

ARTHUR ERICKSON, IN MEMORIAM

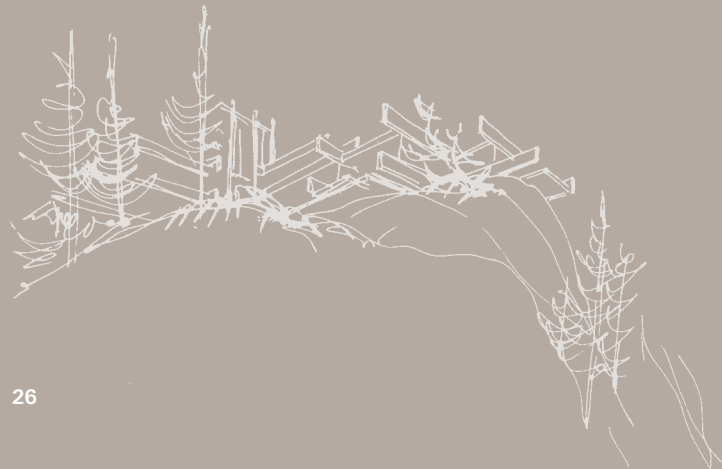
Arthur Erickson, celebrated internationally as Canada's best-known architect, died on May 20, 2009. With his involvement in two of its parcels, the Olympic Village has become the home of his last designs.

His influence reaches beyond his own work, however. In recognition of his contributions not only as a designer but as a mentor to many in the Vancouver community, *The Challenge Series* invited several of Erickson's colleagues to share their memories of him.

In 1973 I was just out of school and thrilled to get my first job in Arthur's office. What left an impression on me were team meetings. There was equality, in that everyone was there. You were not discouraged from giving your opinion; in his office, it was about developing ideas. The "stramps" [combination stairs and ramp] at the law courts, for example – it got put out there by a young graduate and it stuck, it got built.

The culture allowed everybody to be a part of the process. Both my partner and I worked with Erickson, and we both feel that a studio environment is the way to run a practice, where the best idea is what's important. In terms of the process and the environment, I think we did take away something from Arthur. The way we work here, I'm trying to nurture that.

Russ Chernoff, Chernoff Thompson Architects



Arthur really stayed true to his craft. That was his mentoring, to show people you can stick to a discipline. I don't care if you're building thatched roof cottages; you didn't have to compromise. That strength was also Arthur's weakness, why a lot of people were hesitant to deal with him – he didn't waver, he stayed on message. That's the most important thing he could show young architects: that it's okay to not be everything to everybody.

Whether you're a big fan of Arthur Erickson or not, we Canadians don't celebrate our achievements enough. I thought Arthur was a part of the fabric of Canada, and it was really important to get him down there [to the Olympic Village]. He left Canada's mark on the world, he carried that flag and torch for us. I think we should celebrate the few world citizens we have. Whether controversial or celebrated, he still was doing it.

Bob Rennie, Rennie Marketing Systems

I started in 1973 in Arthur's office and was there for nineteen years. It was an incredibly young multicultural office, which was exciting. It was a real adventure.

People often talk about Arthur's office as a learning office. His approach was one of no preconceptions in terms of solution; rather, a profound understanding of program and site. The testing, the searching for solutions was a wonderful experience; the idea would lead you, it was bigger than the participants. The youngest people on staff really got Arthur's ear; he had a talent for including layers of ideas from a wide palette of people.

In addition to the big names, there's a whole generation of architects whose names you may not know, but they talk about how that experience in his office influenced their career and thinking, and the importance of architecture in their lives.

Rainer Fassler, Stantec

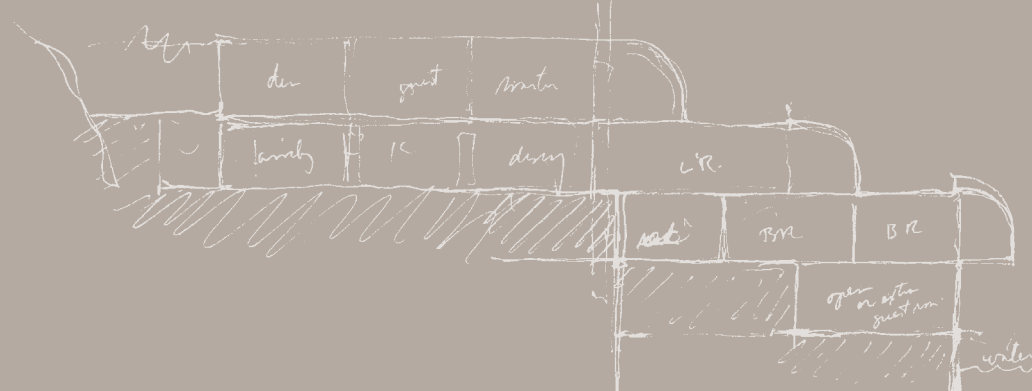


I had Arthur as a studio professor, then worked with him after school. He wouldn't direct you, he was very Socratic in his approach. I wondered when he was going to teach me something! But he would ask questions and get you to find out on your own.

There was a variety of opinion about what our role was as his associates. Some thought we were interpreters of Arthur. I didn't buy into that; I thought we were co-explorers with him. He would intimate something, or ask questions, and solutions would come.

That was always the interesting part of his office. He wasn't the autocratic leader of the office, he was the explorer with you. There were many opportunities for people working there to play and to explore. That was the magic and opportunity, and that's why many could confidently go out and start their own practices.

Nick Milkovich, Nick Milkovich Architects



I think Arthur was the first, and maybe only, international architect that Canada has produced; what it taught me as a young architect was to open my eyes to a bigger world beyond Vancouver. In the 1970s he was already doing work in Saudi Arabia, in Japan, in India. He always came back with slides, and when we designed, he talked about other cultures. He showed me images of India he used as inspiration for SFU, for example.

What I got from him is that we're not limited to the spot where we stand on this earth. We should learn from and absorb other cultures and other experiences, expand our horizons beyond what we're working on today.

The other thing I remember from Erickson: he would never accept anything as complete; he would not put his pencil down. He would come back from travelling and make us change it all. Human sacrifices, financial sacrifices, were not the top priority – to him the ultimate goal was the best work he could create.

When I look at the Olympic Village site, there's an idea about trying new things and expanding beyond the norm of what is Vancouver. I think that is in the spirit of what Erickson would want. He wouldn't want to see us repeat.

James Cheng, James K.M. Cheng Architects



Concept sketches by Arthur Erickson for a number of his buildings.