

The Arkansas Designs of E. Fay Jones 1956-1997

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The Edmondson House

Published by the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program
1500 Tower Building, 323 Center Street, Little Rock, AR 72201
(501) 324-9880
An agency of the Department of Arkansas Heritage

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Overview

As an architect, Fay Jones was exceptional in the truest sense: “out of the ordinary course; unusual; uncommon; extraordinary.”¹ Though thoroughly grounded in the principles of organic architecture espoused by Frank Lloyd Wright, Jones made the principles his own and transformed them into a unique architecture that defies labels. While staying abreast of what his peers were doing-his career spanned the International style, Brutalism, post-modernism, and Deconstructivism, among other architectural movements-Jones made a conscious decision to remain “outside the pale.”² In doing so, he created a rich, coherent, and quintessentially American body of work that is, in a word, exceptional.

Teaching and maintaining a practice in the mountains of northwestern Arkansas, Jones concentrated on residential projects for twenty-five years and was not widely known until completion of his Thorncrown Chapel in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, in 1980. The chapel’s stunning design won international acclaim, and the worldwide architectural community finally knew what the owners of Jones-designed homes had known since the 1950s: Fay Jones was an architect of extraordinary artistry and intellect. Thorncrown Chapel received the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Honor Award in 1981, and in 1990 the AIA recognized Jones’s full body of work-“an exquisite architecture of gentle beauty and quiet dignity”³-with its highest tribute, a Gold Medal. In surveys conducted the next year, architects ranked Jones second among six “most admired” living architects and Thorncrown Chapel as the best work of American architecture during the 1980s.⁴

Though still living, Jones was forced to retire at the end of 1997 by illness. The practice he started in 1956 no longer bears his name (now it is Maurice Jennings + David McKee Architects), and Jones’s remarkable body of work is complete.

Fay Jones’s Career

The recognition received by Fay Jones since 1980 culminates a long and exemplary career marked by an intellectual curiosity that might seem at odds with Jones’s personal history and the place where he chose to practice architecture. Born in 1921 in the cotton belt community of Pine Bluff, Arkansas, Jones moved with his parents to the state capital, Little Rock, before the family settled in El Dorado, an oil boom town in southern Arkansas. There, Jones’s parents-Euine Fay Jones, Sr. and Candy Louise (Alston) Jones-operated a restaurant. Although working with his parents is credited with instilling in Jones a solid work ethic,⁵ it also, according to Jones himself, “made me realize that I didn’t want to be in the restaurant business, so I was looking for another field all along.”⁶

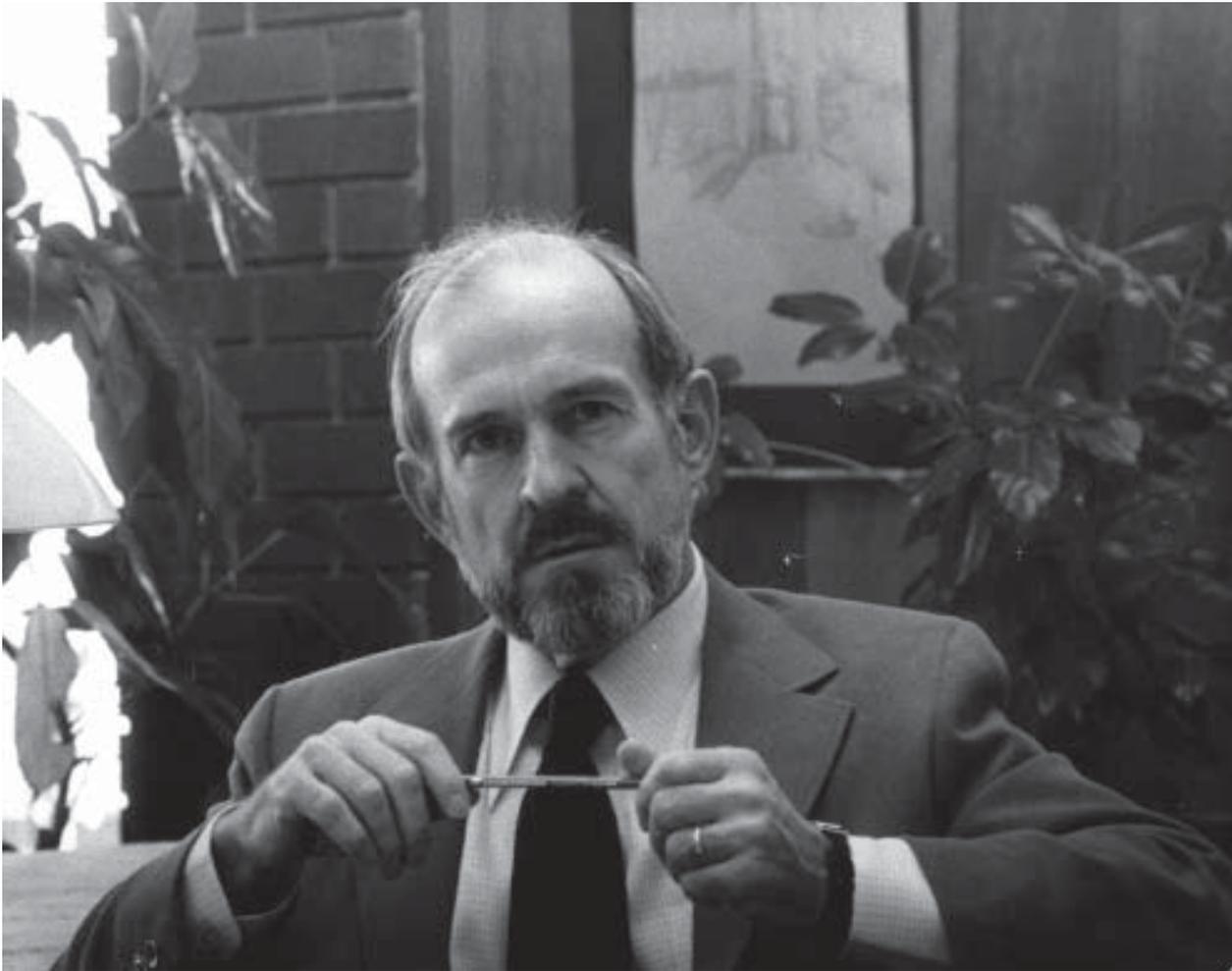
In an interview conducted in the early 1980s, Jones remembered that “my teachers used to send home notes to my parents about my having artistic talent. . . . I’d always liked to draw, and I kept thinking I wanted to be an artist, whatever that meant.”⁷ But it was not only painting and drawing that he enjoyed; he also “liked to build things.”⁸ A red wagon received for Christmas was dismantled for parts, and “I was always building lean-tos against the house.”⁹ The lean-tos eventually gave way to a more sophisticated structure-one that some have suggested presaged the manner in which he later would carefully integrate buildings into their natural surroundings:

“. . . in my high school days I built a pretty fancy treehouse, a big thing I could sleep in. It had a balcony, roll-down canvas blinds, and a fireplace.”¹⁰

Just before graduating from high school in 1938, Jones discovered how to combine his two passions, art and building, into a single career. Between films at the local movie theater, he saw a short subject

on the new Johnson Wax Company building in Racine, Wisconsin, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. Filmed in Technicolor, the short opened up a new world to Jones—the world of architecture. “There was something about that film and seeing that building—all of a sudden it came together,” he later recalled. “This thing called art and this thing construction—it’s all here. And I walked out of that theater knowing that it’s an architect that I want to be.”¹¹

A mixture of deliberate decisions and fate delayed Jones’s entry into the architectural profession until 1950, but his circuitous route to becoming an architect provided him with experiences, skills, and knowledge that shaped his unique approach to design.



E. Fay Jones, architect. Courtesy of Special Collections Division, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.

In addition to his construction projects, as a teenager Jones found time to become an Eagle Scout and “then went on to Sea Scouting, which led to an ambition to attend the United States Naval Academy,” according to one Jones interviewer.¹² Jones thought he was on his way to an appointment to Annapolis when the congressman sponsoring him failed to win re-election. This twist of fate propelled him to the University of Arkansas School of Engineering, the closest he could come at the time to studying architecture in his home state. In his 1992 book *The Architecture of E. Fay Jones, FAIA*, Robert Adams Ivy, Jr. noted that Jones studied civil engineering for two and a half years, and “his buildings would later express and integrate structure into their fabric.”¹³

World War II brought another opportunity for Jones to join the Navy. He enlisted in 1941, the same year that he met Mary Elizabeth Knox, a native of Hot Springs, Arkansas, who was called “Gus” by her friends. They married in 1943, after Jones had completed Naval flight training. Later that year, Jones was sent to the South Pacific, where he spent fifteen months flying dive bombers and torpedo bombers.¹⁴ Even this experience, while not obviously related to architecture, may have affected Jones’s design work. Robert Ivy quotes Jones as saying that he was “fascinated with the three-dimensionality of flight” and points out that “Jones would achieve a soaring lightness and precision akin to flight” in some of his buildings.¹⁵

After being discharged from the Navy in 1945, Jones began looking at architecture programs. He tentatively had decided to enroll at Washington University in St. Louis when he heard about the new program in architecture being started at the University of Arkansas by John Williams, an Oklahoma A&M graduate. Jones promptly signed up and in 1950 became one of the program’s first five graduates.¹⁶

An often-told story relating to the development of Jones’s career recounts his first face-to-face meeting with Frank Lloyd Wright, whose Johnson Wax Company building had brought together Jones’s interests in art and building, inspiring him to become an architect. In 1949, while still in architecture school, Jones learned that Wright would be receiving the AIA Gold Medal in Houston, Texas, within striking distance of the University of Arkansas. A *Smithsonian* article about Jones by Andrea Oppenheimer Dean describes this first encounter with Wright:

Jones organized a field trip to Houston and, the night before the awards ceremony, went with three other students to see the much-publicized new Shamrock Hotel, where he inadvertently stumbled into an exclusive private party thrown by the owner. Fleeing down an empty corridor, an awestruck Jones literally bumped into Wright just as the great man was looking for a way to escape a cocktail party in his honor. Jones remembers “just plastering myself up against the wall to leave him plenty of room to walk by. He must have seen my fright, because he came up to me and stuck out his hand and said, ‘My name is Frank Lloyd Wright. I’m an architect.’ I told him I was an architecture student, that my name was Fay Jones, and Wright kept saying, ‘Jones. I grew up with the Joneses. My mother’s family name was Jones.’”¹⁷

Dean quotes Jones as modestly saying that the bond he developed with Frank Lloyd Wright “seemed to come from my name, from both of us being exactly the same height, and from sharing Welsh heritage.” It was Wright, in fact, who first told Jones that Euine, his little-used first name, is an archaic Welsh form of John.¹⁸

Wright and Jones would meet again, on many occasions, but upon graduation from the University of Arkansas, Jones moved to Houston to accept a fellowship and begin a graduate teaching assistantship in architecture at Rice University. Jones has described Rice as having “an old, established and very high-quality program” which tested the work he had done in the fledgling Arkansas architecture program.¹⁹ With his master’s degree in hand, Jones went on to teach at the University of Oklahoma School of Architecture for two years, 1951-1953. At the time, the Oklahoma program was headed by Bruce Goff, a controversial architect whom Jones names as one of his influences.²⁰ Jones says, “I had never been at a school where there was such tremendous talent . . . such dedication to the work. It was the most artistic, exciting work I have seen to this day. It was an exhilarating time.”²¹

It was Bruce Goff who brought Jones and Frank Lloyd Wright together again. (In 1951, *Life* magazine reported that Goff was “one of the few U. S. architects whom Frank Lloyd Wright considers creative. . . .”²²) During a visit by Wright to the Oklahoma School of Architecture, Goff included Jones in a small faculty dinner with Wright. The discussion that evening led to Wright’s inviting Jones to spend Easter of 1953 at Taliesin West, near Phoenix.²³

In turn, the trip to Arizona brought an invitation from Wright for the entire Jones family (by then including two small daughters) to spend the summer of 1953 at the first Taliesin, near Spring Green, Wisconsin. This four-month apprenticeship was followed by annual Easter pilgrimages by the Jones family to Taliesin West, the last one coming in 1959, shortly before Wright’s death.²⁴

The time spent with Frank Lloyd Wright had a profound effect on Fay Jones’s life and career. Besides adapting to his own use Wright’s principles of organic architecture, Jones followed Wright’s advice in accepting a professorship at the University of Arkansas School of Architecture in 1953. Robert Ivy writes: “Wright advised, ‘Why not go back to Arkansas? It is not spoiled as the rest of the country. You can build there.’”²⁵

Jones certainly knew that the university town of Fayetteville, set in the Ozark Mountains in the northwestern corner of the state, was far removed from the major centers of architectural innovation. (Another architect who has been named by Jones as an influence,²⁶ Edward Durell Stone, was a Fayetteville native who referred to his hometown as “a hotbed of tranquillity.”²⁷) Andrea Oppenheimer Dean reports Jones as saying, “My ambition was limited to doing two to three houses every year and having favorable responses in this area of the country. I wanted respect for what I was doing, but I didn’t expect to become a well-known architect. My focus was on being a good teacher.”²⁸

True to this statement, Jones did no outside design work during his first two years as an assistant professor of architecture at Arkansas. Then, he says, “I designed myself a house, which was the first thing I had built as an official architect on my own. And that house got me another house, and that house got me another house. And I seem to always have had a few houses to do.”²⁹

This unassuming description of how his remarkable practice began sheds light on Jones, the man, and Jones, the architect. Invariably described as “humble,” “courteous,” “gracious,” “warm,” “gentle,” Jones, the man, is anything but ego-driven, helping to explain why—despite his enormous talent—his work was not widely known for many years. Jones, the architect, wanted to design houses, saying: “[T]he house is the one architectural problem that has the most potential for becoming a work of art. It is a building type less encumbered by the many forces that influence nonarchitectural decisions (building committees, realtor logic, complex finance, etc.) and in it all of the purely architectural problems exist.”³⁰

Jones chose to focus on small-scale works throughout his career, even after his reputation grew and larger projects could have been his. Robert Ivy notes, “By choice, Jones’s range has been limited to two major building types—houses and sacred structures.”³¹ Moreover, “Jones focuses on the individual in his work. He has designed no high-rise towers, multifamily houses or new towns; not by chance, this university professor . . . has produced more than 200 private residences—customized shelter for individual clients.”³²

Jones's earliest clients were fellow faculty members of the University of Arkansas: "creative individuals with low budgets."³³ Along with his own house, completed in 1956, the work Jones did for university faculty members enabled him to put to use the principles of organic architecture he had learned from Frank Lloyd Wright.

"By organic architecture," Wright wrote in 1914, "I mean an architecture that *develops* from within outward in harmony with the conditions of its being as distinguished from one that is applied from without."³⁴ Expanding on his definition, Wright said organic architecture is:

First, a study of the nature of materials you elect to use and the tools you must use with them, searching to find the characteristic qualities in both that are suited to your purpose. Second, with an ideal of organic nature as a guide, so to unite these qualities to serve that purpose, that the fashion of what you do has integrity or is *natively fit*, regardless of preconceived notions of style.³⁵

Agreeing with his mentor, with whom he frequently has been compared, Fay Jones said, "We must not reduce architecture to fashion design. Fashion in architecture is beside the point."³⁶ Also like Wright, Jones always aimed to ensure that his buildings *fit*. He once wrote that in organic architecture, "nothing is superfluous, and everything justifies itself by contributing to [a] central generating idea. Frank Lloyd Wright summed it up: 'The whole is to the part as the part is to the whole.'"³⁷



*Alexander House detail.
AHPP photo.*

From the start, however, Jones's designs were no mere copies of Wright's; neither he nor Wright wanted them to be. Jones remembered an admonition on the wall at Taliesin that said "if you understand the underlying principles you will own the effects."³⁸ Wright himself wrote, "It has been my hope to have inspired among my pupils a personality or two to contribute to this work, forms of their own devising. . . ."³⁹

With his first constructed design, his own residence, Fay Jones seemed to pass the test. At Jones's invitation, Wright came to Fayetteville to lecture in 1958. Jones later recounted Wright's visit to the two-year-old Jones home: "Wright himself stood out there by my house, with its vertical board-and-batten siding, and he said, 'You know, I tend to do it like this,' motioning horizontally, 'but you tend to do it like this. Do more of this; I like the drip,' which is how he referred to the way I had the

battens kind of hanging down.”⁴⁰ This vertical emphasis, which became more pronounced later in Jones’s career, is one of several factors that would distinguish Jones’s work from Wright’s.

