



Who will build on the legacy?

Three architects strike out in new directions and win accolades in the process

By John Handley
Photographs by John Lee

Three award-winning Chicago architects could be described as the young and the restless.

They're not content to design the same old buildings of the past. They want to create their own vision, and establish their own imprint on the future.

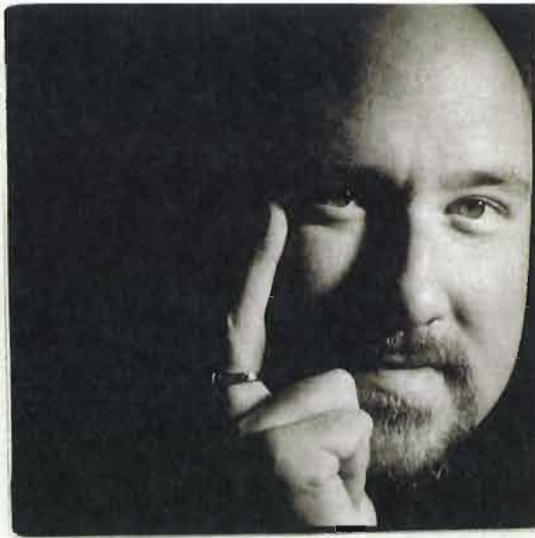
Ellen Bailey Dickson, Thomas Hoepf and Frederick H. Wilson are the most recent winners of the Young Architect Award presented by the Chicago chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

Ellen Bailey Dickson believes Chicago architecture should try to regain the cutting-edge reputation it enjoyed when the Chicago School of Architecture gained worldwide fame a century ago.

"Chicago architects need to bulk up and create their own style. Many still are resting on the laurels of the famed architects of the past—Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright and others," said Dickson, co-founder and co-owner of Bailey Edward Design, a Chicago-based architecture and interior design firm.

Dickson's comments were in response to the current hot issue in the local architectural community caused by out-of-town architects'

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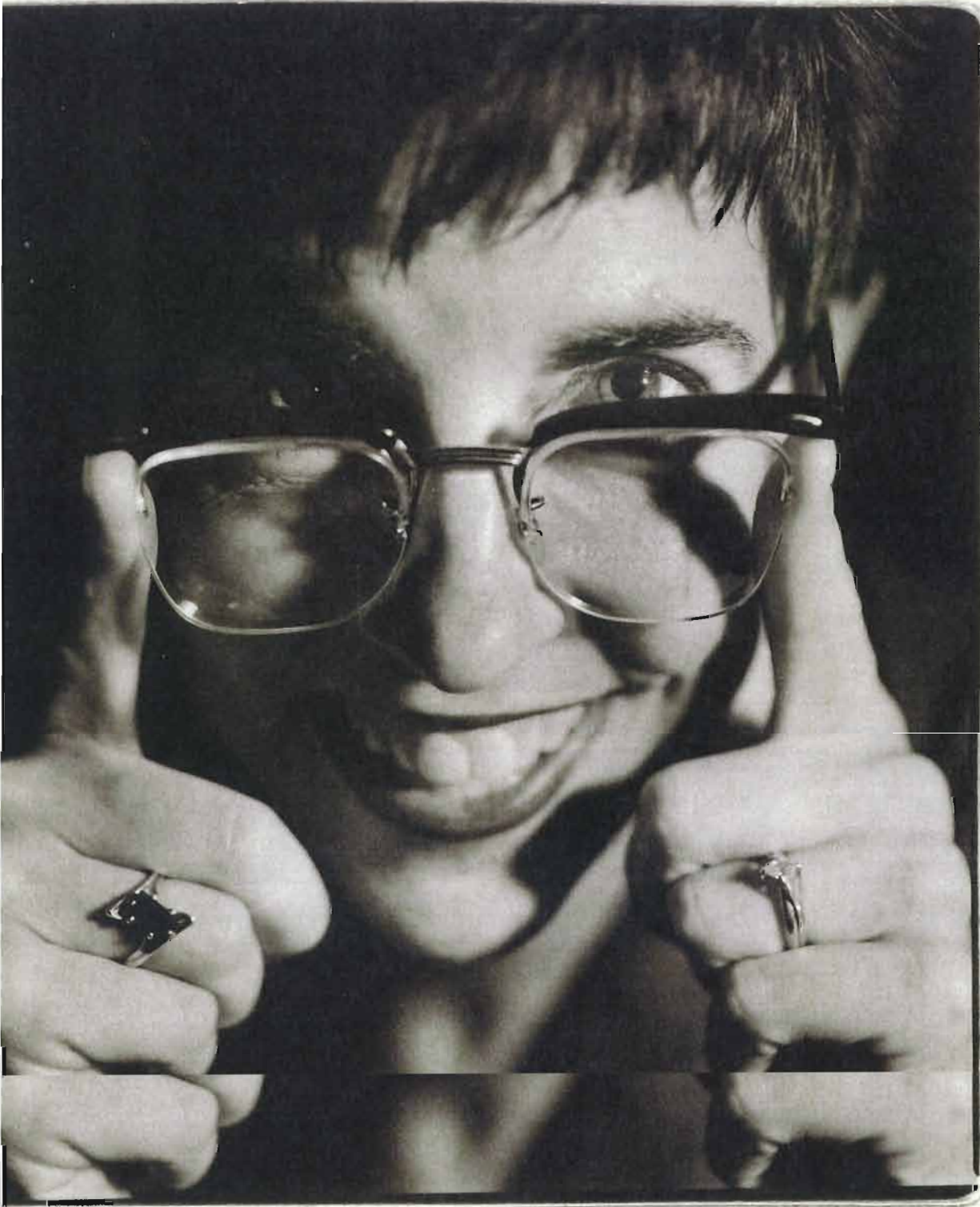


Frederick Wilson



Thomas Hoepf

Dynamic trio Dynamic trio



Ellen Bailey Dickson

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being selected for major Chicago projects.

