NATALIE de BLOIS Memorial

At Cliffer Dwellings 11.05.13 By Kim Haig

As many of our members know, our dear friend and one of the founders of Chicago Women in Architecture, Natalie de Blois, passed on in July of this year. She was an iconic member of the Chicago architectural community, and the tributes from friends, colleagues and family members underscored just how much she achieved in life, despite the challenges she (and most other women architects of her generation) faced in her career. Nancy Abshire, a long-time friend of Natalie’s presented a slideshow of her work which featured a number of well-known buildings that she helped design at SOM in New York before moving to Chicago and becoming the first woman Associate Partner at SOM. Her work alone guarantees her a spot in the annals of distinguished architects, regardless of gender. But, ultimately, she did gain some professional recognition in being awarded an AIA Honor Award in 2010 an AIA lifetime achievement award. But it was the personal recollections and anecdotes of her friends and family that were so touching and revealed the character behind everything she accomplished.

Natalie’s daughter, Carol Ross Barney, was asked to speak. When she met Natalie at the first meeting of Chicago Women in Architecture, as she later recalled, “most of the women architects in Chicago were at that meeting, looking for mentors and companions in a still male-dominated field.” Carol said “Though Natalie suffered many slights and indignities, she rarely talked about it. She felt about adventures he had with his mother, Carol Ross Barney. The first part was a call to pick Natalie up at the curb where her luggage arrived at the airport. The second part was to attend and help in planning for 40th Anniv. celebration in June, 2014.

COMMUNITY DESIGN:

BY KIM HAIG

On September 24, Charlene Andreas, CWA President, led a thought-provoking panel discussion about the field of community design. After introducing the impressive panellists she gave each woman an opportunity to describe their involvement with community design. Betsy Williams, the Managing Director for Architecture for Humanity in Chicago described her task as helping people find a voice in the design of their community, and then help find funding and architecture to fulfill their needs. Nootan de Blois, an Architect at CBI and Managing Director at Shaw Sustainable Design Solutions, talked about helping create a knowledge community to raise the visibility of community design issues and the architects working to solve these issues. Roberta Feldman, a self-described “architectural activist, researcher and educator committed to democratic design” has been active in the arena of public interest architecture since high school. She and her colleagues received the 2011 AIA Honor Award for “research and elaborate public interest strategic design.” And Catherine Baker is a Principal at Froehlich/Baker Architects, an architecture firm that focuses on affordable housing and community based design. Catherine has developed lab programs for high school students, such as documenting tree coverage in their neighborhood. She described her life’s work as a local community development group.

When Charlene asked, “What is community design, and how do you manage the general public to think about design in the context of solving their neighborhood problems?” "Roberta described the efforts serving people who can’t afford design services and helping to democratize design. Her exposure to the issues of the Civil Rights movement inspired her to become an architect and help community designers meet the needs of residents more effectively. She also described, when provided with design options, the residents would often choose options that they weren’t aware existed, even different options from what they were accustomed to seeing. Catherine interjected that there needs to be an honest and open discussion of budget in the process, so that reason- able options can be put forth that will keep the residents engaged in the pro- cess rather than getting disenchanted with the final outcome. Nootan stated that “In every project we can advocate for ourselves then they can advocate for good design. If they can listen then they can recognize good design as well as anyone. She said that design skills are learned, but given a voice, residents can deter- mine what’s best in any given situation. Betsy emphasized that she’s not as in- terested in “high design” as providing involved, so that the community can become involved in the design and arrive at realistically possible options. Roberta added that “When the next ask if design has a social cost and how to manage that. How to get to engage in community de- velopment these projects involve four women discussed of funding projects.” Charlene next asked if design Chicago Education Symposium By Erin Reddy

The SAIC Chapter of the American Institute of Archi- tecture Students hosted a daylong symposium, the Chicago Education Design Symposium (CDES) on November 2, 2013 at the School of the Art Institu- tute. The event gathered design students, educators, and professionals to discuss and showcase the educational landscape in Chicago, the Midwest and beyond, offering perspectives on the current and future course of design education. The symposium celebrated the acumen and relevance of Chicago’s design education, it methodologies - and keep pace with a rad- ically changing industry - while at the same time questioning and redefining the fields’ role in the cultural economy. The symposium attempted to answer this question by hosting lively panel discussions on four major topics: community service and social interest design; civic engagement and leadership experience; contemporary issues in studio culture; and emerging roles in design education.

A major theme focused on the impor- tance of advocacy in the architectural profession, both through civic causes and policy. Many students support the notion that a life of design, and developing leadership and civic re- sponsibility through their education is crucial to “building industry”, students need to be engaged with these same issues while still in school.

A screening of the documentary, “Ar- chiculture,” was held following the symposium. The documentary looks at the four Chicago schools of architecture. It rounds out the day, with some provocative ques- tions brought to the forefront: “Does studio culture work?” “Do we need more studio culture practice or more practice in studio culture?” “Is studio culture a privileged environment?” “Does studio present a narrow vision of what architects actually do and is this model still relevant?” “Do you need studio culture to be a good architect?”

CDES will support the newly established Freedom by Design Chicago, a collaborative effort among the four Chicago schools of architecture.