

PROFILE

Jim Brown, AIA

FIRM: James D. Brown Associates, Architects and Planners.

TRAINING: Dennison University, Economics; Carnegie Institute of Technology, Bachelor of Architecture.

PERSONALS: Married, one child.

AWARDS, HONORS: 87 AIA Outstanding Service and Contributions to Profession while serving Pittsburgh Chapter; 84-86 Chair, PSA Awards Task Force; 86 PSA President; 85 V.P. PSA; 84 Treasurer PSA; 81 President, Pittsburgh Chapter AIA.

LEISURE TIME ACTIVITIES: Tennis, golf, and I spend a lot of time with my son.

SPECIALTY: When I left my previous firm seven years ago, my objective was to build as diverse a firm as was practical. You cannot limit yourself to a size or type of construction when you're building a practice.

WHEN AND WHY YOU CHOSE ARCHITECTURE AS A CAREER: I was interested in being an architect in high school in Illinois. I don't know why at all. It was pointed out by my homeroom teacher that I misspelled "architecture" three years in a row and I think I misspelled it differently each year. So I think that made me eminently qualified to become an architect because most of us are atrocious spellers. I went into liberal arts at Dennison University, but continued to be interested in architecture, so I transferred to Carnegie Mellon.

FAVORITE PROJECT OR BUILDING: The most interesting project is a current one. It's a multi-use development for the North Shore of Pittsburgh in response to the URA's North Shore Place request for proposals. We've been working on it for a couple of years with a group of business people from Pittsburgh, a group from Northside Community Development Council and a group from Hong Kong. It includes retail, a hotel, office space and housing. It's been terribly exciting—the scale and complexity of the project plus the fact that we've been dealing with people from another nation who have come to the city for the first time and are excited about its prospects.

FAVORITE PITTSBURGH BUILDING: I've had the opportunity in the last three or four years (through AIA) to spend some cherished moments at Fallingwater. When you spend quality time in a building of such renown, have dinner, listen to music, walk around, you appreciate it more. It was always a favorite house of mine, but now it's become a more cherished piece of architecture.

FAVORITE BUILDING IN THE WORLD: I was most awed by Santa Maria del Fiore, the cathedral in Florence. The incredible innovations in structure were staggering. How could it have been built then? How could stone chains have been thought of and constructed? And how could they possibly hold up the cupola? Think of the detail, and the number of years and man-hours it took.



BROWN: "The people aspect is what it's all about, that's who uses and lives in these buildings. I like dealing with people and shaping their needs into a finished project."

MOST ENJOYABLE ASPECT OF ARCHITECTURE: It's working with people, helping them define needs and then watching them get excited at the very end—it's the start-to-finish process. The people aspect is what it's all about, that's who uses and lives in these buildings. I like dealing with people and shaping their needs into a finished project.

LEAST ENJOYABLE: Charades, the architect-contractor-owner games. There's a

very dirty part of the design/construction business and it's these back and forth games: Get more money for this, that wasn't specified, this should have been . . . When a project goes well you have a team working together to attain the end product. Unfortunately, that doesn't happen as often as it should.

WORLD'S GREATEST ARCHITECT: Alvar Aalto. The buildings he designed have spatial concepts that are exciting and refreshing, very enjoyable to use. The sense of detail, of materials is exquisite. The relationship of the building to its site and to its surroundings is marvelously done.

MOST AESTHETICALLY PLEASING CITY: If I consider Boston and Cambridge as one, I think it's an incredibly interesting city. Topographically, it has some of the same interest that Pittsburgh has. The architecture and the relationships between some of the buildings and the river makes it a very pleasing place to live and work.

ADVICE TO A STUDENT OF ARCHITECTURE: When you're in school, listen hard to the educators. Then, work in as many offices as possible and listen hard to the professionals. Afterward, make up your own mind because the truth lies somewhere in between. During those years, think about the type of project you're most interested in and try to position yourself to be there, at that place, that office, in the city you want to work in. Don't just send out a bunch of resumes and take the best offer or decide to work for a big prestige firm.

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