Wright also introduced the general public-of northwestern Arkansas, at least-to Jones’s work. During his lecture at the University of Arkansas, Wright told the audience that they should go look at Jones’s house if they wanted to see a compelling example of organic design. Two thousand or so people reportedly did just that over the next few days.⁴¹

Soon Jones’s residential designs were attracting national attention. Initially, however, most of the attention came from the home-building public rather than from the professional architectural community. In October of 1959, *House Beautiful* was the first national magazine to publish Jones’s work. In that issue, the magazine featured a house Jones had designed in 1958 for Dr. and Mrs. Calvin Bain in Prairie Grove, Arkansas. The article focused on the home’s “open plan” as well as on the architect’s exquisite use of simple natural materials, concluding with a statement that could apply to a majority of Fay Jones designs: “This ability to get the most out of the simplest materials, combined with the magnificent development of interior space, resulted in true refinement at modest cost.”⁴²

According to Gus (Mrs. Fay) Jones, the magazine article about the Bain residence brought more than 600 unsolicited requests for house plans,⁴³ and it was just the first of several *House Beautiful* articles during the late 1950s and early 1960s that featured Fay Jones houses.⁴⁴ During the same period, Jones’s residential designs also were appearing regularly in other publications aimed at the general public, including *House Beautiful/Building Manual*, *House and Home*, and *Life*.⁴⁵

From the beginning, Jones’s designs exhibited many of the characteristics for which he would become known, and the early magazine articles about his work frequently highlighted these characteristics: respect for the natural setting, sophisticated orchestration of space and light, use of simple but meticulously crafted natural materials, integration of ornament into the overall design, expressed structure, and repetition of forms:

“This is a house that is not only joined to its site but appears born of it. The limestone and sandstone of which the house is built are the same rocks that lie strewn over the landscape.”⁴⁶

“This house and garden work as one, and there is no real separation between them. . . . It’s this continuity that makes the house appear even more spacious than it is.”⁴⁷

“By . . . letting each purposeful space borrow from the next, the architect has created interesting vistas throughout the house. . . .”⁴⁸

“Intriguing glimpses such as this [from the dining area through the kitchen into the entry hall] contribute to the spatial richness of the interior of the house.”⁴⁹

“The house has an open plan. . . [y]et without use of partition walls, each area does have a feeling of apartness and self-containment.”⁵⁰

“The simplicity of the palette [of materials] means there is almost never an interruption in the flow of space by switching to a different material.”⁵¹

“Everywhere solutions of great elegance were found within the limitations of the materials themselves. . . .”⁵²

“Though rich in its living experience, the house is built of materials that are inexpensive locally.”⁵³

“House, landscaping, furnishings and equipment were planned simultaneously as a single entity. Not a gate, lamp, fireplace tool, or intercom grille was overlooked in terms of individualization for the specific design used for this house.”⁵⁴

In 1961, just five years after completion of his first project, Fay Jones received not one but two “Homes for Better Living” Awards from the American Institute of Architects in conjunction with *Life* and *House and Home* magazines—the first of many national design awards he would receive over the course of his career. The awards were for houses built in 1960: the Adrian Fletcher residence in Fayetteville, Arkansas, and the home of Wal-Mart founder Sam Walton, located in Bentonville, Arkansas.

That Fay Jones has a sense of humor, but not an outsized ego, is obvious in a story he has told about his trip to the awards ceremony in Philadelphia in 1961, when he was not yet well known: “*Life* magazine was handling the awards presentation, and when they saw that Fay Jones was a double award winner, they just assumed that I was a woman. They must have thought, ‘Here’s some little girl out there in Arkansas, and between the milking and the plowing she’s knocking out house plans.’ Oh, this was going to be a big story for them.” When the magazine’s associate editor who was covering the awards ceremony realized that Fay Jones was a man rather than a woman, “She tore out of there to call Henry Luce in New York. They weren’t interested in a guy for the cover, but if I’d been a girl I’d have been on the cover of *Life* magazine.”⁵⁵

The year following the “Homes for Better Living” Awards brought the first publication of a Jones design in a national architectural journal. In May of 1962, *Progressive Architecture* featured the residence Jones had designed for himself and his family. Like the articles in popular magazines, this one discussed features that would become characteristic of Jones’s work. Unlike the popular magazines, however, *Progressive Architecture* explored Jones’s design philosophy, giving the architect his first opportunity to explain to a national audience an approach to design that he eventually would articulate hundreds of times to students, the media, other architects, and the general public: “Always, my design philosophy is one of organic fabrication, the unity of part and whole.” In addition, “The solution must grow directly out of the problem itself—the program, the site, orientation, and the materials to be used.”⁵⁶

More AIA awards came in the mid-1960s—Awards of Merit in 1964 for the home of Mrs. Harold Snow in Fayetteville and in 1966 for “Stoneflower,” the Shaheen-Goodfellow weekend home in Eden Isle, Arkansas—and they were followed by more articles about Jones projects in both popular and professional publications. During the late 1960s and through the 1970s, the Jones designs that attracted the most national attention were Stoneflower (later singled out as a harbinger of his design for Thorncrown Chapel) and a residence just outside of Little Rock, Arkansas, designed for Sam Pallone in 1977. Between 1965 and 1971, Stoneflower was featured in *Progressive Architecture*, *House and Home*, *Life*, and the *American Journal of Building Design*. In 1978, the Pallone residence received an AIA Award of Merit and appeared in the publications *Housing* and *Architectural Record*.



*Goetsch-Winkler House.
AHPP photo.*

Summing up Jones's career to that point, a 1979 article in *Art Voices South* told readers that Jones had "become quite famous nationally for his remarkable residential designs. . . ." ⁵⁷

The next year saw the beginning of a new chapter in Fay Jones's career. Already nationally known for his houses, he would become internationally known for a sacred structure that was completed in 1980, and he would receive a new round of national awards, culminating with the AIA Gold Medal in 1990.

Thorncrown Chapel, located just outside the historic Ozark Mountains resort community of Eureka Springs, Arkansas, opened to the public in July of 1980. Its owner, James Reed (an Arkansas native who had retired to the Ozarks after a teaching career in California), expected three or four dozen daily visitors to enjoy the site's panoramic view of the mountains. Instead, by the following winter, 40,000 people had made the pilgrimage to Thorncrown Chapel. Ten years later, Thorncrown was welcoming 250,000 visitors annually. ⁵⁸

Thorncrown Chapel immediately struck a chord with the general public, and the response from the architectural community was nearly as immediate and enthusiastic. In *Architectural Record*, Charles K. Gandee called the chapel "a brilliant testimony to the power of architecture to intensify experience and inspire contemplation, and a fitting gauge by which to measure one architect." ⁵⁹ Writing for the *AIA Journal*, Stanley Abercrombie said "Thorncrown Chapel . . . is more than a striking building. . . . it is an original." ⁶⁰ In *Time* magazine, Wolf Von Eckardt called Thorncrown an "enchanting example of contemporary architecture" and noted that it was "one of the most popular and widely publicized of American buildings." ⁶¹ *Newsweek* pointed out that the chapel had "been praised in almost every architectural journal in the Western world." ⁶² Among the foreign architectural journals that featured Thorncrown Chapel were *Domus*, *Kenchiku to Toshi (Architecture and Urbanism)*, *L'Architettura*, and *The Architectural Review*.

In 1981, Fay Jones received an AIA Honor Award for Thorncrown Chapel, and ten years later an AIA survey named it the best work of American architecture of the 1980s. ⁶³ Clearly, the chapel was a turning point in the career of an architect who had settled in Fayetteville, Arkansas, to teach and practice, wanting "respect for what I was doing" but not expecting "to become a well-known architect."

Thorncrown Chapel's resounding success opened many doors for Fay Jones. However, while appreciating the recognition and the opportunities it brought, Jones chose to stay the course by continuing to teach and maintain a small practice. As explained in an interview two years after Thorncrown's completion, the "desire to give personal attention to projects is why Jones has kept his architectural firm small, rather than letting it expand, as it could have, to match his reputation."⁶⁴ Thus, despite international acclaim, Fay Jones continued to work from the second floor of a small office building (of his own design) in downtown Fayetteville, with four to six people in the firm and no receptionist—"Whoever's handiest to the phone answers it."⁶⁵ As she had for nearly thirty years, Gus Jones handled most of the firm's paperwork.

Fame did bring some changes. Though Jones still did not accept more work than he personally could handle, he was able to be more selective, and his commissions became more geographically far-flung. By the close of the 1980s, his designs could be found in Mississippi, South Carolina, Colorado, and Massachusetts, and projects were in the works for clients in Texas, Michigan, Virginia, and Alabama.⁶⁶

Also by the close of the 1980s, Jones had retired from the University of Arkansas faculty. After a few years of cutting back, he stopped teaching entirely in 1988 in order to focus on a practice that had grown to national scope. The decision to leave teaching was not made lightly. Jones had been a professor of architecture longer than he had been a practicing architect, and his was a distinguished teaching career. During his thirty-five years at the University of Arkansas, Jones served as chairman of the Department of Architecture from 1966 until 1974, when the School of Architecture was created. He then served for two years as the school's first dean before giving up the position to spend more time in the classroom.⁶⁷ During his years of teaching, he received the "Distinguished Faculty Award" in 1961 and the "Faculty Distinguished Achievement Award in Research" in 1961 and 1982. The university also honored him with the "Architecture Distinguished Alumnus Award" in 1976 and the "Distinguished Alumnus Citation" in 1981. In 1980, he was awarded the Rome Prize Fellowship, which afforded time to study in Europe. In 1985, he received the first American Collegiate Schools of Architecture Distinguished Professor Award⁶⁸ for his "sustained creative achievement in the advancement of architectural education."⁶⁹

Though Jones's international reputation was founded on his design of a chapel, the "heart of [his] work . . . continued to be single-family houses—exceedingly well crafted open-plan dwellings that nestle into natural settings, capturing light and views from the outdoors."⁷⁰ The 1980s saw completion of numerous acclaimed residential designs, among them the 1983 Reed residence in rural Hogeeye, Arkansas; the Edmondson residence in Forrest City, Arkansas, an elaborate complex that Jones worked on through the mid-1980s; and the Watson residence in Fairfield Bay, Arkansas, completed in 1986. Indicating Jones's continued appeal to both the public and the architectural community, the Edmondson residence was published in *Southern Accents*, *Progressive Architecture*, and *Architectural Lighting*. In 1984, *Architecture: The AIA Journal* featured the Reed residence, which later received an AIA Honor Award -- Jones's second. The Reed residence also appeared in *L'Architettura* and *Kenchiku to Toshi*. Robert Ivy chose the Watson residence as one of two Jones designs (the other was Thorncrown Chapel) to highlight in his article for *Architecture* following Jones's receipt of the AIA Gold Medal in 1990. The Watson residence was featured in *L'Architettura* in September of 1990.

While concentrating on houses, Jones also had the opportunity during the 1980s to expand on themes sounded in Thorncrown Chapel. An elegant pavilion, known as Pinecote, designed in 1987 for the

Crosby Arboretum in Picayune, Mississippi, earned Jones his third AIA Honor Award in 1990. Robert Ivy calls the pavilion “a masterwork that rivals Thorncrown,”⁷¹ while to William Lake Douglas it is “a timeless building.”⁷² Back in Arkansas, the Mildred B. Cooper Memorial Chapel was completed in 1988 and garnered extensive coverage in architectural and trade publications, including *Progressive Architecture*, *Architecture*, and *Modern Steel Construction*. Jones even returned to Thorncrown, designing in 1989 a separate worship center to relieve the crowding caused by the chapel’s enormous popularity.

In August of 1989, Vernon Reed, director of the AIA Central States Region, initiated Fay Jones’s nomination for the AIA Gold Medal, the highest award the AIA bestows on individual architects. The Gold Medal “serves as recognition for a lifetime of distinguished achievement and significant contributions to architecture and the human environment.”⁷³ Because “it honors a lifetime of achievement and work of historic significance,”⁷⁴ the Gold Medal is not necessarily presented every year.

Comparing Jones to previous Gold Medal recipients Bernard Maybeck (1951) and Richard Neutra (1977), whose careers also encompassed primarily residential designs constructed in a particular area of the country, Vernon Reed wrote “to Fay Jones, a house is a shelter of poetic art. No architect has more skillfully employed ordinary and common materials in a composition which not only solves the utilitarian functions of living, but elevates the art of living into its most noble form.” Pointing out that Jones “serves as a role model for the largest segment of architectural firms in this country—small firms serving mainly a local or regional client base—and consistently demonstrates to them the value of design integrity,” Reed asserted that “there are no Fay Jones designed structures that are embarrassments to his career. Every single work of his is a masterpiece. Every building epitomizes his ability to order every piece of building material into a magic web where functional, technical, and esthetic solutions intertwine into a single brilliant work of art.”⁷⁵

Reed’s cover letter also noted the unlikely location of Jones’s practice in the “Ozark mountains of northwest Arkansas” and the great popularity of Jones’s designs: “[T]he public loves his work, as evidenced by widespread publication of his work in consumer magazines, as well as professional journals.” He closed by saying, “We should honor this architect of incomparable talent. The selection of Fay Jones would grace the AIA Gold Medal and increase its stature in the eyes of the public.”⁷⁶

The Gold Medal nomination was supported by three pages of references to glowing comments on Jones’s work by a number of architectural authorities (cited more extensively in the section on Jones’s influence). Also supporting the nomination were letters from Harlan E. McClure, FAIA, Dean Emeritus of the Clemson University College of Architecture; Charles W. Moore, FAIA, O’Neil Ford Centennial Professor in Architecture, The University of Texas at Austin; William Marlin, architectural critic and biographer; and Richard Longstreth, Associate Professor of Architectural History, The George Washington University.

In being selected to receive the 1990 AIA Gold Medal, E. Fay Jones of Fayetteville, Arkansas, joined an exceptionally distinguished list of architects who collectively have shaped the built environment not only of the United States but of much of the industrialized world. Charles McKim, Sir Edwin Lutyens, Louis Sullivan, Eliel Saarinen, Frank Lloyd Wright, Louis Skidmore, Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, Eero Saarinen, Alvar Aalto, Marcel Breuer, Louis Kahn, and I. M. Pei are among the forty-seven architects who preceded Jones in receiving the Gold Medal.

*The Hermitage.
AHPP photo.*



The award was presented to Fay Jones at a ceremony held at the National Building Museum in Washington, D. C. on the evening of February 22, 1990. During the afternoon, he was praised by President George Bush at a White House reception. “Jones has created a truly American architecture that is respected the world over,” said the president.⁷⁷ That night, Prince Charles of Great Britain, in Washington to take part in an AIA conference being held in conjunction with the Gold Medal ceremony, also praised Jones’s buildings for evoking “the amplitude of nature without damaging nature.”⁷⁸

Demonstrating that ten years of international renown had done little to enlarge his ego, Jones, who followed Prince Charles to the dais, began his acceptance speech by saying “he felt like a country-and-western singer following Luciano Pavarotti.”⁷⁹ In a speech noted for its brevity,⁸⁰ Jones spoke “quietly, modestly, yet with great assurance and civility”⁸¹ about the architectural continuum, recognizing the value of historic architecture while cautioning against slavish imitation: “If one has a belief in the continuity of past and present-and future-then part of the pleasure of his work will lie in the creative connections he can make between that work and its sources, sources not simply quoted but transformed.”⁸² He might have used as examples his own highly successful efforts to transform the principles of organic architecture into entirely original designs.

The text of the citation that accompanied the Gold Medal was an eloquent tribute to Jones from his peers:

The American Institute of Architects is privileged to confer the 1990 Gold Medal on Fay Jones, FAIA, who, for more than four decades, has created an exquisite architecture of gentle beauty and quiet dignity that celebrates the land and embraces the American spirit. Complex yet delicate, grand in vision yet human in scale, bound firmly to the earth yet soaringly spiritual, his work strikes an emotional chord that touches the soul of all who encounter it. Humble, original, intelligent, and uncompromising, he embodies everything that architecture can and should be.

Additional proof of the very high esteem Jones enjoyed within the ranks of the architectural profes-

sion came the next year. Hundreds of respondents to a 1991 *Architecture* magazine survey ranked him second among six “most admired” living architects.

By the time he received the Gold Medal, Fay Jones’s productive years unfortunately were numbered, his career destined to be ended by debilitating illness. Even so, the early 1990s brought more well-received designs, perhaps most notably the Marty V. Leonard Chapel in Fort Worth, Texas, and Pine Eagle, a small chapel at a Boy Scout camp in southern Mississippi.

In terms used by Jones when describing his approach to design, the chapel in Fort Worth presented a “problem”-“the program, the site, orientation, and the materials to be used”-considerably different from the sorts of projects for which he was known. The chapel occupies an urban site on a “a nearly treeless hillside overlooking Interstate 30 west of downtown”⁸³ Fort Worth. Because of its location, “the Leonard Chapel is made of brick, Philippine mahogany and glass, and is turned inward to minimize distractions and provide a secluded place for meditation.”⁸⁴ Termed “an impressive achievement”⁸⁵ by the architectural critic for *The Dallas Morning News*, the chapel demonstrated Jones’s ability to use his design philosophy and principles to solve any “problem” presented to him.

A more typical “problem” for Jones was the rural lakeside site of Pine Eagle, the tiny (500 square feet) chapel/multi-purpose pavilion he designed for a Boy Scout camp. At the chapel’s dedication in November of 1991, Jones said the small structure “attempts to align itself with the earth, the water, and the sky . . . with the wonderful bounties of nature.”⁸⁶ Robert Ivy asserts that Pine Eagle captured “the spiritual qualities of transcendence and imminence in its frame. The structure both points upward-aligning itself with universal, timeless forces-and opens outward-framing the immediate world like a Zen window.”⁸⁷ Pine Eagle was just one more example of Fay Jones’s enormous gift, in Vernon Reed’s words, for ordering “every piece of building material into a magic web. . . .”⁸⁸



Nelms House. AHPP photo.

