and with design on such a human level is fulfilling to me as an architect.

What does a young firm have to offer clients that a more established firm might not?

We don’t have all of these preconceived ideas, so we really listen to a client and try to work out a creative solution. We bring a fresh and enthusiastic approach to each design and really think about an answer that’s not just cookie-cutter.

What inspires you?

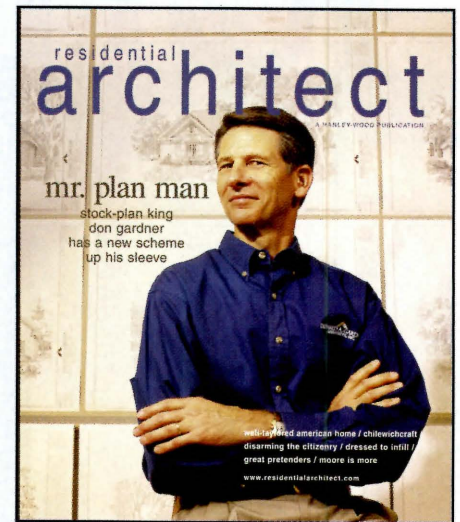
The process of design—the dialogue that transpires in our studio during the creative process. I draw from the built and natural environment. Art, theater, literature, and music inspire me and can weave their way into the design process. An inspired client is a vital part of that process.

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loft moves



chair



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closet

When Tom Allisma needed a senior thesis topic, a knockout punch for his budding portfolio, and a place to live following graduation from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, he decided to tackle all three tasks at once. He designed and built, with his father’s help, a striking 390-square-foot apartment inside a portion of his family’s home in Omaha, Neb.

“My challenge was to take part of this typical Omaha house built in 1981 and dig deeper to create a loft that could perform tasks as a bedroom, gathering room, gallery, studio,

entertainment space,” he says. “It was a handful, but I like experimenting with spaces and structures that serve many different purposes at the same time.”

His program began with the creation of a new private entrance, through a former workshop at the rear of the garage. Constructed entirely of economical, durable birch plywood, the “entry box,” or vestibule, showcases a rolling storage cabinet on casters that doubles as the bathroom door. The cabinet is “voyeuristic,” says Allisma, because

you can see partly through the screen to the corrugated metal walls of the bathroom beyond—but you never get “a good solid view of what’s going on in there.” A cantilevered staircase composed of construction-grade 2x12s with aluminum angle noses leads to the apartment above.

Space for the loft was created by combining several rooms at the back of the house and raising the ceilings from 8 feet to 14. Allisma calls the result “cross-programmed space,” because it incorporates seating areas, a display wall for his model-car col-

a young designer turns spare rooms in his father's house into a multifunctioning loft of his own.

by james schwartz



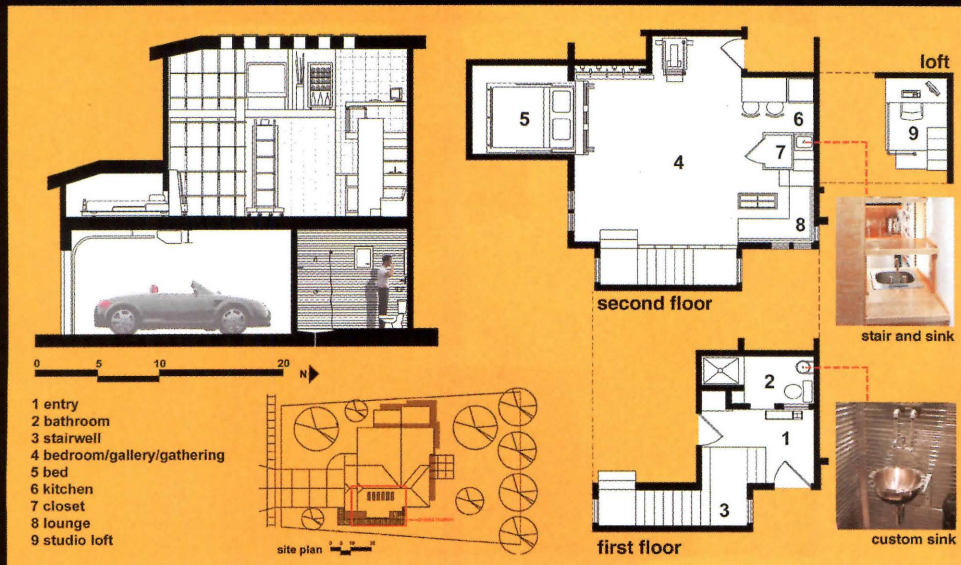
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1



All photos by Tom Kessler, Kessler Photography

Tom Allisma carved his loft out of two small rooms at the back of his father's house. A rolling storage unit with ladder provides a bird's-eye view of the television in the central living area (opposite page). His queen-size bed rolls into a crawl space over the garage (top), leaving only the headboard/bookcase visible.