She also blames today's clients for timidity in design. "Clients at the turn of the 19th Century wanted to show off, to build the best. But clients now are conservative and afraid. They tend to pick a safe, traditional design. Louis Sullivan's Carson Pirie Scott store (on State Street) was not safe. The City of the Big Shoulders is getting narrower shoulders without visionary clients."

The business of her firm is half residential, and half a mix of office and retail. "My hope is that our design can be the architectural reflection of the individual client, not the Ellen Dickson style."

The motto of her firm is: Design no ugly buildings. "You can throw away an ugly birthday card, but ugly buildings can last 20 to 30 years."

"We strive for what we call

'hum buildings.' They are something special. When you see them, they almost produce a resonance in your body. They have visual character; the proportions are right, they are functional and they are going to last. The Monadnock Building hums."

Dickson taught architecture at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana (1986-89) while she was working for a master's degree. She also taught at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee in 1994.

"I left teaching to get professional experience, and test my design theories. The next thing I knew, I was running my own business."

She has been active in AIA Chicago's Adopt-a-School outreach, which seeks to build awareness among 6th graders about the importance of transforming cities and towns into better places to live. "The kids get very excited and design their own buildings," she said.

When Thomas Hoepf looks to the future, he wonders how electronic commerce will affect architecture. Will booming business over the Internet reduce the need for office buildings?

"At core, people are social. There always will be a need to congregate," Hoepf maintains.

He noted that high-rise office buildings are going up in the Loop again. "Seven years ago, I never thought there would be another one. But today there's a new economy."

Would he like to design a skyscraper?

"A high-rise would have an impact on the skyline. It would be a thrill to do a major public building." In the meantime, his firm already is doing a major public building. He is working on the renovation of Concourse G for American Airlines at O'Hare International Airport. The \$86 million project, currently under construction, is high-profile and presents the

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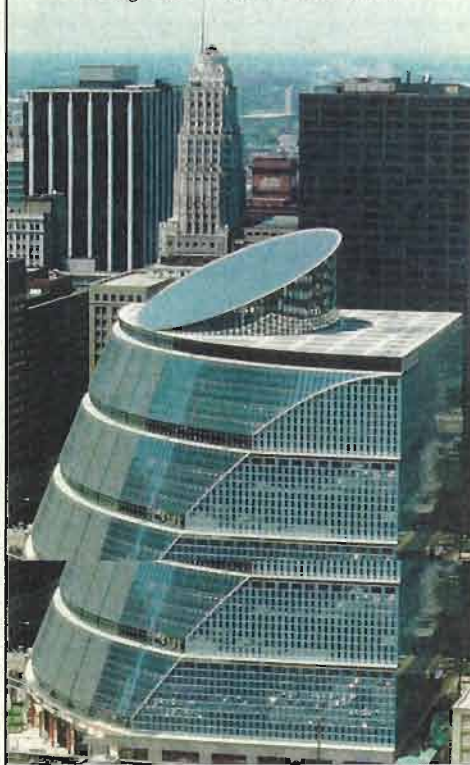
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"Originally built in 1963, the concourse is 700 feet long. Before it had a 9-foot ceiling. We opened it up to get natural light deep into the space with glass walls and an arched and vaulted ceiling 15 to 28 feet high," he said.

Another ongoing project is a three-story atrium that links three existing buildings at the Amoco Research Center in Naperville. "It's like a glass jewel box with bookends."

At first, Hoepf thought about being a musician, a guitar player; but "as a kid I always could draw well. I sketched people and fantasy houses."

Now, architects draw with computers. "Computers have changed the tempo. Work can be produced more quickly. We've done a lot of computer modeling, which allows decisions to be made more quickly. You can see mistakes early."

Since 1994, Hoepf has been principal design architect with Teng & Associates.

Before that, he was a project designer at Holabird & Root for seven years.

Frederick Wilson specializes in residential architecture with his wife, Elissa, as his partner in the Chicago firm of Morgante Wilson Architects Ltd.

"In our designs, we try not to allow the outside world of chaos into the home. The home environment should be soothing, beautiful, with a sense of security, a healthy place to raise children," he said.

"The pace of the world is way too fast and people can't absorb it. Some architecture is an extension of that rapid pace, such as the work of some California architects." Wilson emphasized that "we don't do retreats, but we do take historic styles and re-interpret them for today. We've even done a re-interpretation of modern architecture."

One of his firm's latest projects is the 31-unit condominium at 1515 N. Wells St. It includes a health club on

the first two floors.

Trends for the future? "Things move so rapidly that nothing can be established as a trend because it's not around long enough." Commenting on today's hot residential market, he said: "There's a lot of money out there, and high consumer confidence. But residential is cyclical and will slow down. When that happens, we'll do construction management and interior design."

Wilson said he always enjoyed drawing and also math. "Today, I enjoy all the aspects of the business—from crawling around the mud at a job site to meeting with clients. It's all exciting."

After earning a Master of Architecture degree from the University of Illinois at Chicago, Wilson was hired by Tigerman, Fugman, McCurry Architects Ltd.

He began his own architectural practice in 1994. ■

John Handley is a Tribune staff writer

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