Sadly, illness forced Fay Jones to retire from his architectural practice at the end of 1997. Designs for six residences, a visitor center, two pavilions, two chapels, and a fountain rounded out the final five years of his career.⁸⁹ Most of these projects were not in his home state but, fittingly enough, the very last completed Jones design -- the Fulbright Fountain,⁹⁰ dedicated in 1998 -- is on the campus of the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville.

The Design Philosophy and Principles of Fay Jones

“ . . . as architects we have the potential to build buildings that not only accommodate our functional needs, but stand as models which represent the best of our ideas. We have the power and responsibility to shape new physical and spatial forms in the landscape-forms that will sustain and nourish and express that all-important intangible, the human condition at its spiritual best.”⁹¹

Throughout the forty-one years of his career, Fay Jones sought to design buildings that would “sustain and nourish and express . . . the human condition at its spiritual best.” He did so by consistently following the same design philosophy and principles. As he first explained to a national audience in 1962: “Always, my design philosophy is one of organic fabrication, the unity of part and whole.” Further, he said, “The solution must grow directly out of the problem itself-the program, the site, orientation, and the materials to be used.”⁹²

Over and over, and more frequently as his reputation grew, Jones articulated his philosophy and principles. Speaking for a professional audience in a 1983 interview with William Lake Douglas, Jones said:

Frank Lloyd Wright and the principles of organic architecture have had the greatest influence on my architecture. Those principles have to do with relating, symbiotically, a building to its site, and with displaying and using materials honestly. What made Wright’s work appeal to me was the total attention he gave to everything: landscape, interior design, appointments. And the “part and whole” relationship-each part inner-linking and intertwining so that it is all out of the same piece of cloth.⁹³

In the same year, but being interviewed for an *Arkansas Times* magazine article, Jones went into more detail explaining his approach to design to a lay audience:

The building-site relationship is one of the tenets of organic architecture-this strong sense of the symbiotic relationship of a building to its site. Somehow you’re trying to look at the ideal aspects of the site, trying to build a building that’s responsive to its environmental context. . . . You’ve got to incorporate the place into making the architecture so that the natural fact and the artifact are working together to their mutual benefit. . . .

Another tenet of Wrightian architecture is the part-whole relationship in the bigger and smaller elements of a building. The part is to the whole as the whole is to the part-that is the simplest definition that Mr. Wright gave to organic architecture. . . .

Another tenet involves the nature of the materials-that is, using materials according to their nature. You don’t embarrass a material by putting it into some inferior position. . . . What ever it is doing, it’s doing that job better than anything else could, and it’s in a position of honor in the whole ensemble.⁹⁴

Elaborating on the “part-whole relationship,” Jones often talked about the “generating idea” needed to create a good design:

“Organic architecture has a central generating idea; as in most organisms every part and every piece has a relationship. Each should benefit the other; there should be a family of form, and pattern. You should feel the relationship to the parts and to the whole.”⁹⁵

And:

“The generating idea establishes the central characteristics, or the essence, or the nucleus, or the core; it’s the seed idea that grows and generates the complete design, where it manifests itself from the large elements down to the small subdivision of the details.”⁹⁶

Other themes frequently sounded by Jones in discussing his work are closely related to the organic



*Cherokee Village
Townhouse. AHPP
photo.*

ideal. For instance, there was the need for architecture to transcend mere building to become art: “You could have [a design] very mechanistically diagrammed out and you could build box-like things that [serve the need for shelter], but that’s mere building—that’s just construction. Technically it might be all right, but it’s not architecture. Architecture has got to transcend that some way.”⁹⁷

Jones also sometimes linked architecture and music, a practice that dated back to his years at the University of Oklahoma, teaching under Bruce Goff in the early 1950s. Robert Ivy says Jones “recalled Goff’s passion for music, that recordings of works by Villa-Lobos, Ravel, and Debussy reverberated through the building and provoked discussions of music’s relationship to architecture.”⁹⁸ Jones himself said, “Music is more than something for the soul; it is information that one can absorb and analyze. In listening to music, I hear certain systems of order, rhythms, and counterpoint which I feel can take place in architecture, in built form, as form and space. Architecture is a kind of instrument on which nature can play.”⁹⁹

In adapting the principles of organic architecture to his own work, Fay Jones was embracing, according to Robert Ivy, “an evolving tradition that extends back 200 years. Romantic philosophers, led by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and their literary popularizers unleashed forces still reverberating when they proclaimed the supremacy of nature. Equating nature and truth, they made nature the criterion by which all phenomena are united.”¹⁰⁰

In a section called “Nature and Romanticism” in his book about Jones, Ivy explains the rise of Romanticism in literature and the parallel architectural movement away from “a classical system based on mathematical models to a pluralistic melange.”¹⁰¹ The transcendentalists of New England—Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Walt Whitman, and others—brought the discussion of nature and truth to this country. Ivy notes that the transcendentalists had a strong influence on Fay Jones’s mentor, Frank Lloyd Wright, and that Emerson even described organic architecture: “We feel, in seeing a noble building . . . that it is spiritually organic; that is, had a necessity, in Nature, for being; was one of the possible forms in the Divine mind, and is now only discovered and executed by the artist, not arbitrarily composed by him.”¹⁰²

Writing in 1914, Frank Lloyd Wright discussed the evolution of organic architecture in America:

[The] ideal of an organic architecture for America was touched by [Henry Hobson] Richardson and [John Wellborn] Root, and perhaps other men, but was developing consciously twenty-eight years ago in the practice of [Dankmar] Adler & [Louis] Sullivan, when I went to work in their office. This ideal combination of Adler & Sullivan was then working to produce what no other combination of architects nor any individual architect at that time dared even preach-a sentient, rational building that would owe its “style” to the integrity with which it was individually fashioned to serve its particular purpose-a “thinking” as well as “feeling” process, requiring the independent work of a true artist imagination. . . .”¹⁰³

While carrying forward a philosophical, artistic tradition, Fay Jones’s organic architecture was not imitative. As he discussed in his 1990 Gold Medal speech, he saw architecture as a continuum and took pleasure in making creative connections between his work and “its sources-sources not simply quoted, but transformed.”

That Jones transformed rather than quoted his sources is widely acknowledged. William Marlin asserts that “Jones is not an emulous disciple of Wright but a transporting deliverance, evolving organic values beyond his hero’s vocabulary.”¹⁰⁴ Jack Golden, founding editor of *Friends of Kebyar* and a former student of Jones at the University of Oklahoma, said Jones “has proven his architectural maturity by creating his own traditions and mastering the art of integrating structure and nature to produce architecture of real and lasting beauty.”¹⁰⁵ Writing for *Atlantic Monthly*, Philip Langdon discussed the issue at some length:

Fay Jones’s career has turned out to be more fruitful than those of most Wright devotees. Nearly seven hundred people apprenticed under Wright from Taliesin’s founding, in 1932, until the master’s death, in 1959, and the Taliesin organization continues to train students and design buildings. Yet hardly a word is heard about most architects who came under Wright’s tutelage. While Wright himself is proclaimed a genius and celebrated with an endless series of books and museum exhibits, the apprentices are, as a group, held in low esteem in the profession. . . .

There are many sources for this disdain-among them an uneasy sense that those who stayed too long in Wright’s rural compounds became architectural cultists. . . .

Jones turned out different. He absorbed the underlying principles of Wright’s work and has used them to devise remarkably satisfying houses that are not clones of Wright’s.”¹⁰⁶

Wright himself identified one distinction between his work and Jones’s when he visited the Jones residence in 1958 and commented on the vertical emphasis created by the home’s board and batten siding.¹⁰⁷ This vertical emphasis became more pronounced as Jones’s work evolved, culminating in the soaring spaces of his chapels.

Another obvious distinction was Jones’s use of expressed structure, a characteristic that Robert Ivy suggests hearkened back to Jones’s study of civil engineering.¹⁰⁸ As Jones explained in an interview with William Marlin: “What is significantly different [about my work] is that I have been interested in showing the structure, such as the beams, joints, joinery, and other kinds of connectors that are clearly articulated in my buildings.” By contrast, Jones said, “Wright, for some deeply felt reasons, was always after spatial plasticity, and you often have a helluva time figuring out what is actually holding his things together, or up. . . .”¹⁰⁹

Andrea Oppenheimer Dean states: “Wright’s and Jones’s work diverge in much the same way as do the architects’ temperaments. There is a soft side to the architecture and personality of Jones that is seldom seen in Wright. While some of Wright’s buildings feel dark, Jones’s are always suffused with light.”¹¹⁰ Similarly, Philip Langdon points out that “Jones’s geometry is less demanding than the master’s. His floor plans are looser, for example, and his furniture is relaxed and informal.”¹¹¹

The philosophical underpinnings of organic architecture, translated into the principles that Fay Jones learned from Frank Lloyd Wright-building-site relationship, part-whole relationship, nature of materials-brought coherence to Jones’s work. It was his gift, however, to be able to use the principles to design buildings that “sustain and nourish and express . . . the human condition at its spiritual best.”

Architecture in Arkansas

Arkansas is an unlikely place to find an architect of Fay Jones’s talent and stature. Edward Durell Stone, another Arkansas native who reached the highest echelons of the architectural profession, took the more predictable route to success by leaving Arkansas at an early age to study at top schools (Harvard and M.I.T.), eventually establishing an East Coast practice that grew to international proportions.

By staying in (or, actually, returning to) Arkansas, Fay Jones consigned himself to having mainly a regional audience until the world took notice of Thorncrown Chapel. In choosing Arkansas as home base, he was-as always-following his own drummer. Ultimately, however, he proved that exceptional talent can be fulfilled no matter its location, and recognition will follow.

For its entire history, Arkansas has been-relative to the rest of the U.S.-a poor and poorly-educated state with a small population. Better known for its natural attractions than its man-made ones, Arkansas has an architectural legacy that is much different from older and more affluent states-and one that is not nearly so well documented. Only now is a book on the state’s architecture underway.¹¹²



Raheen. AHPP photo.

A few men billed themselves as architects prior to the Civil War in Arkansas, but they are thought to have been skilled craftsmen who planned buildings that they constructed. (One, an “R. Larrimore,” who briefly lived in Little Rock during the 1840s, advertised both his architectural and undertaking skills.¹¹³) Not until after the Civil War did architects deserving of the title begin settling permanently in Arkansas, coming to take advantage of opportunities created by war’s end. Between 1865 and 1870, for example, Little Rock’s population more than tripled, spawning a building boom that had attracted architect Thomas Harding by 1869.¹¹⁴ He was followed over the next few decades by several others, notably Charles L. Thompson, who arrived in 1886 and practiced until 1938. Because most other towns in Arkansas during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were too small to sustain an architect’s practice, Thompson and his firm (as well as other Little Rock-based architects) designed buildings all over the state. Thompson’s significant impact on the state’s built environment was recognized by the listing of more than 120 of his firm’s designs in the National Register in 1982.

A few of the architects who came to Arkansas were professionally trained (including one, George R. Mann, who had attended M.I.T. and worked briefly for McKim, Mead, and White¹¹⁵), but most either had started as draftsmen and worked their ways up or were schooled in engineering. As educational and licensing requirements became more stringent, young Arkansans interested in becoming architects had to leave the state to go to school. Some of them returned home to practice; others remained away. A major turning point for the architectural profession in the state came with the creation of the architecture program at the University of Arkansas in 1946—the program from which Fay Jones was one of the first five graduates in 1950.

The number of architects in Arkansas increased with the availability of professional training in the state. Many Arkansas-trained architects established practices in smaller Arkansas cities, so that those needing the services of an architect did not always have to turn to Little Rock for assistance. However, even in Little Rock, architectural firms remained relatively small and typically served no more than a regional clientele. (Today, there are some exceptions to this rule. For example, the firm founded by Charles L. Thompson in the late nineteenth century, now known as Cromwell Truemper Levy Thompson Woodsmall Inc., has thirty-nine architects and engineers [and a total staff of 103] and a national practice in certain specialized areas.)

Considering the size of its population (currently about 2.5 million) and the income levels of its residents, Arkansas has been adequately served—perhaps surprisingly well served—by architects since the late nineteenth century. Today, the AIA lists 128 architectural firms in Arkansas, with small firms located in cities and towns throughout the state. In Little Rock, the state’s largest city, a few dozen small to mid-sized firms are in business, along with three firms considered large by Arkansas standards.¹¹⁶

While there has been no particular dearth of architects in Arkansas, the state has produced only two—Edward Durell Stone and Fay Jones—whose names are recognized nationally and internationally. Of the two, only Jones received his architectural training and established his practice in the state. Also, of the two (and of all Arkansas architects), only Fay Jones was selected to receive the AIA Gold Medal. Given these facts, it is safe to say that there never has been, and may never be again, another architect in Arkansas like Fay Jones—an architect of extraordinary talent who was born and educated in the state, chose to practice there, and went on to international acclaim and the AIA’s highest honor.

Fay Jones's Influence on American Architects and Architecture

From the time he began architecture school in 1946 until he retired from practice in 1997, Jones saw the rise and fall of a number of architectural styles or movements. While he was an architecture student at the University of Arkansas, the International style still generally held sway, but in his first few years out of school, Jones was immersed in organic architecture as practiced-very differently-by Bruce Goff and Frank Lloyd Wright. (Jones has said that Goff's approach to organic design produced buildings that "began to look like organisms."¹¹⁷) After his teaching career started at the University of Arkansas, Jones saw fellow Arkansan Edward Durell Stone emerge as a leading practitioner of Neo-Formalism, and Jones was a self-professed admirer of Louis Kahn, sometimes associated with Brutalism. Post-modernism and Deconstructivism also appeared on the architectural scene before the end of Jones's long career.

As a professor of architecture, Jones stayed abreast of architectural trends. As a practitioner, however, he chose his own course. Writing about Jones's "place in contemporary architecture," Robert Ivy has said:

"Outside the pale," Jones's admission of noninvolvement in contemporary ideological dialogue, sums up his attitude toward most contemporary building and frames an understanding of this architect's work. An individualist whose work has followed a steady path, Jones has maintained a calm voice through years of raging debate, clashing philosophies, and changing styles. The voice is firm with self-knowledge. Jones's path has been his own.¹¹⁸

Ivy goes on to note: "In any review of the architecture of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, Jones's work stands resolutely alone, revealing no parallel, no peer, and no apparent successor."¹¹⁹

If Jones left "no apparent successor," did he have no real influence on architecture during his career? American architects said otherwise in 1991, when they named him one of the country's most admired living architects. While the influence of eminent architects sometimes is demonstrated by pointing to designs by other architects that obviously mimic the work of the masters, the influence of Fay Jones is more subtle and, some would say, more profound. To mimic a Jones design is to betray the principles Jones followed in his work. Architects who claim his influence, and do so justifiably, do not design buildings to look like his. Rather, they strive to emulate his design principles and to infuse into their work the power and spirit of Jones's best designs. They are *inspired* by Jones, not merely influenced by him.

The physical characteristics of Jones's work that exerted the most influence-or provided the most inspiration-remained very consistent over the years. From the beginning of his career, Jones was admired for his ways with space, light, and natural materials, as well as for the coherence of his designs. The very first article published on a Jones design (in 1959) commented on "the magnificent development of interior space."¹²⁰ Similar comments about Jones's orchestration of space and light, about his meticulous crafting of natural materials, about his buildings' relationships to their settings, and about the relationship between small details and the overall design are found in a majority of the articles written on Jones's buildings. (See previous discussion in section on Jones's career.)

Also from the beginning of his career, those who wrote about Jones's work often moved past analysis of the physical attributes of his buildings to discuss the emotional impact the buildings had on those

who experienced them. For example, at one Jones-designed house built in the early 1960s, the living room's "view, changing with the time of day and season of the year, is a continuing source of refreshment."¹²¹ The residence of Mrs. Harold Snow, for which Jones won an AIA Award of Merit in 1964, was described as "a revelation of the part that architecture can play in outlook, in mood, in depth of enjoyment."¹²²

Fay Jones's influence on other architects is manifest in their responses to his work. In 1976, architect John H. Howe of Minneapolis wrote to Jones:

I am a jealous wreck [after seeing slides of your work]. I can only gasp at the magnificence and richness of your interiors. Indeed your living rooms are twentieth century baronial halls; withal so harmonious, broad in concept and delightful in detail, all parts related to the whole. The flow of space, and integration between exterior and interior, is unparalleled.¹²³

The following year (and three years before Thorncrown Chapel opened to world-wide acclaim), architect O'Neil Ford said, "Most people don't know it yet, but Fay Jones is one of the most outstanding architects in America."¹²⁴

Charles Moore also was among those in the architectural profession who recognized Fay Jones's greatness early on. In the foreword to Robert Ivy's 1992 book on Jones, Moore wrote:

It must be almost forty years since I first saw a Fay Jones house. . . . I remember thinking it was beautiful-that it had rich and mysterious spaces . . . [and] there were fiendishly ingenious details. . . .

