



## ONLY GIRL ARCHITECT - LONELY



A Reading and Discussion by Susan F. King, AIA LEED AP of her recently published essay in the book entitled *Chicago Architecture: Histories, Revisions, Alternatives*, edited by Katerina Ruedi Ray & Charles Waldheim. King traces the history of practicing women architects over the past 100 years in the Chicago area and "in particular, their persistent and successful efforts to form long-standing professional associations and informal networks that today still characterize architectural practice in the city."

**TUESDAY, MARCH 28, 2006**  
**2pm, CITY DESIGN CENTER**  
**820 W. Jackson, Suite 330**

Sponsored by:  
 The Gender and Women's Studies Program, WISE at UIC, the School of Architecture, and the City Design Center.  
 For more information, contact Colleen Norton at cnorton1@uic.edu or 312.996.2455

Flier from one of several invitations that Susan received after her essay entitled "Only Girl Architect - Lonely" was published in the book "Chicago Architecture: Histories, Revisions, Alternatives."

## Architectural Activism in Practice

by Pamela Hill

In 1973 a mother in Ohio discovered that a new highway planned for her neighborhood did not include any overpasses, a safety concern for children enroute to school. This woman mobilized her neighbors and the community and was successful in getting the overpasses built. Susan King was one of a number of children who participated in a protest that brought attention to the issue. From this experience, the future architect learned as a young girl that one person's dedication and commitment could indeed make a difference, in this case actually changing the built environment.

This was one of the stories Susan shared with attendees as the featured speaker at the 2012 Annual CWA Spring Brunch. Recently elevated to the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architects, as only the 18th woman from Illinois, Susan relayed a brief chronological history of her career in a talk titled "Architectural Activism in Practice". In enthusiastic yet modest fashion, Susan interwove the various threads of passion and chance that have defined her career.

Raised in Mecca, Ohio, Susan attributed her early interest in architecture and sustainable design to her father. A steelworker by trade, Mr. King also enjoyed a serious hobby as a carpenter. He built two houses for the family and various other projects. One of particular interest to his daughter, the future sustainable design expert, was a windmill/pump he designed that utilized wind power to provide

water to a man-made pond and constructed of salvaged metal barrels.

Following graduation from the University of Cincinnati, Susan moved to Chicago and worked as an intern at Perkins and Will before joining Eckenhoff Saunders Architects (ESA). At ESA, Susan honed her technical skills, quickly assumed increasing levels of project responsibility and developed an unexpected expertise in suburban manufacturing facilities. Susan eventually realized that she wanted her career to more fully encompass her developing interests in social responsibility and sustainable design. She began a job search that lasted several years, but eventually resulted in her joining Environ (the predecessor to her current firm Harley Ellis Devereaux).

Although Susan's jobs kept her very busy, she knew early in her career that she wanted to connect to her profession outside of the office. One of the reasons Environ may have decided to take a chance on Susan's ability to handle residential projects (despite her lack of firm experience with this building type) was due to her entry in a 1993 architectural competition. Sponsored by the Chicago Tribune, the competition asked entrants to create new concepts for low income public housing. It resulted in over 300 entries from around the world and an exhibition at the Chicago Athenaeum. The entry prepared by Susan and friend Darci Oberly received an honorable mention.

Other extracurricular activities included membership in Architects/Designers/Planners for Social Responsibility (ADPSR, originally established in 1981 to promote nuclear disarmament) and chairing AIA Chicago's Committee on the Environment (COTE). Susan's extensive involvement with CWA began indirectly in 1993 with her discovery of CARY (Chicks in Architecture Refuse to Yield), a group of women who were taking a very public and activist stand to promote the interests of women in the architectural profession. At that time the group was sponsoring a multi-media exhibit "More Than the Sum of Our Body Parts." Designed by CWA members Carol Crandall, Kay Janis and Sally Levine, the exhibit explored issues of discrimination, sexual harassment and balancing work with family. It ran consecutively with the AIA National Convention which was held in Chicago that same summer.