loft moves

project: Loft residence, Omaha, Neb.
designer: Tom Allisma, Associate AIA, Omaha
general contractor: Tom Allisma, Associate AIA, and Peep Allisma, Omaha
project size: 390 square feet
construction cost: \$38.46 per square foot



out



up



in



original house exterior



original home office



original bedroom

sub[urban] adaptive reuse[s]

a father & son project

cross-programming 7 different uses within 390 sq. ft.
 entry / bathroom / studio / bedroom / kitchen / gallery / gathering



The new entrance at the side of the original house is punctuated by a tube-steel and corrugated metal canopy. Inside the front door, a staircase composed of aluminum diamond plates and a concrete pad leads from the vestibule to the main living area.

“i like experimenting with spaces and structures that serve many different purposes at the same time.”



a



b



c

A towering storage cabinet holds rolls of toilet tissue and slides to reveal the bathroom. The room's walls are lined with corrugated metal and the floor is concrete. Allisma fashioned his sink out of a \$12 stainless steel salad bowl fitted with a drain.

lection, closets, a dining buffet, and a multipurpose storage unit. Modeled after a lifeguard tower, the moveable unit holds a closet on one side and a ladder on the other. The ladder leads to the lifeguard chair he uses for a closer view of the wall-mounted television and to an elevated wine cooler placed nearby. Hidden completely out of sight is the bed, which rolls into the loft from an insulated cavity in the south wall. Allisma says it takes just seconds to glide the sleeping platform into place.

A final surprise is the secret staircase that leads to Allisma's third-floor studio. It's integrated into what

he calls “a transforming structure” on the north wall that contains a large storage closet and a mini-kitchen. The second tread of the staircase extends into the kitchen to form a countertop for the sink.

The apartment may be small, but it “adapts itself for all my needs,” Allisma says. And thanks to the sweat equity of his father and friends, he brought in the entire project for just \$15,000.

Since completing his home base three years ago, Allisma has worked at Avant Architects in Omaha, and designed several restaurants he co-owns, including BLUE - Sushi Sake

Grill, in West Omaha, and a new venture called Roja due to open next year.

Still, he points to the planning and construction of the loft as a key experience in his professional trajectory: “Creating such a tiny space that could serve multiple functions was one of the most valuable learning tools for me as a young designer. And working on it with my father was a great experiment.”

Apparently you really can go home again, and you may even enjoy the return trip.

James Schwartz is a contributing writer in Washington, D.C.

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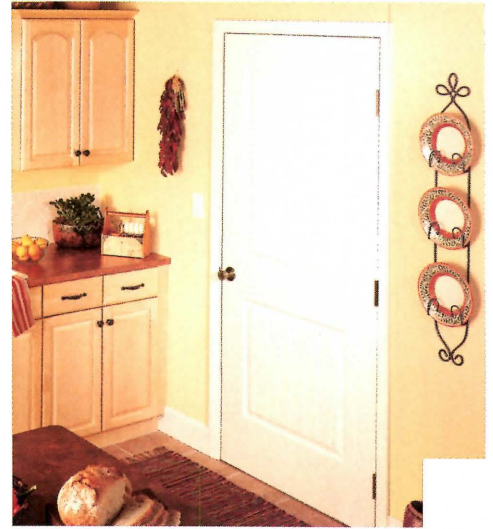
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From vintage lighting fixtures to restored barnwood to classic slate roofing, period products offer homeowners, architects, and builders endless design options. Read on to learn about some top-notch period products on the market today.



Dahlhaus Lighting
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LIGHTING AND MUCH MORE

European style and craftsmanship appeal to many homeowners. **Dahlhaus Lighting**, based in Ennepetal, Germany, has what homeowners are looking for. The company specializes in the design and production of vintage European outdoor lighting, as well as accessories like mailboxes, wall plates, and bollards. Dahlhaus offers impressive lighting solutions that reflect the company's dedication to authentic design, the highest quality craftsmanship, and outstanding service.

Another company that makes high-quality lighting products and more is **Steven Handelma Studios**. The most discriminating customers can choose from over 350 products – handforged lighting, fireplace screens, registers, grilles, and accessories. The company's Mediterranean, French, English, Mission, and Craftsman styles incorporate the best of traditional lines and good proportions with innovative and interesting details.



Steven Handelma Studios Circle no. 66

ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Architects and builders look for manufacturers that offer excellent products along with solid experience, and **Felber Ornamental Plastering Corp.** fits the bill perfectly. A recognized name for over 30 years, Felber offers varied styles in stock or custom sizes and forms. From its 2,000-plus models, Felber can provide rich architectural details, including ceiling medallions, cornices, niche caps/units, domes, light troughs/trim rings, pilaster capitals, brackets, cartouches, and period ceiling ornamentation.