. . . When [Thorncrown Chapel] was finished, and dazzled every architecture jury in sight, then clearly the time was right for Fay's extraordinary talent, at once familiar and amazing, to become public-celebrated in books and magazines worldwide. Suddenly the secret was out and the wonderful works of Fay Jones were the center of public celebrations, culminating in his 1990 AIA Gold Medal.

I have no real excuse to congratulate myself that one of my continuing enthusiasms for all these decades has become a national historic treasure. But it does make me proud, even thrilled, to see that this powerful and special genius who embodies nearly all the qualities we admire in an architect has become a part of the public realm.¹²⁵

Thorncrown Chapel, of course, brought Jones and his work to the attention of a much wider audience. Just as thousands of average people who visited Thorncrown fell under its spell, architectural authorities were awed by what Jones had accomplished. The "Statement of Contribution" that is part of Jones's nomination for the AIA Gold Medal refers to the architectural community's response to Thorncrown:

In 1986, *Architecture* magazine invited its readers to nominate buildings of the last 10 years for addition to its 1976 list of the best works of architecture of America's first 200 years. The building that evoked the greatest response was the tiny, remote Thorncrown Chapel. . . . In his editorial, Don Canty quoted an anonymous nominator: ". . . the most complete and fully expressed architectural thought built in the last 10 years." Critic Wolf Von Eckardt, writing in *Time* magazine, compared Jones's work to music: "The Chapel is as evocative as a Bach fugue."¹²⁶



*Alexander House
interior. AHPP photo.*

Writing for *Architectural Record*, Charles K. Gandee said: “For the last 30 years, Jones has been gradually perfecting a distinctive vernacular that seems to have as its goal the symbiotic melding of architecture and landscape. . . . Thorncrown Chapel . . . bespeaks a lifelong pursuit of mastering materials, forms, and details.”¹²⁷

As Thorncrown Chapel became widely known, perfect strangers—some in the architectural profession and others not—let Fay Jones know what the building meant to them:

“I recently saw photographs of your Thorncrown Chapel in the *AIA Journal*. What a glorious statement of hope. . . . I’m not sure why I’m writing to you, except that your work is a great encouragement to me.”¹²⁸

“This is simply to tell you how much I like and admire your Thorncrown Chapel. . . . I hope . . . you will not have reason to cringe at the sight of the influence your chapel will have on others.”¹²⁹

“I was in your audience at MIT the other evening and now I know why I like Thorncrown Chapel so much. . . . I felt a soaring of the mind and spirit. . . . And what a teacher you are! As a lay person I learned a great deal and one could see from the response of the students that they did too. Your personal integrity hovered over the podium as you spoke.”¹³⁰

As his reputation grew, Jones increasingly was in demand as a speaker, particularly at schools of architecture. After hearing Jones lecture at the University of Hawaii Architecture School in 1987, Elmer Botsai, FAIA wrote: “You have restored my soul. . . . Obviously your work speaks for itself. You are without question one of the most consummate architects in the history of American architecture.”¹³¹

Rick Phillips, a Honolulu architect who also heard Jones speak at the University of Hawaii Architecture School, later wrote an article for *Friends of Kebyar* in which he called Jones “nothing less than a figure of historical significance at a time when architecture sorely needs some ‘history in the mak-

ing.” Pegging Jones as “an intellectual architect,” Phillips said that “he is an accessible intellectual. His games challenge, but all of us can play.”¹³²

Shortly before Jones was nominated for the 1990 AIA Gold Medal, Philip Langdon wrote in *Atlantic Monthly* that “architects admire Jones because he has had the tenacity to continue exploring a small number of enduring ideas rather than accommodating himself to every shift of fashion from Bauhaus to Deconstructivism. . . .”¹³³ Further, according to Langdon:

Fay Jones exerts a powerful appeal because he brings to the fore two deep-rooted American ideals. One is that of the individualist who develops a personal philosophy about his work and holds to it, even when others in his field are heading in an entirely different direction. The other is that of the lovingly designed and carefully crafted single-family house in a setting imbued with nature.¹³⁴

Similar points about Jones were made in the Gold Medal nomination’s “Statement of Contribution”:

His work articulates a set of unified philosophies which embrace man’s great intellectual and intuitive powers. . . .

He has unselfishly shared those philosophies with students and practitioners for over 35 years—all across the nation—as his special insights are sought by colleges and universities, by AIA chapters and components for lectures, exhibitions, and design awards jury duty.

His work is acclaimed by ordinary folks—those who have some difficulty understanding the trendy fashions of architecture—as well as by architecture’s most severe and knowledgeable critics.

His form of practice—small in size, limited in building types, mainly regional in scope—has proved to be exactly right for his peers to be inspired by his design accomplishments. With over 80% of the architectural firms in the United States identifying with his size and form of practice, Fay Jones stands as an exemplar for honesty in design.¹³⁵

In closing, the “Statement of Contribution” asserts: “Fay Jones’s gentle, nurturing design work enriches human life; . . . it truly represents the most consummate pure architectural design that our profession is capable of producing.”¹³⁶

Supporting Jones’s Gold Medal nomination were letters from well-known authorities, including Charles Moore, who admitted to having been “an ardent fan of Fay Jones since what must have been the late ‘fifties,” when he visited his first Jones-designed house. “It represented the kind of effective focus of a boundless capacity for caring that I thought then and still think is unequalled in an architect of our time,” Moore wrote. Moreover, Jones’s work “is I think truly great transcendent architecture, all the greater because it speaks intimately to many, many people.”¹³⁷

Harlan E. McClure, Dean Emeritus of the Clemson University College of Architecture (and, like Jones, an American Collegiate Schools of Architecture Distinguished Professor), wrote of Jones’s “extraordinary capacity to deal brilliantly with a broad range of American building problems in which his organization of space and his uncommon use of commonplace materials elevates them to poetic compositional elements beautifully ordered to capture the joy of living and the grandeur of a place.” Calling Jones “a complete master of his art,” McClure stated: “This gentle unassuming man has built with knowledge, integrity, and a grace that has placed his work in a rare category, appreciated by the general public as well as by more sophisticated critics.”¹³⁸

William Marlin began his letter of support by explaining that “over twenty years of newspaper and magazine commentary, and more recently as the authorized biographer of Buckminster Fuller and Frank Lloyd Wright, I have been privileged to explore and explain the values and visions of some of the most momentously creative, profoundly principled figures of our century.” Seeking to learn more about greatness, Marlin wrote, “it was not long before I was drawn to the radiantly dynamic example of Fay Jones, who is integrity incarnate-and an artesian font of inspiration for those who genuinely care about the practical dimensions of philosophic depth.” Speaking of the architecture and the man, he stated: “If the adroit siting, lyrical clarity, engaging scale, and superb detailing of [Jones’s] work rings true for a great many people, this is in part because his own honesty, humanity, creative honor, and capacity for reverence have found compelling countenance.” Finally: “While it cannot be said that Fay Jones has defined, codified, and evangelized some new architectural epoch, whether of style or theory, he has discerned and dramatized a needed direction, bringing off his exploration of both historical precedent and contemporary imperative with consummate discipline.”¹³⁹

Architectural historian Richard Longstreth, who “has focused on American subjects of the 19th and 20th centuries,” discussed Fay Jones’s contributions in the realm of domestic design, saying: “The caliber of the work itself is very high, and collectively it reaffirms the importance of such a practice to the legacy of modern American architecture.” Like many other Jones observers, he noted that “Jones has always been very much his own architect; his work is distinct and distinguished unto itself.” Asserting that “Jones is among the few architects of any generation who has mastered the faculty of grounding design in the basics of the program, while developing the design so that it transcends those concrete factors,” Longstreth summarized by saying Fay Jones “is an architect who resists easy categorization, but one of great artistry, originality, and distinction.”¹⁴⁰

Jones’s selection to receive the 1990 Gold Medal brought more personal tributes from his peers. Hugh Newell Jacobsen wrote a particularly warm and enthusiastic letter of congratulation:

There simply are not words to express the absolute righteous, correct, timely and altogether appropriate choice by the AIA for the recipient of the Gold Medal! At last we have one of us engraved on that granite wall of real heroes and corporate heavies.

At last we have one of us who write specs banging away alone in the basement late at night on the typewriter; one who is still there thru [sic] the weekend detailing in a sea of yellow bum-wad.

Your work is consistent and growing better.

Your work is at once fresh and inevitable.

Your work is art.¹⁴¹

Two years later, after Thorncrown Chapel had been selected by AIA members as the best work of American architecture during the 1980s, Jacobsen wrote to Fay Jones again, saying the selection “secures your place forever in American Architecture. We who had you there for years salute you.”¹⁴²

Even in retirement, Jones continued to receive praise for his work and evidence of his influence on American architecture-and on Americans:

I’m writing both to congratulate you on a lifetime of work that places you among the immortals, and to tell you that you’ve been an inspiration to me for a very long time. I’m sure that despite the honors you have so deservedly been given, you can have no idea of how

many lives of both architects and nonarchitects you have impacted in powerfully positive ways.¹⁴³

On occasion, Jones's impact extended beyond the boundaries of the U. S. In 1992, British architectural student Mark Jefferson took part in an exchange program between the University of Arkansas and the University of Brighton. Now he says: "The effect of meeting Fay Jones and experiencing some of his buildings . . . has been profound and has given me great inspiration to try to create something of value in buildings of my own."¹⁴⁴

Though expressed in many different ways, there are common themes running through all that has been said about the influence and inspiration of Fay Jones and his work:

1) *He set his own course, following the same design philosophy and principles throughout his career, regardless of current architectural trends. Not only did this make his work unique but his design integrity was a source of inspiration in the architectural community.*

"An individualist who followed his own path. . . ." (Ivy)

". . . he has had the tenacity to continue exploring a small number of enduring ideas rather than accommodating himself to every shift of fashion. . . ." (Langdon)

". . . an architect who resists easy categorization. . . ." (Longstreth)

2) *He was a master of his art. His manipulation of space and light, integration of buildings into their settings, and ability to meld details with the overall design of a building were exceptional.*

"I can only gasp at the magnificence and richness of your interiors. . . . The flow of space, and integration between exterior and interior, is unparalleled." (Howe)

". . . rich and mysterious spaces. . . fiendishly ingenious details. . . ." (Moore)

". . . lifelong pursuit of mastering materials, forms, and details." (Gandee)

". . . extraordinary capacity to deal brilliantly with a broad range of American building problems in which his organization of space and his uncommon use of commonplace materials elevates them to poetic compositional elements beautifully ordered. . . ." (McClure)

3) *He designed buildings that not only were beautiful but carried a powerful emotional impact.*

". . . glorious statement of hope. . . ." (Trinkaus)

". . . soaring of the mind and spirit. . . ." (Meyer)

"You have restored my soul. . . ." (Botsai)

"Fay Jones's gentle, nurturing design work enriches human life. . . ." (Statement of Contribution)

4) *He always exhibited great personal and professional integrity, providing inspiration and serving as an excellent role model.*

". . . embodies nearly all of the qualities we admire in an architect. . . ." (Moore)

"Your personal integrity hovered over the podium as you spoke." (Meyer)

". . . integrity incarnate. . . ." (Marlin)

5) *He maintained a small practice that focused on the design of houses, again providing inspiration and serving as a role model for other architects.*

“The caliber of the work itself is very high, and collectively it reaffirms the importance of such a practice to the legacy of modern American architecture.” (Longstreth)

“At last we have one of us engraved on that granite wall of real heroes and corporate heavies.” (Jacobsen)

“His form of practice—small in size, limited in building type, mainly regional in scope—has proved to be exactly right for his peers to be inspired by his design accomplishments.” (Statement of Contribution)

6) *The impact of his work was far-reaching because it appealed to both design professionals and to the general public.*

“... an accessible intellectual. His games challenge, but all of us can play.” (Phillips)

“His work is acclaimed by ordinary folks ... as well as by architecture’s most severe and knowledgeable critics.” (Statement of Contribution)

“This gentle unassuming man has built with knowledge, integrity, and a grace that has placed his work in a rare category, appreciated by the general public as well as by more sophisticated critics.” (McClure)

7) *The man and his work simply were extraordinary.*

“... one of the most outstanding architects in America.” (Ford)

“... has become a national historic treasure. ... [a] powerful and special genius. ...” (Moore)

“... without question one of the most consummate architects in the history of American architecture.” (Botsai)

“... nothing less than a figure of historical significance. ...” (Phillips)

“[His work] is I think great transcendent architecture, all the greater because it speaks intimately to many, many people.” (Moore)

“... a complete master of his art. ...” (McClure)

“... an architect ... of great artistry, originality, and distinction.” (Longstreth)

“Your work is art.” (Jacobsen)

“... a lifetime of work that places you among the immortals. ...” (Allen)

Frank Lloyd Wright knew that many of his students simply imitated his work, but Wright hoped for more: “[W]hen the genius arrives nobody will take his work for mine—least of all will he mistake my work for his.”¹⁴⁵ Clearly, there are many who believe the genius arrived in Fay Jones.

Associated Properties

Properties associated with this context will have been designed by E. Fay Jones and built between 1955 and 1990 in Arkansas. Reflecting the focus of Jones’s practice, most properties will be residential and ecclesiastical structures. Jones, however, did execute a few commercial and civic designs, the latter usually taking the form of pavilions in park-like settings.

In all cases, Jones’s projects reflect the philosophy and principles of organic design to which he adhered throughout his career, emphasizing the character of the materials employed, the building’s relationship to its natural setting, and the relationship of the parts to the whole. In keeping with the manner in which Jones always approached design, allowing the solution to grow out of the problem (program, site, orientation, materials to be used), his structures cannot be categorized by style, but they do generally exhibit certain characteristics for which Jones became known: masterful orchestration of space and light, respect for the natural setting, use of simple but meticulously crafted natural

materials (especially wood and stone), integration of ornament into the overall design, expressed structure, and repetition of forms.



Tanner House detail. AHPP photo.

adhere to those principles regardless of current architectural trends. His was not a “style” but an approach to design, helping to put to rest concerns about whether his work will hold up as architectural trends come and go.

In presenting Fay Jones with the Gold Medal for a lifetime of achievement, the American architectural community, as represented by the American Institute of Architects, already has declared his body of work to be historically significant. Architectural authorities also have established the fact that Jones alone, among hundreds of architects who studied under Frank Lloyd Wright, had the genius to transform the teachings of his mentor into original architecture. Specific structures that have been authoritatively analyzed and are widely considered to be some of the best examples of Jones’s work can be said with confidence to have exceptional significance.

As discussed more thoroughly in the section on Jones’s influence, his exceptional significance is underscored by the many ways in which he and his work influenced and inspired:

- 1) He set his own course, following the same design philosophy and principles throughout his career, regardless of current architectural trends. Not only did this make his work unique but his design integrity was a source of inspiration in the architectural community.
- 2) He was a master of his art. His manipulation of space and light, integration of buildings into their settings, and ability to meld details with the overall design of a building were exceptional.

Significance

The extraordinary artistry and intellect of E. Fay Jones, his unique place in architecture in Arkansas, and the inspirational influence that he had on architects and architecture in America—and on the ordinary people who experienced his structures—give his work exceptional significance at the state or, in one instance, the national level, thus falling into the category of Criteria Consideration G. Selected examples of his work in Arkansas are eligible for the National Register under Criterion C because they are the works of a master and possess high artistic values.

Despite the relatively recent vintage of Fay Jones’s work, many of his projects have been the object of close scrutiny by other architects, architectural critics, and historians, allowing them to be placed in historical perspective. Defining Jones’s place in the American architectural continuum is made easier by his adherence to principles of organic architecture that now are nearly a century old (as articulated by Frank Lloyd Wright), as well as by his choice to

- 3) He designed buildings that not only were beautiful but carried a powerful emotional impact.
- 4) He always exhibited great personal and professional integrity, providing inspiration and serving as an excellent role model.
- 5) He maintained a small practice that focused on the design of houses, again providing inspiration and serving as a role model for other architects.
- 6) The impact of his work was far-reaching because it appealed to both design professionals and to the general public.
- 7) The man and his work simply were extraordinary.

In a letter of support for the nomination of Fay Jones-designed properties to the National Register, Robert Ivy writes that in reviewing Jones's projects, "one is struck by their complexity and complete synthesis—a remarkable achievement of the most sophisticated ideas in built form." He also makes the point that the "nature of the construction, primarily wood and stone, and the fragile character of the sites that are so integral to Jones's work all demand protection that nomination to the Register could encourage."¹⁴⁶

Finally, another letter of support, from the president of AIA Arkansas, makes clear the status of Fay Jones in Arkansas architecture: "It is safe to say that every architect within our state greatly admires and values the work of E. Fay Jones. His is not a style that can be emulated, but this is what makes his body of work so unique and important to our state. It is his approach to design, his respect for the site, and his attention to detail that have influenced architecture."¹⁴⁷

The United States has produced many architects who became more famous than Jones did, who were more commercially successful than he, and who developed "styles" that other architects could imitate. However, very few architects hewed so closely, and with such remarkable results, to the same design philosophy and principles throughout their careers, consciously choosing to eschew current trends and remain "outside the pale." Even fewer architects have produced work that so consistently struck a deep emotional chord with both design professionals and the general public. As an architect, Fay Jones was exceptional—a true American original.

