

JOHN Q. LAWSON

BIOGRAPHY - RATTLER REUNION 2007

In August 1957 I headed down to Houston, Texas to begin five years of education at Rice University, majoring in architecture because it seemed to combine my interests in art and science. After receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1961, I married a classmate, Elizabeth Jo Waddel, whose parents lived in New Jersey, just outside of Philadelphia. We both got summer jobs with architectural firms and saw the buildings of Louis Kahn and the "Philadelphia School" of architects whose work seemed to sum up what we had been learning at Rice. We returned to Houston for the fifth year program.

Our son, Bevan, was born in the spring. That year I worked mornings for a structural engineer and afternoons for an Interior Design firm, won the M. N. Davidson Award (which allowed us to spend five weeks in Mexico traveling, sketching, and painting) and received my Bachelor of Science in Architecture in 1962. We relocated to New Jersey in the fall, so I could attend Princeton University on the Lowell M. Palmer Fellowship. Soon after receiving my Master of Fine Arts in Architecture degree in 1964, we moved to Doylestown, Pennsylvania where I began working for award-winning architect Frank Schlesinger, a one-man firm at the time, and still good friend of mine.

Our daughter, Cary, was born that summer. All was well until Frank's office ran out of work. I began to commute, via the Reading Railroad, 60 miles south to Philadelphia where I found employment with Kneedler Mirick & Zantzing Architects. Their offices were located in the 40-story, International Style PSFS Building and I began enjoy the city and its urban life style. In 1965 I joined Mitchell/Giurgola Architects, one of the leaders of the Philadelphia School, thus beginning my 20-years with the firm. We left Doylestown and moved to the center of Philadelphia. When things were slow at M/GA I was loaned out to Venturi and Rauch to prepare some drawings which were published in Robert Venturi's revolutionary *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*. I "reverse commuted" back to Doylestown to help Frank for a short time, and finally settled down to a steady position with M/GA as the firm's commissions became larger and more prestigious.

I grew with the firm, becoming an Associate in 1971 and a partner in 1974. In 1972 I was asked to join the architectural design faculty at the University of Pennsylvania as an Adjunct Associate Professor of Architecture in the Graduate School of Fine Arts. One of my more famous, albeit controversial projects at M/GA was the *Liberty Bell Pavilion*, completed for the Bicentennial Celebration in 1976. Meanwhile, the constant working and traveling took its toll on my family life and my marriage ended in divorce. In 1979 M/GA entered, and won, the international competition for the design of *Parliament House*, the Capitol of Australia. Coincidentally, in 1981 I took a six-month sabbatical as a Fellow in Architecture at the American Academy in Rome, where I studied, traveled, and sketched the monuments of Italian architecture. While in Rome my current wife, Lorna Katz, and I were married in a month long process. Meanwhile, M/GA expanded its operations from the New York and Philadelphia offices to Canberra, Australia. Back in Philadelphia, I often found myself back on the road again in pursuit of more commissions to maintain the increasing costs of the larger firm.

In 1986, I left M/GA to form my own office, John Lawson Architects, in partnership with my wife, and we began working on a series of smaller projects for the University of Pennsylvania as well as several residential projects. Later that year I became a member of the prestigious College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architects. I stopped teaching at Penn in 1987 in order to devote full time to my architectural project. In 1988, I also began to participate as a board member of several Philadelphia non-profit groups such as City Parks Association and Awbury Arboretum Association (continuing my Tucumcari childhood interests in nature and the outdoors, boy scouts, farming and ranching), Eastern State Penitentiary Task Force, and the Urban Design Committee, AIA Philadelphia.

My son Bevan, a structural engineer whom we often consult with on our architectural projects, lives in Philadelphia, was married in 1990 and has two children, daughter Fiona, born in 1995, and son Declan, born in 1998. My daughter Cary is senior copy writer for a New York ad agency, R/GA and lives in Ft. Lee, NJ, at the foot of the George Washington Bridge. In 2004 I resumed my teaching activities and joined the Architectural Faculty, School of Architecture and Design, Philadelphia University where I continue to enjoy teaching in the fifth year architectural design studio. I am still finding time to continue my life long interest in painting by sketching landscapes in watercolor and by creating large, geometric abstract oil paintings. I have shown the paintings with other architects in group shows and continue to pursue other venues for exhibiting my paintings, collages, and drawings.