Susan joined CWA and assumed the position of Newsletter Editor, as well as developing the Ladies of the Corridor Series, which featured articles on past and current female members of the profession. Key to the success of the series was Susan's enlistment of other CWA members to contribute. This represents another distinguishing feature of Susan's career: the emphasis and importance she places on collaboration. At CWA she developed the role of Vice-President as a strong supporting position for the president, and lead CWA through its very successful 25th Anniversary year as president.

When Susan joined Environ she began work on a series of socially responsible housing projects through which she was able to blend her beliefs that good design belongs to everyone and environmental friendliness should be a

criteria of affordability. Highlights include: Bernardin Manor, an active senior living community that incorporated engineered wood structure that reduced waste and was economical; and Wentworth Commons which provided affordable apartments for at risk individuals and families with integrated support services on the Ground Floor. It also explored the ins and outs of benchmarking green through the pursuit of LEED certification for housing. Wentworth, ultimately became the first multi-family building to achieve LEED certification in the City of Chicago. The upbeat color scheme of the exterior façade has been well-received, multi awarded and respected by the community. Like Wentworth Commons, Sankofa House in the North Lawndale neighborhood also garnered one of the former Mayor Daley's last GreenWorks Awards for Innovation in the Built Environment. This fall the Country Club Hills Wellness Center opened which is the first permanent housing facility for South Suburban PADS, (Public Action to Deliver Shelter.) Even through the Great Recession, her portfolio of beautiful built work has continued



Country Club Hills Wellness Center provides permanent supportive housing for 20 families and 57 individuals via South suburban PADS. While not visible as the roof mounted Solar Thermal is, the facility is heated and cooled via a geothermal system. Copyright: Alberts Photographic

to grow.

The issue of gender and equity within the profession has long been of interest to Susan. During her talk she relayed some sobering statistics on women in architecture: Although 40% of architectural school graduates are women, only 20% are licensed and only 16% are principals or partners in firms; male architects with 15 years experience on average make 25% more than women; and of the 6,373 Fellows of the AIA, only 5% are women. The good news is that in Illinois many of the women who have achieved fellowship are present/former members of CWA, proving Susan's point that the CWA organization develops women leaders. In her essay, "Only Girl Architect, Lonely" (published in 2006 in *Chicago Architecture: History, Revisions, Alternatives*), Susan traced the history of women architects in Chicago and their efforts to develop supportive professional associations. Starting with Elisabeth Martini in 1921 (the title of Susan's essay was based on an ad Martini placed in that year seeking other women architects to form a club), women in Chicago have created and sustained a dynamic and supportive organization that continues to serve its members and the entire architectural community.

## Gender Equity: Understanding Our Place 1889 - 2012 Outline of Women Fellows from Illinois

1970	(1)	Gertrude Lemp Kerbis, Chicago IL	(13)
1974	(1)	Natalie de Blois, Chicago, IL	(16)
1990	(1)	Diane Legge Kemp, Chicago, IL	(53)
1991	(2)	Margaret McCurry, Chicago, IL	(63)
		Cynthia Weese, Chicago, IL	(67)
1992	(1)	Carol Ross Barney, Chicago, IL	(68)
1995	(2)	Kristine Fallon, Chicago, IL	(94)
		Linda Searle, Chicago, IL	(100)
1996	(1)	Susan Greenwald, Chicago, IL	(104)
1997	(1)	Roula Alakiotou, Chicago IL	(109)
2003	(1)	Laura Horstman Fisher, Chicago, IL	(182)
2004	(1)	Angie Lee, Chicago, IL	(197)
2006	(3)	Holly Gerberding, Chicago, IL	(215)
		Helen J. Kessler, Chicago, IL	(222)
		Donna V. Robertson, Chicago, IL	(228)
2009	(2)	Jeanne K. Gang, Chicago, IL	(269)
2010		Martha Bell, Chicago, IL	(293)
2012	(1)	Susan F. King, Chicago, IL	(343)

## Practicing Overseas - A CWA Panel Discussion

by Ziyuan Wang

On Oct 24th, 2012, a roomful of CWA members gathered together at Izzy+showroom for a panel discussion on practicing architecture overseas. Delivered by a small group of high-achieving female architects, the panel discussion touched upon provocative issues of the globalized architecture industry, such as gender perceptions in different cultures, the nexus between western and eastern architectural traditions, and the perspective of American architecture in the multilateral global dialogue.

