

Natural Connections

Architect Randy Hudson helps clients do more with less, sustainably

By Karen Dabney

When asked why he became an architect, Randy Hudson says, “Jealousy.”

Born in New York City and raised in State College, Hudson always loved art. “When I was a kid, I was always drawing.” He and one of his best buddies used to draw together, and his friend’s choice of a college major led to that jealousy.

Growing up, Hudson didn’t like arithmetic or most math, but excelled at geometry. Hudson’s father told Milton Osborne, then head of the Penn State Department of Architecture, about Randy’s interest in architecture and dislike of math.

Osborne laughed. “That’s not the important thing. What’s important is to love buildings. And if you like to draw, that’s good too,” Hudson recalls him saying.

Hudson was fascinated by farms and landscapes he saw on Sunday drives near State College, and the castles, cathedrals, and cities he saw in his ninth-grade year, when his family lived in Germany.

He enrolled in art at Penn State, thinking that was his first love. At the same time, his childhood friend, the drawing partner, started in architecture at Penn State and told Hudson how cool it was to design buildings.

“I thought, wait a second. How does this guy get to do this thing that I love so much? I should be doing that!” Hudson switched to Penn State’s Bachelor of Architecture program.

“It was a great decision. I focused on building design and graduated with the top design award in my class in the mid-1970s.”

After graduation, Hudson designed residences with Larry Warner in State College and Baxt Architects in New York City. He obtained his master’s in architecture and urban design from Columbia University. For much of his career, he was in charge of design for Hayes Large



Hudson’s drawing of a Bucks County farm-style compound woven into native habitats.



Architect Randy Hudson



A new charred-wood-sided studio tower contrasts with the white modern original home.

Hudson Architecture + Design (3)

Architects in Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland, and Ohio. His work included architecture and landscape architecture design projects for schools, universities, and libraries.

“I really enjoyed working for the greater good — for public projects. I particularly like libraries and their mission as a ‘third place’ where people can connect.”

In State College, his projects include Penn State’s Eastview Terrace residence halls, the Pattee Library Knowledge Commons, and Schlow Centre Region Library.

He says, “The new Schlow Library building was built on one of the most important corners in State College. It anchors Allen Street.”

Hudson worked with then-director Betsy Allen to plan the library, including views for passersby to see readers inside, and for people inside to look out on their town. “Inside, we wanted great environments for different age levels. Outside, the colonnade shows it’s an important public building. Moving the tower of the old building to the new entrance creates continuity between old and new. Traditional building materials like brick and stone give a feeling of solidarity and permanence.”

He currently runs his own company, Hudson Architecture + Design, in State College. “I don’t have a style,” Hudson says. “I do have a way of working — to pay close attention to the site and pay close attention to the people, and try to discover what’s best for them at this place, at this time. I listen very carefully and interpret what I’m hearing to expand the possibilities.”

He draws designs by hand, which allows a quick translation of ideas into vision. He says the eye-hand-paper feedback loop helps him think and visualize. It is open-ended and doesn’t lock in early decisions as computer-generated drawings of initial designs often do. He says construction drawings may use CAD (computer aided design).

Hudson is LEED accredited (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) and says the American Institute of Architects is very concerned about policies that damage the renewable energy industry. “I think about the next generation. I try to be sustainable in the sense of doing the most with the least. If you can accomplish your goals by painting and by moving furniture, do it.”



A new kitchen opens the view to a landscaped entryway.

He seeks to repurpose materials and find ways to improve energy efficiency and safety, citing electric ranges and heat pumps as efficient choices. He reduces or eliminates concrete, one of the biggest users of energy due to the energy-intensive process of manufacturing its primary ingredient, cement.



Hudson sees buildings and their landscapes as continuous, and designs that way. His clients' most frequent requests are for connecting the outdoors and indoors. He opens and adjusts views to emphasize sites' natural assets.

Because populations of native birds and pollinators are declining, and they need native plants to survive, Hudson has adjusted his landscaping approach. Conventional landscaping relies on imported plants, including bluegrass, which provide little food for local pollinators. He works instead with native plants.



A family farm is "rewilded" with new native meadows, trees, shrubs, and a pond.

"American oak species support 400-plus species of North American caterpillars, while Norway maples from Europe support zero. Songbirds feed those caterpillars to their babies. No caterpillars mean no songbirds. And my clients like songbirds."

He has worked with Ernst Seeds to develop native lawn grass substitutes and recommends planting native flowers to help stop the decline of American bees.

Randy Hudson designs landscapes and buildings that help people connect to the world around them. He believes it makes people happier. For more information, visit hudsonarchdesign.com. **T&G**

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