The properties in this nomination are exceptionally significant documents of the work of an internationally known Arkansas architect who has retired from practice due to declining health. By publicly recognizing their importance, the AHPP hopes to ensure not only the properties' continued survival but, even more, the careful stewardship that they so richly deserve.

Endnotes

- 1 *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary, Unabridged*, 2nd ed. (William Collins Publishers, Inc., 1979), p. 637.
- 2 Fay Jones quoted in Robert Adams Ivy, Jr., *The Architecture of E. Fay Jones, FAIA* (Washington, D.C.: The American Institute of Architects Press, 1992), p. 12.
- 3 From text of the citation accompanying "The 1990 Gold Medal" conferred on Fay Jones, FAIA by the American Institute of Architects.
- 4 Ivy, p. 13 and "Readers Respond," *Architecture: The AIA Journal*, September 1991, p. 91. The other architects/firms whose work was "most admired" were Kohn Pedersen Fox and I. M. Pei (tied for first place), Antoine Predock, Charles Moore, and Robert Venturi (who also appeared on the "most despised" list).
- 5 Ivy, p. 16.
- 6 Fay Jones quoted in Department of Arkansas Heritage, *"Outside the Pale": The Architecture of Fay Jones* (Fayetteville, AR: The University of Arkansas Press, 1999), p. 2.
- 7 Fay Jones quoted in Mel White, "The Master Builder," *Arkansas Times*, October 1983, p. 57.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid., p. 57.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ivy, p. 16.
- 14 White, p. 58.
- 15 Ivy, p. 17.
- 16 Ibid., and White, p. 59.
- 17 Andrea Oppenheimer Dean, "The Cathedral Builder Born 500 Years Too Late," *Smithsonian*, August 1991, p. 106.



Harmon House. AHPP photo.

- 18 Ibid., p. 107.
- 19 Jones quoted in White, p. 59.
- 20 Ivy, p. 18 and "The AD 100 Architects: E. Fay Jones," *Architectural Digest*, August 15, 1991, p. 134.
- 21 Jones quoted in Ivy, p. 18.
- 22 "The Round House," *Life*, March 19, 1951, p. 70.
- 23 Ivy, p. 18.
- 24 Dean, p. 107 and Ivy, p. 19.
- 25 Ivy, p. 19.
- 26 "The AD 100 Architects: E. Fay Jones." In this brief description of his design approach, Jones says he was influenced by Stone "for his simplifying planning arrangements." Robert Ivy explains that Stone's influence on Jones was not so much through design but professional and personal: "[Stone] demonstrated, through a fully exercised life, what an architect from Arkansas could accomplish in the international arena." Ivy, p. 29.
- 27 Stone quoted in Philip Langdon, "In The Wright Tradition," *Atlantic Monthly*, April 1989, p. 83.
- 28 Dean, p. 107.
- 29 White, p. 80.
- 30 "Grotto and Geometry," *Progressive Architecture*, May 1965, p. 147.
- 31 Ivy, p. 10.
- 32 Ibid., pp. 24-25.
- 33 Ibid., p. 20.
- 34 Frank Lloyd Wright, "In The Cause of Architecture II," *The Architectural Record*, May 1914, p. 406.
- 35 Wright, p. 413.
- 36 Fay Jones quoted in Vernon Mays, ed., *What Makes A Good Building* (Virginia Tech College of Architecture and Urban Studies, no date), p. 12.

37 E. Fay Jones, "The Generative Idea," *Landscape Architecture*, May/June 1983, p. 68.

38 Jones quoted in Dean, p. 108.

39 Wright, p. 413.

40 William Marlin, "Truing Up: The Architecture of Euine Fay Jones," *Inland Architect*, November-December 1989, p. 37.

41 Ibid.

42 Guy Henley, "The Open Plan-A Way To Gain Spaciousness," *House Beautiful*, October 1959, p. 299.

43 Ivy, p. 210.

44 In addition to the October 1959 issue, Fay Jones and his work were featured in these issues of *House Beautiful*: November 1959, January 1960, March 1960, April 1962, June 1962, October 1963, July 1964, April 1965.

45 Ivy, p. 219.

46 "Magnificent Space On A Magnificent Site," *House Beautiful*, July 1964, p. 61. This article is about the Clark residence in Arkansas.

47 "Romantic House On A Country Hilltop," *House Beautiful*, April 1965, p. 185. The "country hilltop" is in Little Rock, Arkansas; the house is "Pine Knoll," built for Mr. and Mrs. Graham Hall.

48 Guy Henley, "The Open Space Plan-A Way To Gain Spaciousness," *House Beautiful*, October 1959, p. 299. This is the article about the Bain residence, Jones's first published design.

49 "A House That Turns Existing Into Living," *House Beautiful*, October 1963, p. 181. This article is about the Snow residence in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

50 "Romantic House On A Country Hilltop," p. 198.

51 "Magnificent Space On A Magnificent Site," p. 108.

52 Henley, p. 299.

53 "A House That Turns Existing Into Living," p. 233.

54 "Romantic House On A Country Hilltop," p. 196.

55 Jones quoted in White, pp. 52-53, 56.

56 "Organic Fabrication," *Progressive Architecture*, May 1962, p. 139.

57 Edgar A. Albin, "Architecture in Arkansas: A Creative Cooperative Endeavor," *Art Voices South*, January-February 1979, p. 10.

58 Charles K. Gandee, "A Wayfarer's Chapel By Fay Jones," *Architectural Record*, March 1981, p. 90 and Dean, p. 103.

59 Gandee, p. 92.

60 Stanley Abercrombie, AIA, "A Building Of Great Integrity: Fay Jones' Thorncrown Chapel, Eureka Springs, Arkansas," *AIA Journal*, Mid-May 1981, p. 141.

61 Wolf Von Eckardt, "Creating for God's Glory," *Time*, 19 April 1982, p. 50.

62 Douglas Davis, "A Church Is Not A Home," *Newsweek*, 28 March 1983, p. 76.

63 Ivy, p. 13.

64 White, p. 63.

65 Jones quoted in White, p. 63.

66 Ivy, p. 214.

67 White, p. 56 and "Fay Jones Wins AIA Gold Medal," *Progressive Architecture*, January 1990, p. 28.

68 Ivy, pp. 21 and 216.

69 Award quoted in Jack Golden, "From The Editor," *Friends of Kebyar*, April/June 1989, p. 2.

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71 Ivy, p. 76.

72 William Lake Douglas, "The Poetics of Revealed Construction," *Progressive Architecture*, May 1987, p. 107.

73 1990 Gold Medal news release, American Institute of Architects, Washington, D.C.

74 Ibid.

75 Vernon Reed to Christopher J. Smith, AIA Secretary, 21 August 1989, American Institute of Architects, Washington, D. C.

76 Ibid.

77 President Bush quoted in Dean, p. 108.

78 Prince Charles quoted in Dean, p. 110.

79 Dean, p. 110.

80 *Architectural Record*, April 1990, p. 21.

81 Dean, p. 110.

82 Jones quoted in *Architectural Record*, p. 21.

83 David Dillon, "Grandeur In A Small Place: Fay Jones' Leonard Chapel Is An Impressive Achievement," *The Dallas Morning News*, 5 December 1990, p. 4C

- 84 Dean, p. 110.
- 85 Dillon, p. 4C.
- 86 Jones quoted in Ivy, p. 93.
- 87 Ivy, p. 93.
- 88 Vernon Reed to Christopher J. Smith.
- 89 Telephone interview with Mrs. Fay Jones, Fayetteville, Arkansas, 22 January 2000.
- 90 The fountain honors the late Senator J. William Fulbright, a Fayetteville native.
- 91 Jones quoted in *What Makes A Good Building*, p. 12.
- 92 "Organic Fabrication," p. 139.
- 93 E. Fay Jones, "The Generative Idea," p. 68.
- 94 Jones quoted in *White*, pp. 60-61.
- 95 Jones quoted in "Outside the Pale", p. 48.
- 96 *Ibid.*, p. 54,
- 97 Jones quoted in *White*, p. 61.
- 98 Ivy, p. 18.
- 99 E. Fay Jones, "The Generative Idea," p. 69.
- 100 Ivy, p. 22.
- 101 *Ibid.*
- 102 Emerson quoted in Ivy, p. 22.
- 103 Wright, p. 406.
- 104 Marlin, p. 30.
- 105 Golden, p. 2.
- 106 Langdon, p. 84.
- 107 Marlin, p. 37.
- 108 Ivy, p. 16.
- 109 Marlin, p. 33.
- 110 Dean, p. 108.
- 111 Langdon, p. 86.
- 112 Cyrus Sutherland, a retired University of Arkansas professor of architecture, is preparing *Buildings of Arkansas*, one in a series of books on "Buildings of the United States" sponsored by the Society of Architectural Historians.
- 113 F. Hampton Roy, *Charles L. Thompson and Associates: Arkansas Architects, 1885-1938* (Little Rock: August House, 1982), p. 17.
- 114 F. Hampton Roy and Charles Witsell, with Cheryl Griffith Nichols, *How We Lived: Little Rock As An American City* (Little Rock: August House, 1984), p. 109.
- 115 Roy, *Charles L. Thompson and Associates*, p. 67.
- 116 The 1999 Little Rock telephone book lists about seventy-five small and mid-sized firms. The three large firms are Cromwell Truemper Levy Thompson Woodsmall Inc., Gaskin Hill Norcross (formerly the Blass Firm), and Wittenberg Delony & Davidson Inc.
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- 118 Ivy, p. 12.
- 119 *Ibid.*
- 120 Henley, p. 299.
- 121 Curtis Besinger, "It's Not How Much You Spend But How You Spend It," *House Beautiful*, June 1962, p. 81.
- 122 "A House That Turns Existing Into Living," p. 176.
- 123 John H. Howe to E. Fay Jones, 4 April 1976, personal papers of E. Fay Jones, Fayetteville, Arkansas.
- 124 O'Neil Ford quoted in Marlin, p. 29.
- 125 Charles W. Moore, "Foreword" in Ivy, p. 7.
- 126 "Statement of Contribution," 1990 Gold Medal nomination, American Institute of Architects, Washington, D. C.
- 127 Gandee, p. 88.
- 128 Ted Trinkaus, Wake Forest, North Carolina, to E. Fay Jones, 12 November 1981, personal papers of E. Fay Jones, Fayetteville, Arkansas.
- 129 Harwell Hamilton Harris, Architect, Raleigh, North Carolina, to E. Fay Jones, 27 October 1981, personal papers of E. Fay Jones, Fayetteville, Arkansas.
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- 133 Langdon, p. 85.

- 134 Ibid., p. 87.
- 135 “Statement of Contribution.”
- 136 Ibid.
- 137 Charles W. Moore, FAIA to the AIA Board of Directors, 20 November 1989, American Institute of Architects, Washington, D.C.
- 138 Harlan E. McClure, FAIA to the AIA Board of Directors, 15 November 1989, American Institute of Architects, Washington, D.C.
- 139 William Marlin to the AIA Board of Directors, 20 November 1989, American Institute of Architects, Washington, D.C.
- 140 Richard Longstreth to the AIA Board of Directors, 3 November 1989, American Institute of Architects, Washington, D.C.
- 141 Hugh Newell Jacobsen to E. Fay Jones, 19 December 1989, personal papers of E. Fay Jones, Fayetteville, Arkansas.
- 142 Hugh Newell Jacobsen to E. Fay Jones, 8 November 1991, personal papers of E. Fay Jones, Fayetteville, Arkansas.
- 143 Edward Allen, Architect to E. Fay Jones, 15 October 1998, personal papers of E. Fay Jones, Fayetteville, Arkansas. Mr. Allen is the author of the textbook *Fundamentals of Building Construction: Materials and Methods*.
- 144 Mark Jefferson to Cheryl Nichols via e-mail, 13 January 2000.
- 145 Wright, p. 410.
- 146 Robert A. Ivy, FAIA to Cathy Slater, Director, Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, 12 January 2000, Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, Little Rock, Arkansas.
- 147 Eugene Terry, President, AIA Arkansas, to Cathy Slater, 19 January 2000, Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, Little Rock, Arkansas.

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The E. Fay and Gus Jones House, Fayetteville, Washington County. AHPP photo.

E. Fay and Gus Jones House

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places on April 28, 2000

Architectural Description

The E. Fay and Gus Jones House in Fayetteville, Arkansas, was designed by the architect for himself and his family. Completed in 1956, the house was the first Fay Jones design to be constructed. The home's upper level is sheathed in rough-cut redwood board-and-batten siding, while the lower level is built of native fieldstone. Generally rectangular in plan with upper-level decks projecting from two sides, the Jones House is sheltered by a broad gabled roof.

The first Fay Jones design to be constructed, the Jones House put the architect's principles of organic architecture to the test, in the process incorporating most of the design elements for which Jones's work would become known. The materials—primarily wood and stone—utilized in constructing the house not only fit comfortably into its wooded suburban site but some—like the boulder incorporated into the ground floor's design—actually were of the site. Masterful orchestration of space and light, carefully crafted natural materials, expressed structure—all of these are elements of the Jones House's design that would become characteristic of virtually all Fay Jones designs.

Oriented to a downhill view toward the east rather than to the subdivision street on the uphill (west) side of its sloping lot, the house is approached from the street through the “car shelter”¹ on the north elevation. (The driveway from the street, bordered by curving fieldstone retaining walls, is marked by a tall, lighted entry sculpture of Jones's design.) Once through the car shelter, which is tucked under a balcony supported by fieldstone piers, a hard turn to the right leads past a row of jalousie windows to the “front” door. This single-leaf door is protected from the elements by the projecting, upper-level balcony that wraps around the east and north elevations of the house.

With two distinct levels on a sloping site, the Jones House can both snuggle into the hillside and reach up into the trees. The lower level is firmly anchored to the site by walls of native fieldstone gathered from a nearby creek bank.² In contrast, the upper level of the house is sheathed in board-

and-batten siding (the battens “dripping” down lower at their bottom edges than the boards, as noted by Frank Lloyd Wright during his 1958 visit to the house³), and ten floor-to-ceiling windows in the east (downhill) elevation of the upper level open the house to a wooded view.

Wide bands of short, louvered windows punctuate both the lower and upper levels of the residence’s west elevation, facing the street. Each band of windows is sheltered, the lower ones by the upper level’s slight projection and the upper windows by the overhanging eaves of the broadly pitched, gabled roof, which is covered by composition shingles.

The south elevation of the Jones House is adjacent to a tall stone retaining wall. Three floor-to-ceiling windows bring light into the master bedroom, located at the south end of the upper level. The south gable end is sheathed in vertical wood siding and contains a small diamond-shaped window at its peak (as does the corresponding gable at the north end). A single structural beam projects to the west of this window.

The lower level of the house was designed to accommodate cars, Fay Jones’s studio, and living space for the two Jones daughters. The main entrance opens into the “garden room,” a rock-walled area, with a skylight and small free-form pool, that was born of necessity: a boulder uncovered during excavation was too costly to remove, so Jones incorporated it into the design.⁴ To the right (west) of the garden room are the architect’s studio and a storage area, while the daughters’ apartment occupies nearly half of the lower level’s floor space, north of the studio and storage area.

The upper level of the house encompasses living, dining, and kitchen areas that are largely open to one another, as well as sleeping, dressing, and bath areas for Fay and Gus Jones. Actually modest in size (the living room is eleven by seventeen feet, and the dining room is eight by fourteen feet), the living spaces appear more expansive because of the manner in which they flow together in an open-plan arrangement. Adding to the sense of expansiveness is the height of these spaces, their ceiling rising upward to the ridgeline of the roof. Expressed structure, which would become a Jones hallmark, appears here in the form of three longitudinal beams running the length of the ceiling.

A broad fieldstone chimney is the “heart” of the Jones House, both literally and figuratively. Because the house has few interior walls to provide structural support, the chimney serves that crucial purpose. Its broad expanse, which stretches up through the ridge of the roof, supports longitudinal structural members. The chimney also allows for centrally located fireplaces on both the lower and upper levels of the house.

When the Jones family moved into their newly-completed home in May of 1956, they left behind their old furniture. Like the student of Frank Lloyd Wright that he was, Fay Jones designed most of the interior furnishings for the new house, creating a coherent aesthetic throughout. Though custom-designed, the furnishings were not necessarily complicated or expensive. A simple, low dining table, for example, was made from a plywood door covered in orange laminate.⁵

Like his masterful orchestration of space and use of expressed structure, exceptional handling of interior lighting—both natural and artificial—was a hallmark of Jones’s designs that first appeared in his own home. In the Jones House, all artificial lighting sources are hidden. The primary artificial light on the upper level of the house filters up from the wide soffit that encircles the main living areas, visually expanding the height and depth of the space. Downlights, constructed of left-over lumber from handrail edging, line a built-in seating alcove in the dining room.

Jones House History

Completed in 1956, the E. Fay and Gus Jones House was the first constructed design of architect Fay Jones, and in many ways it set the standard for all that followed. Not only did the Jones House incorporate numerous features that became well-known characteristics of Jones's work but its well-received design, a successful translation of the principles of organic architecture, literally launched his career as a practicing architect.