Felber Ornamental Plastering Corp.
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THE BEAUTY AND DURABILITY OF SLATE

Slate roofing is unbeatable in durability, and homeowners love the classic look. **Evergreen Slate Company, LLC** has been producing Vermont roofing slate since 1916, and even offers free architectural services. With 11 exquisite colors and many different sizes and textures, the company can match any slate roof ever applied and create any architecturally pleasing design. Vermont roofing slate is fireproof and water resistant, can withstand extreme temperature changes, and is exceptionally durable, lasting 75 to 100 years.

A TRIP BACK IN TIME

Imagine a home filled with the warmth and character that only comes from truly authentic recycled barnwood. **Conklin's Authentic Antique Barnwood and Hand Hewn Beams** can help you create such a home. The company offers a variety of barnwood in natural colors and widths, available in original condition, resawn, or milled. Or choose from hand-hewn barn beams and pole rafters, rich in character and historic detail with a beautiful aged, natural patina. Plus, Conklin's offers an array of wood flooring to fit any room.

Another company whose products take you back in time is **Woolen Mill Fan Company**. This company offers a great alternative to a standard ceiling fan – a traditional belt-and-pulley fan. With metal parts cast and machined by Amish craftsman using turn-of-the-century techniques, these fans are anything but mass produced. Woolen Mill fans employ a selection of modern electric gear reduction motors, mounted on a wall or ceiling or hidden in an adjoining room or closet. Available in iron, aluminum, or bronze, with solid mahogany blades, Woolen Mill fans will add mystery and charm to any room.



Evergreen Slate Company
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Woolen Mill Fan Company Circle no. 352



Conklin's Authentic Antique Barnwood
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Keep reading through this special section on period products for more great ideas.

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Felber Ornamental Plastering Corp.: Call 800-392-6896 or visit www.felber.net

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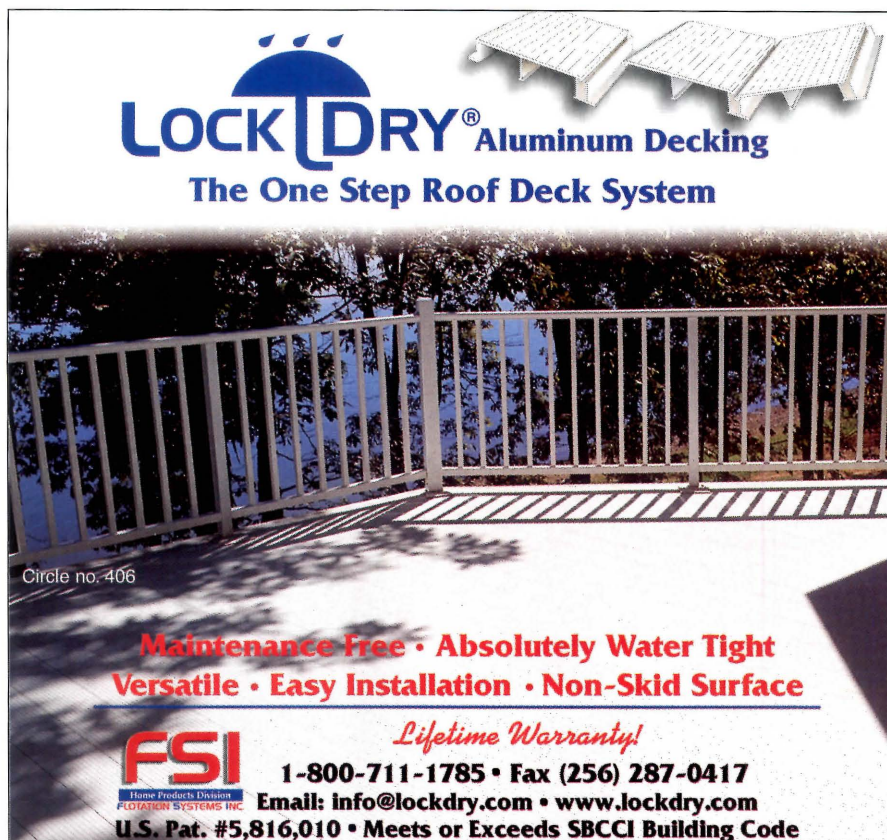
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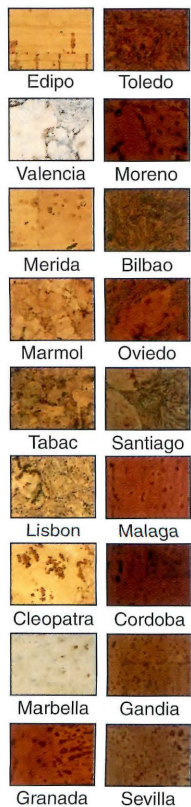
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