

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARSHA BERGER, AIA

COLUMNS: Marsha, as the new President of the Pittsburgh Chapter AIA, tell us about your goals for the coming year.

BERGER: I hope that my year as Chapter President will be the start of passionate community involvement. Architects have so much knowledge and so much to share. We know about psychology, how people live and work. We deal in sociology, exploring the patterns of people interacting in their environment. We understand nature, how to orient buildings for the sun, the rain, for the winds. Then we have to grasp the pure mechanics of systems and bring passionate, artistic expression to it all. Because we have so broad an education, we should be thinking of ways to give our knowledge back to the community, to speak up and say "What about this? Pay attention to that!"

A second goal is to create a public supported foundation that promotes Architecture with a capital "A." Many people outside the profession are passionately inter-

ested in architecture and would love to become involved. Jane and John Doe could take a walking tour, attend a lecture, borrow books or a videotape. There are so many things to be done.

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C: Besides community involvement, what else drew you to a career in architecture?

B: Actually, architecture is my second career. My first was in computer science with an undergraduate degree in mathematics. It was a good background because architecture and math are so similar. There's

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the recognition of patterns, the order and the systems. Mathematicians are always looking for that one rule that governs the universe—that one simple notion you can boil things down to—pure truth. Architecture has the same requirement, we must impose simplicity, order. Architecture is the opposite of chaos.

In some ways architecture is like music, another of my great loves ... it draws on the same innate interest people have. There may be basic human laws that govern the making of music, or working out mathematical calculations, reducing problems to a set of systems and imposing order on them so that they can be dealt with. Some people can do that through music, others through a

computer program. Architects do it through the built environment.

C: Speaking of music, you're well known for your involvement in the arts. How does architecture relate to that interest?

B: I love architecture more than any of the other arts, and I'm committed to them all. I can't imagine my life without painting and sculpture, without music, movement and dance. I have a strong ability to imagine visually, to create visual images in my head. In architecture we engage all the senses: sight, sounds, smells, textures, how one feels in the space. I find the parallels between architecture and the arts interesting — the 3-dimensional positioning in space, the variation and repetition of patterns, the spatial representations.

C: What types of projects give you the most fulfillment?

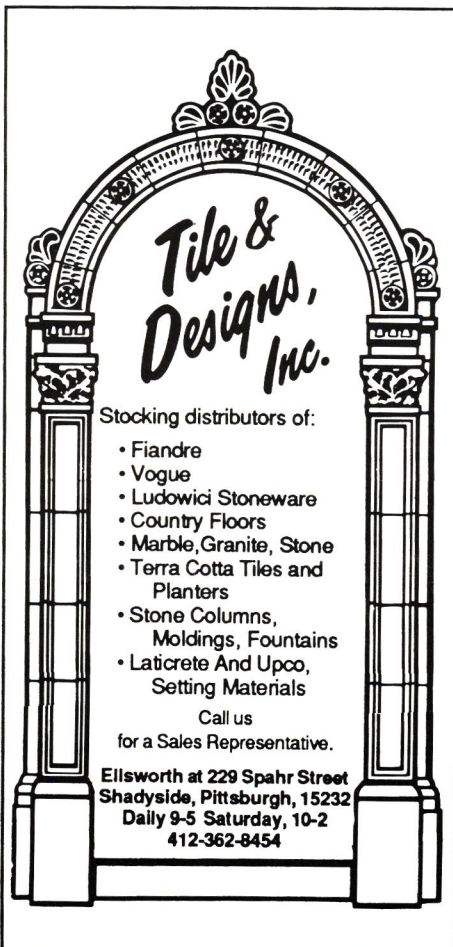
B: I love doing small challenging projects. Often they have some political commitment to them. I am the eternal do-gooder. I love the idea of saving the world through saving one part of it. If architecture isn't passionate, I won't do it. If you're in the arts you must feel that passion about your work.

C: What's the most difficult part?

B: I wish I had more time. There's too much to do, to see, to experience. I'm not very tolerant when it comes to waiting for solutions. In the design process I know there are times I have to wait for things to ferment, to settle. That's when sleep helps. It allows the mind to subconsciously resolve a lot of those problems.

C: What issues in architecture are currently important to you?

B: There's one issue that always comes up: Interiors. Do interiors belong to architects or not? Take the Pantheon, one of the most wonderful architectural spaces that man has created. Other than a very small part of the facade, it is a totally interior space. This



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whole notion that architects create an object that sits on the landscape is entirely one-sided. Architecture is the inside and the outside. There is a folding of space, an interaction of inside and outside. For anyone to say that architecture stops at the front door and then you call the decorator or interior designer is entirely wrong. Shelter is not just a roof over your head, it is also enclosure. We spend very little time approaching a building, but we spend a lot of time inside. The inside is absolutely critical. The exterior is important in terms of its context, how do we create a building within a larger space, a block, a neighborhood, a city—how do the pieces go together? But a building that simply sits out on a plain and rises up as a piece of sculpture, well, it's a piece of sculpture, it's not a piece of architecture.

C: Are there other key issues you'd like to address?

B: Yes. The importance of collaboration between architect, client and contractor. We don't do this work alone. I don't believe that any good project is done without a good client and fabulous workers. It's what we've known all along. In the old days, the architect was out there in the field, working with the craftsmen. We didn't do the drawings in the office and then turn them over to somebody else. It was a true collaborative effort. The same thing applies to the client. The client has to give more than just money. And when the client pays attention and is asked to give a lot to the architecture, you really get good solutions.

C: Your feelings about architecture are intense. What else puts fire in your eye?

B: Social programs. I'm involved with the Presley Ridge School. What they can do is beyond anything I can even envision, taking kids who are really in trouble and de-institutionalizing them. I feel I must combat bias in any form, whether it's racism, sexism, ageism. We have to fight this tendency to be against 'anybody who isn't me.' I'm as passionately committed to these ideals as I am to architecture. Δ

WIA EXHIBIT TO VISIT PITTSBURGH IN JANUARY

The Chapter's recently-formed Women in Architecture Committee is kicking off the new year by sponsoring a traveling architectural exhibit in PPG's Wintergarden. Entitled "That Exceptional One: Women in American Architecture," the exhibit chronicles 100 years of women's achievements in architectural design, practice, and theory. It runs January 14 through 21.

The show is divided into three parts: "Becoming an Architect" overviews the training opportunities available to women; "Practicing Architecture" presents a series of detailed case histories of female architects and their firms; and "Gaining Recognition" presents an illustrated historical timeline. Also shown are achievements by contemporary female architects.

Chapter members are encouraged to stop by the Wintergarden on their way

to the Jan. 16 Dinner Meeting at Café Euro.

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