When construction of the Jones House began in 1955, its location was on the northern edge of Fayetteville; it was the first house built in a development planned by a young business graduate of the University of Arkansas, Vernon Pittman. The opportunity to build the house arose suddenly after Jones offered his design talents to the developer, with the understanding that if Jones purchased the house for his own family, his architectural fees for the project would be waived. (If someone else had bought the house, Jones would have received a fee for his work.)⁶ The house was designed over a weekend, and construction began the following week. "I played the thing by ear all the way," he recalled a few years later, and many of the structural details were worked out full size on sheets of gypsum board.⁷ However, as Robert Ivy reports in his book on Jones, the architect was prepared for the project because he "had been looking forward to a house, doodling with theoretical ideas, waiting around for a specific site."⁸

Fittingly, Jones did purchase this first of his designs to be constructed, moving his family into the new home in May of 1956. He and his wife Gus have lived in the house since that time, making only superficial changes over the years.

The Jones House soon received the stamp of approval from Jones's mentor, Frank Lloyd Wright, who came to Fayetteville in 1958 at Jones's invitation to lecture at the university. Wright approved the "drip" of the battens on the exterior of the house, noting Jones's departure from the more horizontal emphasis of Wright's designs.⁹ In addition, as described by Robert Ivy, when Wright "walked up the narrow [interior] staircase and turned to admire the main living space, he smiled at his former apprentice and said, 'Fay, I am going to have to give you a certificate.'"¹⁰ Further, when Wright gave his lecture at the university after seeing Jones's house, he told his audience to go look at the house if they wanted to see a good example of organic design. Some two thousand people reportedly did so,¹¹ giving Jones's practice a remarkable jump start.

Frank Lloyd Wright was not the only architect admired by Jones who commented on the house. Edward Durell Stone, a Fayetteville native and the only other Arkansas-born architect to achieve national and international renown, was taken by the energy of the Jones House, saying it "looks like the inside of a piano."¹²

Interviewed about the house for a 1962 article in *Progressive Architecture*, Jones discussed his approach to design: "Always, my design philosophy is one of organic fabrication, the unity of part and whole."¹³ Expanding on the theme of organic design, he went on to say, "The solution must grow directly out of the problem itself—the program, the site, orientation, and the materials to be used."¹⁴ As an example, he used the boulder that had been discovered during excavation for the lower level of his house: "What seemed a costly disadvantage to the original concept was a large underground boulder, uncovered when excavation was begun for the entry and study area. By re-designing and enlarging this area into a garden room, complete with pool and skylight, the boulder became an entire wall and feature of that space."¹⁵

Progressive Architecture's article on the Jones House concluded with this assessment: "This is not the typical static enclosure to which a family must adjust; it is, rather, the flexible, organic shelter that responds naturally to life as it progresses."¹⁶

Jones put all of the principles of organic architecture-relating a structure to its site, using materials honestly, and relating smaller parts to the overall design-into practice in the design of his house, and he did so with extraordinary success, both in the judgment of design professionals and from the viewpoint of the general public. Moreover, in translating those principles into practice for the first time, he experimented with elements that became characteristic of most of his later designs: sophisticated orchestration of space, meticulous crafting of natural materials, expressed structure, exceptional handling of interior lighting. As summarized by Robert Ivy:

The significance of Jones's earliest building lies in the completeness of its expression, an expression of innate modesty and vitality-qualities of its maker. While later residences would refine Jones's expression of the organic building principles first stated here, none would more fully declare his ambitions.¹⁷

The Jones House also launched Fay Jones's career. ". . . [My] house got me another house, and that house got me another house. And I seem to always have had a few houses to do," he modestly explained many years later to an interviewer.¹⁸ The Jones House was the first of more than 200 residential designs that Jones would complete before retiring from practice in 1997.

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Endnotes

- 1 Rather than "carports," the covered parking areas for automobiles incorporated into many Fay Jones designs are labeled "car shelters" on his plans.
- 2 "Organic Fabrication," *Progressive Architecture*, May 1962, p. 139.
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- 4 "Organic Fabrication," p., 139, and Marlin, p. 29.
- 5 Robert Adams Ivy, Jr., *The Architecture of E. Fay Jones, FAIA* (Washington, D.C.: The American Institute of Architects Press, 1992), p. 103.
- 6 Ivy, p. 99.
- 7 "Organic Fabrication," p. 141.
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- 9 Marlin, p. 37.
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- 13 Jones quoted in "Organic Fabrication," p. 139.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid., p. 141.
- 17 Ivy, p. 106.
- 18 Jones quoted in Mel White, "The Master Builder," *Arkansas Times*, October 1983, p. 80.



*Shaheen-Goodfellow Weekend Cottage,
Eden Isle, Cleburne County. AHPP photo.*

Shaheen-Goodfellow Weekend Cottage, Eden Isle, Cleburne County

Nominated to the National Register of Historic Places on June 5, 1996

Architectural Description

The Fay Jones-designed Shaheen-Goodfellow Weekend Cottage, usually known as “Stoneflower,” was constructed in 1965 in the resort community of Eden Isle, Arkansas. While incorporating many characteristic Jones features, Stoneflower was a milestone in the architect’s work. The definite vertical emphasis of Stoneflower’s design, along with dramatic contrast between an airy, wooden upper structure and a cave-like stone base, created a house strikingly different in appearance from Jones’s previous designs. A tall, narrow, two-level, gable-roofed building with widely overhanging eaves, Stoneflower also foreshadowed Jones’s design for the acclaimed Thorncrown Chapel.

Designed by Fay Jones for two young landscape architects, bachelor Bob Shaheen and Curt Goodfellow, his wife and children, Stoneflower was a modest commission with a not-very-generous budget of \$25,000. Within that budget, Jones was asked by his clients to design a house that would embrace the view of nearby Greers Ferry Lake; serve as a retreat from the city; provide a room for indoor planting (but not a typical greenhouse); keep space simple, open, and flexible; and visually

eliminate all manufactured items—"anything that looked like it was bought and stuck on."¹ The result was a highly creative organic design that attracted national attention. In June of 1966, *Life* magazine said of Stoneflower:

On one level it is an airy tree house, high above the ground, with a deck that sways a little as if the wind were moving it. On another level it is a cool cave, snug inside rock walls with even a hot-and-cold running waterfall. Overall, it is an all-purpose escapist home, sitting on a bluff in the foothills of the Ozarks.²

In Stoneflower, two themes first explored by Jones in his own home (and expanded upon in many subsequent designs) came clearly into focus. First, there were the lower level's "naturalistic and rustically defined stone spaces set with water and plants."³ In contrast came the "upper structure filled with the shadows of a space-defining lattice of wood struts."⁴ These dualing themes, described by Robert Ivy as "two of Jones's shelter prototypes-caves and treehouses"⁵-are the essence of Stoneflower's design.

Anchored by a foundation of boulders from the building site, Stoneflower is rectangular in form, its wood-frame upper structure sheathed in natural redwood board-and-batten siding. The house is twelve feet wide, thirty feet long, and twenty-four feet high (exactly one-half the dimensions of twenty-four by sixty by forty-eight feet that Jones would use at Thorncrown Chapel). A wooden deck, also thirty feet in length, projects from the lake end of the home's upper level, extending living space into the trees and toward the water.

Light fills the upper level of Stoneflower-the main living space with a sleeping loft-through large windows that fill most of the two gable ends of the house. At the lake end, the window is open to the view, but at the opposite end-which faces a golf course-the window is protected by wooden battens which continue the vertical rhythm of the home's board-and-batten siding. In anticipation of future next-door neighbors, the long side walls of the house were designed without windows except for clerestories.

The upper level is one large space, its ceiling rising to the roofline. On this level are the living and dining areas and the kitchen, which is tucked under a sleeping loft that "floats" near the center of the open space. To stabilize the high, long walls of the house, Jones used overhead cross-bracing that forms an intricate web-like pattern the length of the upper level (a structural element that he would employ again, to even better effect, at Thorncrown Chapel). Throughout this level are Jones-designed furnishings and fixtures: built-in sofas and a dramatic hanging light fixture, to name just two.

In dramatic contrast to the airy, light-filled upper structure, the lower level of Stoneflower is cave-like. In the words of *Life* magazine, "To walk down the mossy steps into Stoneflower is to enter a primeval world. Inside the rocky cavern, water trickles over a boulder into a small stream that disappears underground. Ivies slither up walls and ferns poke out of corners."⁶

Here, Jones was able to address his clients' wish for a place for plants. By making the upper, wooden structure narrower than the stone-walled base and filling the gaps with fiberglass panels, he created skylights that admit sufficient light for a lower-level garden room. With exterior doors at either end, the garden room also serves as Stoneflower's entry; a spiral staircase leads to the upper level. Just off the garden room, and separated from it only by sight lines, is the home's bath or "bathing grotto," where a man-made waterfall serves as a shower.

Furnishings and fixtures on the lower level continue the grotto theme: “A bowed fireplace lights one corner of the man-made cave; a small fountain circulates water through a small interior pool. Rock ledges for seating, boulders for coffee tables, and a flagstone floor combine to form a Jungian dreamscape.”⁷

Outside, the wooden deck not only provides additional living space but also a means of cooking—one that was Jones-designed and thoroughly integrated into the overall scheme. A little more than half-way down the deck, away from the house, are two “flambeaux,” or open metal containers with gas-fired jets for cooking and light, one on either side. They connect the deck with the steel bracing that anchors it to the ground below.

The Stoneflower property also contains a small outdoor pool, surrounded by flagstone pavers.

Shaheen-Goodfellow Cottage History

The Shaheen-Goodfellow Weekend Cottage, usually known as “Stoneflower,” was a milestone in the career of its architect, E. Fay Jones. Its design synthesized organic themes that Jones had been exploring—in particular, the contrast between light, airy spaces and darker, cave-like ones—since the design of his own residence ten years earlier. Stoneflower, completed in 1965, also was a harbinger of Jones’s internationally acclaimed design for Thorncrown Chapel. Vertical in emphasis, its high wooden walls enclosing a soaring interior space criss-crossed by an intricate web of structural bracing, Stoneflower foreshadowed some of Thorncrown’s most celebrated design elements. Because of its critical place in Jones’s career, Stoneflower is exceptionally significant.

According to the 1966 *Life* magazine article about Stoneflower, Little Rock landscape architects Bob Shaheen and Curt Goodfellow discovered the site for their weekend-getaway while on a picnic at Eden Isle, a new resort community that was rising on the banks of man-made Greers Ferry Lake. Shaheen and Goodfellow had been hired to landscape Eden Isle’s roadways and golf courses, and they proposed to exchange their services for the lot. They knew Fay Jones from having landscaped the house Jones designed for former Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus in Huntsville, Arkansas. Jones reportedly was stimulated by the problems of the rocky, sloping site and by his clients’ somewhat unusual demands,⁸ which included providing a room for indoor planting; keeping space simple, open, and flexible; and visually eliminating all manufactured items—along with the more typical desires to capitalize on the lake view and create a serene escape from the city.⁹

Working for fellow design professionals, Jones was able to express more fully than ever before two contrasting organic themes that he had been exploring since his own house was constructed: dark, cave-like spaces snuggling into the hillside versus tall, light-filled spaces stretching up into the treetops. In the process, he created design elements and forms that the world would see again fifteen years later, when Thorncrown Chapel opened in 1980. In overall shape—tall and narrow, with a broadly pitched, gabled roof—Stoneflower is much like Thorncrown, and its proportions are identical to the chapel’s, though Stoneflower is half the size. Just as notably, Stoneflower’s tall walls were strengthened with the same sort of overhead cross-bracing that Jones would use to remarkable effect at Thorncrown Chapel.

Though Stoneflower did not create the sort of international stir that Thorncrown Chapel would, it was recognized by the American Institute of Architects with an Award of Merit in 1966, and it re-

ceived notice in both professional and popular publications. The May 1965 issue of *Progressive Architecture* featured the house in an article entitled “Grotto and Geometry,” alluding to the dramatic contrast between Stoneflower’s lower and upper levels. In a statement that proved prophetic, the article said: “In this house . . . there is an atmosphere of spatial and linear refinement that gives the building an almost mystical atmosphere, like that of a chapel.”¹⁰ Similarly, the 1966 *Life* article noted: “A small spiral stair leads to an upper world of wood and open sky, which has the lofty feel of a chapel.”¹¹

More recently, Stoneflower was one of four Jones designs highlighted in a *Friends of Kebyar* feature on the architect,¹² and Robert Ivy discussed the house in his 1992 book on Jones, coming to this conclusion:

Although the house is small, it has remarkable presence, which is derived in part from the surprise of its vertical walls lifted high above the lichen-covered boulders, in part from the marriage of opposed worlds united in one structure. Part hillside out-cropping, part lighthouse, Stoneflower bristles with ideas and controlled energy.¹³

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*The Applegate House,
Bentonville, Benton County.
AHPP photo.*

Joe Applegate House, Bentonville, Benton County

Nominated to the National Register of Historic Places on June 5, 1996

The Joe Applegate House in Bentonville, Arkansas, was designed by E. Fay Jones and completed in 1967. An expansive, multi-level residence that masterfully takes advantage of its hillside site, it is constructed of indigenous Ozark stone. Unlike Jones's other residential designs, the Applegate House features a flat roof and walls that are entirely curvilinear in form.

Completed in 1967 after three years of construction, the Applegate House was a monumental construction project. The house, approximately nine thousand square feet in size, was built entirely of brownish Ozark stone, with walls that are over twenty inches thick in some areas. Located on a hill, with the rear facade of the house overlooking a three-acre lake, the entire property consists of approximately fourteen acres. Typical of Fay Jones's work, the manner in which the house is sited in the landscape is an important feature of the overall design. Not at all typical of Jones's work, however, is the residence's flat roof, which has widely projecting eaves that feature a raised abstract design at the edge.

The entrance to the property is marked by a pair of stone gates. Installed by the current owner of the property, the gates are not original but are sympathetic to Jones's design of the house. Past the gates, the approach to the Applegate House is a curving, upwardly sloping drive to the north of the house, terminating in a circular drive that passes under the car shelter on the west side of the house.

Just one story in height, the west elevation is the home's most horizontal facade. It is dominated by the projecting car shelter, which is covered by a flat, asymmetrical, white concrete roof supported on large stone piers. Only a large stationary window next to the single-leaf entry door, recessed under the car shelter, and a tall, thin window to the south penetrate the walls of this elevation. By minimizing the west elevation's height and limiting its fenestration, Jones enhanced the home's relationship to its sloping site, at the same time maximizing the impact of the manner in which the three-story interior opens up vertically and captures the view through its heavily-glazed east wall.

Sited at the top of a hill that slopes down to the lake below, the Applegate House clearly was designed by Jones to maximize views of the lake. Taking advantage of the hillside, the rear (east) elevation of the house is three levels high and is punctuated by curvilinear, cantilevered balconies that are enclosed by Jones-designed iron balustrades. Sliding glass doors provide access to the balconies, enhancing the residence's penetration into the landscape. This rear elevation also contains flagstone patio areas and winding paths, all designed to capitalize on the lake view.

Jones designed small circular bathroom windows on the southeast section of the house, and he has joked that the glass for these windows came from two 1957 "Chevy" windshields at an auto salvage yard. The largest group of windows on this rear portion are a two-story group of full-height, largely stationary windows which light the atrium within. A second, smaller group of windows, to the north of the first group, lights the living area and bar. Along the eastern side of the Applegate House, the site slopes uphill to the north, and the house gradually becomes one level again, with other living areas underground. The edge of the roof is scalloped with large curvilinear indentations to mimic the curves in the stone walls of the structure. This design element is evident elsewhere but is most noticeable at this point on the exterior.

The stonework of the Applegate House is exceptional and is the dominant structural and aesthetic element in the home's design. The house was constructed utilizing a brownish indigenous Ozark stone laid in random ashlar coursing. Projecting stones of various sizes serve to enliven the facade and break up the horizontal pattern. The fact that the residence's primary windows are located on the rear elevation, and all windows are recessed into the stone with minimal framing, underscores Jones's intentional emphasis on the nature of the stone. The same design elements also provide privacy, limiting visual penetration into the house from the drive or "front" of the property.

Jones's design of the interior of the residence also emphasizes the nature of the indigenous stone. With two minor exceptions, the interior walls are stone. (The exceptions are a small bedroom, which was recently created out of a storage area on the lower level and features plaster walls, and a small half-bath with wood paneling, which was added at the north end of the house off the kitchen area.) The serpentine stone walls of the interior create the well-orchestrated flow of space for which Jones designs are known, with very few doors partitioning off areas and interrupting the continuous interior space (thus creating the ideal situation for entertaining by the Applegates).

The central feature of the interior is a large pool, nine-and-one-half feet deep and surrounded by an atrium area that is two stories high. The bottom of the pool originally was finished in a dark color,

which increased the sense of spatial depth, but the current owner has repainted the pool white. The white plastered ceiling over the pool features a recessed circular area which originally contained hanging globe lights, now in storage. Because the Applegates entertained at home frequently, they wanted the open flow of interior space, and the house originally had only two bedrooms. (A third, smaller bedroom was added by the current owner at the basement level on the north end of the house.) Three circular, stone showers feature rock “waterfalls” instead of shower heads. Another unusual feature is the Jones-designed heating and air conditioning intake and return “vents” which were created through the omission of mortar from joints between stones, allowing for unobtrusive air circulation throughout the house. (Jones would later utilize a similar system in his design for Thorncrown Chapel.) The flat roof of the house features sixteen domed skylights, all of which have been replaced due to leakage or aging. Typical of other houses designed by the architect, all cabinetry in the house was custom-built to Jones’s design specifications.