Moderated by CWA Vice President Gail Cavanagh, the panel discussion featured top-notch women architects with high-profile global project management experiences. Barbara L Burnette, a Senior Project Interior Designer at Perkins+Will, talked about her experience in the Middle East. Dianne Legge Kemp, now Principal at RTKL International, encapsulated her extensive practice in China while Ferhat Zerin from Ginkgo Planning and Design helped shed light on practicing urban planning in her native India.

female co-workers. Barbara testified that once you have established yourself, women are well respected in Saudi Arabia, while Ferhat looked back on her experience from SOM to Ginkgo and said she never felt judged as a woman. "The important thing is to be good at what you do, regardless of your gender."

The discussion then veered into the cultural realm, as Gail asked about how western architecture influenced local built environments positively. Observing the unprecedented growth in India, Ferhat described the problems that accompanied this rapid development, for example, the lack of certain phases such as design development. Ferhat noted that she also enjoyed the creative freedom brought about by such unrestrained optimism. Dianne poignantly pointed out the lack of diversity in China's real estate developments, as the zoning rules there tend to create homogenized high-rise buildings. As an advocate for diverse, low-density development, Dianne always tried to push for more close-to-the-ground residential developments but was faced with a lot of resistance. She praised the well-preserved landscape tradition, which the West can learn much from, but expressed concerns over the mindless demolition of great historic architecture.

The discussion started with the panelists introducing their respective experiences in obtaining work overseas, which usually involved winning design competitions and gradually establishing lasting client relationships locally. Although gender roles play out differently in every culture, all panelists responded positively to practicing architecture overseas as a woman. Dianne had occasionally encountered intimidation from male clients, but she was always able to stand up to and diffuse the problem, especially as she fostered wonderful working relationships with her Chinese

"Now for China it is more important to be wild and creative than to be historic", said Dianne, "but I argue for a new architecture that is very much of their cultural tradition."

Speaking of the cultural modifications they had to make in order to adapt to local conditions, all the panelists had interesting stories to tell. Coming from a multi-national firm, Barbara mentioned that since Perkins+Will has so many offices around the world across all cultures, there are too many opinions to consider. But her practice in the Middle East has educated her about different kinds of Muslim cultures, and through open communication with people from different religious backgrounds, she came to realize we essentially share the same roots. She commented on American arrogance, and concluded that architects should think about technical problems culturally, such as the absence of living rooms in Muslim cultures. Dianne saw opportunities in introducing recreational and sports facilities in China, which are still relatively new, and the need for more efficient interior space planning. Ferhat maintained that Western architecture has become too generic looking, and while western architects continue to export such styles, we need to learn humility and bring back new perspectives.

As the discussion wrapped up, a CWA member from the audience raised the question about whether or not the value of American technology is enough to offset the arrogance. The panelists all agreed that the rest of the world is catching up so fast that someday they won't need American technology anymore. "They want to learn from our brain power," said Barbara, "the reason they want us there is to teach them how to do it." In the same vein, Ferhat commented that students in India had learned the technical skills already. "They need our leadership skills: ability to think big and make decisions." Dianne seconded their claims, adding that American firms are valued for their perspective and creativity instead of technology. In the end, the conversation circled around to appreciation of the advantages taken for granted here: safety, liberty, freedom, clean air, and clean streets. Having lived overseas, they all have learned to be more respectful of other cultures and appreciative of what we have in the U.S. "Before you start to save the world, work locally", said Ferhat, "At some point, it's time to be back."

## MEMBER NEWS. UPCOMING EVENTS + MORE...

February

12 CWA Monthly Meeting - Business Meeting at DIRTT, 325 N. Wells St., Suite 1000. Members and non-members are welcome to attend. Presentation by Susan Smith of Selloquent, 5:30 p.m. Networking, 6:00 p.m. - Meeting

24 FINAL DAY of Inside Studio Gang @ the Art Institute of Chicago.

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