Applegate House History

Built in 1965-1967, the Joe Applegate House holds a unique place within Fay Jones’s body of work because of its curving walls and flat roof. The curvilinear nature of the residence’s construction reflects the influence of Bruce Goff, Jones’s mentor during his years (1951-53) of teaching at the University of Oklahoma

In 1965, pharmacist Joe Applegate and his wife Mable commissioned Fay Jones to design their new home in Bentonville, Arkansas. The Applegates liked to entertain, and the spacious residence’s open plan enabled them to host large social gatherings.

According to the architect, the unusual (for Jones) design of the house was due in part to Joe Applegate’s request for a house with curvilinear elements. The fact that Jones was able to respond so aptly to his client’s request underscores his transcendent ability to use the principles of organic architecture to solve the “problem” (defined by Jones as “the program, the site, orientation, and the materials to be used”¹) at hand. In the case of the Applegate House, the solution to the problem was a design more obviously influenced by the work of his former mentor Bruce Goff than any other Jones design.

The late Bruce Goff has been described as “an organic architect . . . who approaches a project from the inside out. . . . [H]e analyzes each client, then designs outward from the personality he has discovered. Thus he arrives at the outer form last, with no preconceptions. He cares only that his curious new shapes be good to look at, and have no beginning nor end.”² With designs characterized by lay people as “strange,” “dramatic,” “weird,” “exotic,” and “shocking,” Goff was considered creative even by Frank Lloyd Wright.³

In his book on Fay Jones, Robert Ivy says “Goff’s primary lesson for Jones was intuitive, not explicit. Goff’s is a naturalistic architecture filtered through a strong individual consciousness. Jones characterizes Goff’s interests as ‘the strange, the unusual, the exotic,’ a reading of organic architecture that produced building forms that ‘began to look like organisms,’ while Jones’s architecture became more geometric.”⁴

The exception to the distinction drawn by Ivy between Goff and Jones was the Applegate House. Rather than geometric, it is curvilinear, its walls undulating rather like an organism. Jones’s interior and exterior use of stone, seen also in earlier designs for his own residence (1956) and the Shaheen-

Goodfellow Weekend Cottage (1965), is another element of the Applegate House's design that owes something to Goff's influence, as is the interior pool. (Much of the ground floor of one notable Goff design, the Bavinger House near Norman, Oklahoma, was water.⁵)

A final feature of the Applegate House that is a major departure from other Jones projects is the flat roof, necessitated by curvilinear elements that did not lend themselves to Jones's characteristic "roof-dominant" design. Generally, Jones felt "that a long, prominent sloping roof with deep overhangs evokes a reassuring sense of shelter and at the same time is immensely practical. . . ."⁶ The Applegate House has the overhangs but not the prominent sloping roof.

After living in the house for about ten years, the Applegates sold it to musician Ronnie Hawkins of The Band, who occupied it for about two years. The third family to own the house were the Simses, from 1980 to 1994. Since that time, the house has belonged to current owners Mr. and Mrs. Don Wetmore, who have undertaken much-needed maintenance and repair work. An offbeat bit of history is the fact that the house once was used as the setting for a "B" movie starring Peter Fonda.

While the design of the Applegate House clearly is the product of Fay Jones's characteristic approach to design, and it incorporates characteristic Jones features (for instance, the masterful manner in which the house relates to its natural setting, the use of finely crafted natural materials, and sophisticated orchestration of interior space), the uncharacteristic elements-especially the curvilinear walls and flat roof-make it unique among Jones designs, both within Arkansas and elsewhere.

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The Edmondson House, Forrest City, St. Francis County. AHPP photo.

Edmondson House, Forrest City, St. Francis County

Nominated to the National Register of Historic Places on June 5, 1996

Architectural Description

Located on a three-acre, lakeside site in Forrest City, Arkansas, the Edmondson House complex was built in three stages, all designed by architect E. Fay Jones. Construction of the complex began in 1978 with the main house, which took until 1980 to complete due to the intricacies of its design. Construction of a guest house followed, beginning in 1985, and additional phases of construction, through 1986, included adding a greenhouse to the guest house and constructing a plaza area leading down to the lake at the north end of the Edmondson property, where a small pagoda-like “fishing shack” was built. Similar materials, forms, and design elements tie the buildings together, creating a cohesive architectural statement, as well as one that is unique among Fay Jones’s projects. With red tile roofs and cream-colored stucco walls, the buildings of the Edmondson House complex are unlike any of the architect’s other designs. The project also was Jones’s most comprehensive residential work in Arkansas, encompassing furniture, wall hangings, dishes, vases, and even stationery.

Though the main house is barely visible from the street, the comprehensiveness of Fay Jones’s design for the Edmondson complex is immediately obvious at the entrance to the property, where cream-colored stucco walls mirror the finish used on the rest of the complex’s structures, and details—such as an architect-designed mailbox and an entry gate pattern incorporating the initial “E”—provide clues to

what lies beyond.

The Edmondson property initially slopes gently away from the street, then drops abruptly into a wooded ravine down to the lake. Challenged by the difficult but beautiful site, Jones-as always-put his principles of organic architecture to work, creating a design that both takes advantage of, and fits comfortably into, its natural setting. The Edmondson House complex unfolds down its hillside site to the lake.

The driveway from the street leads westward to the parking area, comprising a covered car shelter on the left and a parking pad on the right which occupy the property's highest ground. Through an architect-designed gate, a brick pathway and steps (illuminated by Jones-designed lights) lead downward in a northwesterly direction, through a courtyard and past a pair of sculptures and a fountain-also all designed by Jones-to a footbridge. The bridge spans the hillside's abrupt drop and leads through another architect-designed gate to the front door, located on the second level of the four-level main house.

The main (southeast) elevation of the house is organized into two bays, each topped by a front-facing gable, the right (north) bay projecting forward. The roofline of the north gable extends downward to the south, beyond the wall of the house, its eaves supported by a wooden beam and a stucco pier to create a sheltered entry area leading to the front door, located in the front elevation's south bay.

The single-leaf entrance door with sidelight was custom-built of wood and glass and repeats the abstract pattern designed by Jones to incorporate the initial "E." The pattern is seen again in a window above the door and in a triangular window in the roof next to the chimney that rises through the center of the house. The main elevation's fenestration also includes a long thin window that begins near the ridge of the south bay's roof and descends to the lowest level of the house.

The massing of the main house is irregular. A deck projects from the northeast elevation, and a screened porch on the northwest elevation overlooks the route to the guest house and lake. The southwest elevation appears almost fortress-like, rising tall above the steep site, its windows located high above the ground.

Though the amount of window area in the main house is not overabundant, there is ample light, and-typical of a Jones design-it is masterfully controlled. The magazine *Southern Accents* reported that "Jones positioned the house so carefully that in the winter, sun cascades in to warm the rooms but barely intrudes at all in the summer months."¹ In the main living/dining area, entered on the second level but opening upward two stories, light comes through skylights and clerestories but is reflected and enhanced by mirrors incorporated into the design of columns and walls.

In addition to the living and dining areas, the second level-considered the main floor of the house-includes a separate sitting room, with custom-designed audio-visual storage, the kitchen, and a powder room. Like all three other levels of the house, a working fireplace is located at the heart of the main floor. This also is the level from which the deck and the screen porch-opening the house to its natural setting-project.

The two uppermost levels of the house comprise a master bedroom suite. The bedroom itself, closet area, and bath are located on the third level. A study occupies the fourth level. Moving upward

through the third and fourth levels, the floor area decreases because each of these levels overlooks the one(s) below.

The first, or ground, level of the house includes two bedrooms and a sitting room (originally a suite for two daughters), closets, bath, and storage. It is from this level that access is gained to steps leading downhill to the plaza area and separate guest house.

Interior walls throughout the main house echo the exterior in being creamy stucco. Wooden trim is red oak, except for a darker redwood used on major beams.

Also throughout the interior of the main house many remarkable Jones-designed elements are seen. Light fixtures, chairs, tables, a baby's crib, fireplace accessories, dishware, napkins, wall hangings, stationery—all were designed by Jones, at the clients' request, to create a uniquely cohesive aesthetic environment. The level of detail is extraordinary; the plans for the main house ran to more than one hundred pages.

From the ground level of the main house, steps lead down to a broad tile plaza that surrounds a small heated pool, or “spa,” which is sheltered from view by a large Jones-designed trellis. Exceptional in its detail, the trellis contains “over one mile of linear footage of redwood . . . [a]nd it is all pegged,” according to Jim Finch, contractor for the Edmondson House.² Originally intended to be covered with wisteria, the trellis was left bare because both architect and owner decided it was complex enough as is.³

Just past the pool is the guest house, added to the complex in the early 1980s but designed with the same creamy stucco walls and gabled red tile roof as the main house. Generally rectangular in form, the guest house has three levels. On the main (middle) level is the “guest lounge” or living area, lighted—much like the living area in the main house—by skylights and clerestories. A prominent bay window in the west end of the guest house admits both light and a view of the lake. On the sunny southwest side of the main level is the 1985 greenhouse addition. Like the main house, the guest house is fitted throughout with Fay Jones-designed furnishings and fixtures.

Situated on a sixteen-acre lake, the Edmondson House complex also includes a small square, pagoda-like wooden “fishing shack” designed by Jones.

Edmondson House History

Designed by Fay Jones for Don and Ellen Edmondson, the main house of the Edmondson complex was built from 1978 to 1980 followed between 1985 and 1986 by the guest house, “fishing shack,”⁴ and various site improvements. With creamy stucco walls and red tile roofs, the structures comprising the complex are different in appearance from all other Jones designs. In addition, the Edmondson House complex was the most complete and comprehensive of all of Jones's residential projects in Arkansas, encompassing all site improvements—walls, gates, sculptures, fountain, courtyard, trellis, plaza—and virtually all interior furnishings and fixtures.

As a student at the University of Arkansas in the 1950s, Don Edmondson became fascinated with Fay Jones's work after hearing Jones lecture for an art appreciation class. In 1985, *Southern Accents* explained: “For more than 30 years, the former student followed Jones's career with interest, noting

that while the architect refined his designs, he continued to be true to his philosophy [of organic architecture]. Having a home designed by Jones became a dream that he nurtured over the years.”⁵

When in a position to pursue his dream, Edmondson contacted Jones and asked him to “Do everything you should do with this house, everything you want to do,”⁶ thus starting a year-long process of give and take between the architect and clients before design work began. The Edmondsons did have certain requests. Ellen Edmondson wanted a more “tailored look” than the wood-and-stone designs for which Fay Jones was known, so they asked for stucco walls and a tile roof. They also did not want the carport to dominate the house, and they requested that the kitchen not be part of the general circulation pattern in the main living area. “Lots of light” and a house reaching up into the trees, not nestled under them, were other factors important to the Edmondsons.⁷ They also had the resources, and the confidence in their architect, to allow Jones to design virtually everything in and around their new home.

Jones’s principles of organic architecture thus were put to the test in new ways. Certain aspects of the design problem as outlined by the Edmondsons could be solved in a familiar manner. The request for a house in the trees, for example, hearkened back to a theme running through much of Jones’s work (expressed in both his own home and in Stoneflower), as did the desire for “lots of light.” The stucco walls and tile roof, however, were definite departures from Jones’s characteristic use of natural materials-sometimes so natural that they actually came from the building site. Jones’s handling of this departure, however, was well-received. *Progressive Architecture*, for example, said: “In some areas, the stucco planes are less expressive than might have been the case in stone or some other material. . . . However, because the land surrounding the house is so heavily wooded, nature fills in the blanks as no doubt expected.”⁸ Architectural critic William Marlin called the Edmondson House a “stucco-and-tile symphony.”⁹

If the materials used for the house were different, Jones’s handling of a difficult site and his attention to detail were as masterful as ever. When the Edmondson House received an Honor Award in 1984 from the AIA Gulf States Region, jurors cited especially its “superb sequence of spatial details and massing,” also noting that “the fluidity of exterior and interior space reflects a sure hand in all aspects of detailing, design and site planning.”¹⁰

In his analysis of the Edmondson House, Robert Ivy points out that the “union of trellis, house, and houseware into a cohesive composition echoes Wright’s goal of fully integrated composition.” He goes on to state, however, that “the Edmondson property demonstrates Jones’s emergence from Wright’s shadow; quiet assurance characterizes the planning and spatial composition; humility characterizes the subordination of building image to the site’s fullness.”¹¹

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- 3 Jim Murphy, “Arkansas Aerie,” *Progressive Architecture*, December 1987, p. 88.
- 4 Feb. 9, 2000, interview with Maurice Jennings. The structure basically serves as a fish-cleaning station adjacent to the boat dock.
- 5 “A Lyrical Environment,” p. 109.
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Thorncrown Chapel, Eureka Springs, Carroll County. AHPP photo.

Thorncrown Chapel, Eureka Springs, Carroll County

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places on April 28, 2000

Architectural Description

Situated in the Ozark Mountains, just off U.S. Highway 62 west of Eureka Springs, Arkansas, Thorncrown Chapel was designed by architect E. Fay Jones and completed in 1980. Termed an “enchancing example of contemporary architecture”¹ by architectural critic Wolf Von Eckardt, the chapel immediately struck a chord with both the general public and the professional design community, becoming Jones’s most widely recognized-and, arguably, most highly regarded-work. A wood-frame structure resting on a stone foundation, Thorncrown is at home among the trees, its tall, narrow profile suggestive both of Gothic cathedrals and of previous Jones designs, especially the weekend cottage Stoneflower.

Located on a wooded, steeply sloping site in the Ozark Mountains near the Victorian-era resort community of Eureka Springs, Arkansas, Thorncrown Chapel is constructed of southern pine two-by-fours, two-by-sixes, and two-by-twelves; local fieldstone; and glass. The simple materials were dictated by the site and by the architect’s (and his client’s) desire to preserve it:

In walking the site there was an early realization that heavy earth-moving equipment or massive construction materials could not be used without destroying the wooded setting; and that the whole design must hinge on not using anything too big for two men to carry along a narrow hillside pathway. This limitation was key to the structural concept. It became a

building of many small pieces . . . linked together into modular, angular structural elements that formed a larger cage-like structure infilled with clear glass.²

The visitor approaches Thorncrown Chapel from the southwest and comes upon it unexpectedly, around the bend of a hill. Except where the gravel path leads to its entrance, the chapel stands close to the trees that surround it, its gray-stained wooden framework closely matching the color of their bark. The one-room chapel is rectangular in form, twenty-four feet wide and sixty feet long, and rises forty-eight feet into the tree canopy. (It is exactly twice the size of Stoneflower, the weekend house designed by Jones at Eden Isle, Arkansas.) Anchored by fieldstone foundation walls and sheltered by a broad gabled roof, Thorncrown fits comfortably into its natural setting.

The chapel's delicate wooden framework is its signature. Infilled with glass, the exterior framework—particularly in the identical north and south gable ends—draws the eye upward, leaving a first impression of imposing height. The long side walls, also delicate wooden frames infilled with glass, open the chapel to its setting, a panoramic valley view on one side and a rocky, wooded hillside on the other. Low fieldstone foundation walls not only anchor the chapel to its site but ingeniously serve as ductwork; insulated cavities within the walls distribute air through small holes in the mortar joints.

Inside Thorncrown Chapel, an intricate web of overhead cross-bracing (a refinement of a similar bracing system used by Jones at Stoneflower in 1965) again draws the eye upward. In the words of the architect, “This stabilizing web of braces, under a ridge skylight, receives a constantly changing play of light and pattern—a natural ornamentation of the structure and the space.”³

The interior's crowning touch came in the unlikely form of steel connectors used to join the wooden braces together where they cross at the center of the chapel. The centers of the connectors are open, creating diamond-shaped patterns of light at the chapel's heart. In a letter to Fay Jones, the author of the textbook *Fundamentals of Building Construction: Materials and Methods* called the connectors “the single most inspired and powerful architectural detail that I know of.”⁴ Robert Ivy says, “[C]ollectively they create the illusion of infinity.”⁵

In its emphasis on simple, natural materials and on relating the building to its natural setting, the design of Thorncrown Chapel follows two of the three primary tenets of organic architecture. The third tenet—the part-whole relationship—is seen in the manner in which Jones designed everything in the chapel: pews, pulpit, door handles, lanterns. “I wanted there to be a family of forms or patterns, a strong generating idea that everything relates to, rather than having just an assembly of things,” Jones told an interviewer. He also wanted to “keep the detailing very, very simple, integral to the design . . . [N]othing has been stuck on just for decoration.”⁶ In other words, the part is to the whole as the whole is to the part.

In Thorncrown, Jones also introduced a concept of his own, something he called the “operative opposite.” While the chapel's design alluded to the architecture of Gothic cathedrals, Jones reversed the rule of Gothic construction, which has repeated external flying buttresses pushing the structure upward and inward. As he explained, “Thorncrown has this repetition of structural elements, but stability is achieved by wooden tensile members pulling from within.”⁷ Tension rather than compression: the operative opposite.

Two additional properties within the nominated area do not contribute to the chapel's significance,

but are within the wooded tract that houses Thorncrown. These are a small, simple, wood-frame study of Jones's design, located on the property southwest of the chapel and sited into the hillside, which currently serves the owner, as well as staff who manage the business of the chapel, and the later Thorncrown Worship Center, not of Jones's design, constructed in 1989 to relieve crowding caused by the chapel's popularity. Neither detract from the serenity of Thorncrown Chapel's design and setting.

Thorncrown Chapel History

Dedicated in July of 1980, Thorncrown Chapel was a turning point in Fay Jones's career. Its elegant design won international acclaim, bringing Jones's work to the attention of a much wider audience. Hailed as the best work of American architecture during the 1980s, the chapel already has made its way into textbooks and architectural anthologies. As a turning point in Jones's career and an internationally renowned work of architecture, Thorncrown Chapel is exceptionally important.

Fay Jones's involvement in Thorncrown Chapel was the result of a fortuitous confluence of events. Jim Reed, a native Arkansan who had retired to the Ozark Mountains after a teaching career in California, noticed that travelers on busy U. S. Highway 62 regularly stopped at the foot of his property to enjoy the panoramic view of the mountains. Instead of trying to end the trespassing, Reed decided to welcome wayfarers by building a chapel. As Charles Gandee wrote for *Architectural Record* in 1981:

Providence must have been eavesdropping on Mr. Reed's thoughts, because a stranger in a local restaurant-eavesdropping on his conversation-directed him to architect Fay Jones. A more empathetic collaboration couldn't have been formed. Reed's idea that "we have something here that is very fragile . . . it should be preserved . . . we don't want it destroyed," coincided perfectly with Jones's concept of an "organic" architecture synchronized with the landscape.⁸

That Fay Jones was the right architect for the job became abundantly clear after the chapel's dedication in July of 1980. Thorncrown Chapel was an immediate hit with the general public, and visitors began arriving in overwhelming numbers. Jim Reed expected three or four dozen people daily; instead, 40,000 had seen the chapel by the winter after its dedication. A decade later, a quarter of a million people were visiting Thorncrown Chapel annually.⁹

The architectural community's response to Thorncrown was similarly enthusiastic. The year after its completion, the chapel received an Honor Award from the American Institute of Architects, and it began appearing regularly in professional publications. In *Architectural Record*, Charles Gandee said the chapel was "the palpable expression of its time, place, and purpose. . . ."¹⁰ and called it "a brilliant testimony to the power of architecture to intensify experience and inspire contemplation. . . ."¹¹ *Interiors* magazine labeled it "a sophisticated jewel set perfectly in its surroundings" and a building of "consummate quality."¹² Writing for the *AIA Journal*, Stanley Abercrombie said Thorncrown "is more than a striking building. . . . it is an original."¹³

Thorncrown Chapel also appeared in a number of foreign architectural journals. *The Architectural Review*, a British publication, said "Fay Jones has crafted a building that beautifully matches its time and place."¹⁴ Articles about Thorncrown appeared in Japan's *Kenchiku to Toshi* (*Architecture and*

Urbanism) in June of 1981; in Italy's *L'Architettura* in December of 1981; and in another Italian journal, *Domus*, in March of 1982.

Writing for a more general audience, the readers of *Time* magazine, Wolf Von Eckardt pointed out that Thorncrown Chapel was “one of the most popular and widely publicized of new American buildings,” describing it as “an almost transparent structure of mostly timber and glass” that “seems to be at one with the surrounding woods and rocks.” Focusing on the chapel's interior system of cross-bracing, Von Eckardt said: “The trusses inside the structure form a repetitive, rhythmic lattice pattern as evocative as a Bach fugue.”¹⁵

The acclaim for Thorncrown continued through the 1980s. In March of 1983, an article in *Newsweek* said that “since its opening in 1981, the Thorncrown Chapel has risen to the status of an icon in contemporary architecture. Designed by a once obscure architect named Fay Jones, 61, it has been praised in almost every architectural journal in the Western world.”¹⁶ In 1987, the publication *Places* said: “Thorncrown Chapel is a building that is also an astonishing formalization of the forest setting into which it is placed.”¹⁷ A 1989 article in *Friends of Kebyar*, discussing the concept of the “operative opposite” that Fay Jones employed in Thorncrown's design, asserted: “The result is a structure of almost ethereal beauty, as light as Gothic is heavy, as stretched as Gothic is squeezed.”¹⁸

In 1986, architects added Thorncrown Chapel to the list of America's best works of architecture. As explained in the “Statement of Contribution” accompanying Fay Jones's nomination for the 1990 AIA Gold Medal: “In 1986, *Architecture* magazine invited its readers to nominate buildings of the last 10 years for addition to its 1976 list of the best works of architecture of America's first 200 years. The building that evoked the greatest response was the tiny, remote Thorncrown Chapel. . . .”¹⁹ Five years later, another survey of architects ranked Thorncrown Chapel as the best work of American architecture during the 1980s.²⁰

When Fay Jones received the 1990 AIA Gold Medal for his lifetime of achievement, a new round of recognition for both the architect and his masterwork ensued. Andrea Oppenheimer Dean, writing for *Smithsonian* magazine in August of 1991, noted that Thorncrown Chapel had been highlighted in a segment televised by NBC News and called Jones's design for the chapel “crucial” to his receipt of the Gold Medal.²¹

In his 1981 article for the *AIA Journal*, Stanley Abercrombie predicted that Thorncrown Chapel might “be turning up 50 years from now in anthologies of 20th century architecture.”²² His prediction came true—about forty-five years ahead of time.

The textbook *Fundamentals of Building Construction: Materials and Methods*, first published in 1985 and widely used in American schools of architecture, includes a full-page interior photo of Thorncrown Chapel and speaks of Fay Jones's use of two-inch framing lumber to “create a richly inspiring space.” The textbook's author, architect Edward Allen (who for many years taught “The Art of Detailing” at Yale University), told Fay Jones in 1998 that the steel connectors used on Thorncrown's cross-bracing comprised “the single most inspired and powerful architectural detail that I know of,” adding that no one had yet disagreed with him.²³

In recognition of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the American Institute of Architects, in December of 1987 *Architecture* magazine published thirty pages by Andrea Oppenheimer Dean on “Seventy-

Five Turbulent Years of American Architecture As Recorded In The Professional Press.” The article featured photos and discussion of the icons of American architecture, among them Louis Sullivan’s Merchants National Bank, Cass Gilbert’s Woolworth Building, Grand Central Terminal and the Chrysler Building, Frank Lloyd Wright’s Fallingwater, Mies van der Rohe’s Seagram Building, Eero Saarinen’s Dulles Airport, the John Hancock Center and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, . . . and Fay Jones’s Thorncrown Chapel.

Thorncrown Chapel also is included in Sourcebook of *Contemporary North American Architecture: From Postwar to Postmodern*, published in 1989. The book’s author, Sylvia Hart Wright, characterizes Thorncrown as an “exquisite chapel in the Ozark woods. . . .”²⁴ In *American Architecture: Ideas and Ideologies in the Late Twentieth Century*, author Paul Heyer calls Thorncrown Chapel “an architecture which complements and, in creating a special sense of place, ‘almost’ completes the site.”²⁵

Finally, Thorncrown, of course, is thoroughly discussed in Robert Adams Ivy’s 1992 book on Fay Jones, *The Architecture of E. Fay Jones, FAIA*. Ivy calls the chapel “elemental—a man-made temple married to the woodland” and says: “This harmoniously unified masterpiece is arguably among the twentieth century’s great works of art.”²⁶

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Reed House, Washington County. AHPP photo

Roy and Norma Reed House, Washington County

Nominated to the National Register of Historic Places on June 5, 1996

Architectural Description

Situated on a hillside on a small working farm in rural northwest Arkansas (about ten miles outside of Fayetteville), the Roy and Norma Reed House was designed by architect E. Fay Jones and completed in 1983. A one-and-one-half story, wood-frame structure, rectangular in shape with a stone foundation and partial basement, the Reed House is sheltered by a steeply-pitched, cedar-shingled roof. The house received an American Institute of Architects Honor Award in 1987 and is an exceptional example of Fay Jones's talent for integrating buildings with their settings. In the case of the Reed House, however, there is a twist: a portion of the setting is man-made—the vernacular farm structures of the Ozarks.

The visitor approaches the Reed House from the southwest, up a sloping, unpaved road that winds through a stand of trees, and discovers the house, at the edge of a pasture, looking both familiar and new. Fay Jones has explained that he was “trying to relate the house to the site in a symbiotic way, in some very natural belonging sense.”¹ However, he also has said of the design: “It’s a simple little barn, picking up some of the motifs of nearby tractor sheds, the posts with the wire bracing, that sort of thing. The diagonal ribbing on the north and south comes from the corn cribbing you see in these parts.”²

Taking inspiration both from the natural setting and from neighboring vernacular farm buildings, Jones nestled the house into the hillside and anchored it to the site with a stone foundation wall. Thus, the downhill (west) elevation is the most imposing, appearing to rise two stories because the stone-walled basement level is exposed on this side. A centrally-located door provides basement-level access. Above, at the first-floor level, a wooden porch projects from the house, exhibiting

design details that show the sure hand of the architect. Four wooden posts rise up from the ground to support the porch, but they penetrate its deck and continue rising to support the overhanging eaves of the main roof, which shelter the porch.

The home's steeply-pitched, gabled roof is covered with cedar shingles and at its ridge is a central skylight that can be opened for ventilation. The eastern slope of the roof is "decorated" by a long, fixed ladder, used each spring to cover the skylight with translucent fabric that reduces heat gain during the summer. Also punctuating the roofline are two clay tile chimney flues, rising directly south of the skylight.

The roof's widely overhanging eaves dip close to the ground on the uphill (east) side of the house, supported by six wooden posts and sheltering a porch with a fieldstone floor that wraps around the north and south ends of the house. A sliding glass door is located at the center of the east elevation, providing access to the main interior living space.

The wooden siding-oriented vertically on the walls of the house but diagonally in the north and south gable ends-is Western red cedar. Both gable ends project beyond the first floor, giving shelter below and increasing floor space for the interior's partial second floor. Both gables also contain large, multi-part, diamond-shaped "hayloft" windows, though the one in the south gable is broader than its counterpart to the north. Striking but also functional, the windows open to provide cross-ventilation. A sliding glass door is centered beneath the projecting south gable end. Under the north gable are three small kitchen windows.

The interior of the Reed House is finished sparsely with painted walls and simple, but well-crafted, stained wood trim. The main living area is one large open space encompassing living, dining, and kitchen areas. (A bathroom is partitioned off at the southeast corner, its enclosure balanced by the staircase in the southwest corner.) A wood stove sits at the center of the open area with twin clay tile flues rising straight up through the ridge of the roof. The flues are flanked by square structural columns that also extend to the roofline. The flues and columns create a strong vertical element at the heart of the living space in the Reed House.

At either end of the interior, bedroom/loft areas connected by a refined sort of "catwalk" create a partial second story. At the north end, the master bedroom and bath are fully enclosed, except that a diamond-shaped window-echoing those in the gable ends-provides a view over the downstairs living area. The guest sleeping loft at the south end is open to the living area below.

The wood stove in the main living area and another in the partial basement, which serves as a study, are the home's only sources of heat, and there is no air conditioning. Walls and roof are heavily insulated; in the winter, the stove's clay tile flues radiate heat; in the summer, the big "hayloft" windows and skylight keep air circulating, assisted by two ceiling fans.

The Reed House commission did not include architect-designed furnishings, but the clients' own furniture and decorative objects are at home in this structure shaped both by its natural setting and by its vernacular neighbors.

Also on the Reed property is a car shelter that was not designed by Jones and is noncontributing to the nomination. It is located east of the house.

Reed House History

Designed by Fay Jones, the Roy and Norma Reed House was completed in 1983 on a small farm in northwest Arkansas. Termed “one of Fay Jones’s pivotal works”³ by Robert Ivy, the Reed House expanded Jones’s application of the principles of organic architecture to embrace elements of the man-made setting as well as the natural. In 1987, the house won for Jones his second AIA Honor Award. Its simplicity and use of familiar vernacular forms distinguish the Reed House from Jones’s other residential.

When journalist Roy Reed, a former *New York Times* correspondent, decided to return to his home state and build a house on an 11-acre site he owned in tiny Hogeys, Arkansas, he “unhesitatingly chose E. Fay Jones, FAIA, of nearby Fayetteville” as architect “because I liked the homey quality of his houses, his use of so much stone and wood. Fay’s houses are designed for the hills; they seem to fit in and blend with the mountains.”⁴

Because Jones’s reputation had grown considerably after the completion of Thorncrown Chapel in 1980, Reed and his wife Norma were warned that they might not be able to afford a “Fay Jones house.” However, Jones readily took up the challenge of designing a small, site-sensitive, energy-efficient house on a limited budget—the Reeds’ primary requests. Roy Reed also explained that “we’re sort of hill people, with a small farm, cattle roaming around, dogs, cats, and dirt. So we needed a place that could accommodate trash, where it wouldn’t matter if I just left a pile of scrap lumber for six months.”⁵

Jones answered the Reeds’ requests with “an intangible quality of design that transforms their spare, modestly priced, 2,300 square-foot frame building into a small masterwork,”⁶ according to Andrea Oppenheimer Dean, writing for *Architecture* magazine. Robert Ivy asserts that the Reeds’ “programmatic constraints provided a framework for creative thought. . . . [The home’s] simplicity and clarity distinguish it as among Jones’s most accessible residential designs.”⁷

Jones’s design for the Reed House expanded the “building-site relationship” tenet of organic architecture to include man-made as well as natural elements of the site, and certain elements of its design—the diagonal gable-end siding and simple porch posts, for example—obviously were borrowed from vernacular structures. However, William Marlin points out that the “vernacular references never lapse into cloying rusticity.”⁸ Similarly, Robert Ivy states that simplicity and clarity “should not be mistaken for lack of sophistication,” giving as an example the fact that the house “turns a different face to each point of the compass.”⁹

The AIA’s choice of the Reed House for a 1987 Honor Award provides evidence of Fay Jones’s success at applying his design principles to this small yet challenging project. The Reed House also received international attention, appearing in Italy’s *L’Architettura* in November of 1984 and in Japan’s *Kenchiku to Toshi (Architecture and Urbanism)* in July of 1985.

It is worth noting that during the same general period of time that Jones was working on the Reed House, the early 1980s, he also was designing additions to the Edmondson House complex in Forrest City, Arkansas. In some ways, the two projects were polar opposites—one very large and complicated, with nearly every inch architect-designed; the other small and simple, emphasizing energy conservation and the ability to “accommodate trash.” The fact that Jones could adapt his design principles to

successfully solve these two very different problems is a measure of his extraordinary talent.

Alluding to how its spareness gives the Reed House kinship to Oriental design, Robert Ivy states: “An Oriental sensibility and American pragmatism imbue the small Reed residence with simplicity and economy. Its uncommon dignity, common sense, and strong originality, however, surpass both the sources of its inspiration and its apparent size.”

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Mildred B. Cooper Memorial Chapel, Bella Vista, Benton County. AHPP photo.

Mildred B. Cooper Memorial Chapel, Bella Vista, Benton County

Nominated to the National Register of Historic Places on June 5, 1996

Architectural Description

Constructed in 1988, the Mildred B. Cooper Memorial Chapel in Bella Vista, Arkansas, was architect Fay Jones's second major commission for a chapel. The tall, narrow, wood-and-steel frame structure is rectangular and rests on a low stone foundation. A variation on themes previously sounded in Jones's design for Thorncrowne Chapel, Cooper Chapel features a dramatic progression of Gothic pointed arches that begins at its entrance and continues through the interior.

Though located just a few hundred feet from a busy highway and shopping center in the retirement community of Bella Vista, Arkansas, Mildred B. Cooper Memorial Chapel stands in solitude, overlooking a small lake and protected by a wooded hill. To reach the chapel, visitors walk a hillside pathway that is lighted by Jones-designed foot lamps. Around a curve, the chapel appears.

The use of steel, in addition to wood, in the framing of Cooper Chapel allowed for a design even more delicate in appearance than Thorncrowne Chapel's. Fay Jones explained: "I wanted something light and delicate for the bracing of the building. There's a reference to Gothic architecture in the

characteristic geometry of the building, but we wanted a web shape. Steel, being very strong, could produce a thinner structure than could wood.”¹

The use of steel also allowed for curves in the framework, enabling Jones to use the Gothic pointed arch as the chapel’s primary design motif. The motif is introduced in the main facade, which is sheathed in narrow vertical redwood siding. A tall pointed-arch opening pierces the wooden siding, framing the entryway. Just above the point of the arch is a round, unglazed window, suggestive of a Gothic cathedral’s rose window.

Behind the tall arched opening is a flagstone-paved vestibule leading to the main entrance, comprising a pair of pointed-arch entry doors made of oak. Like Thorncrown, Cooper Chapel is a single lofty rectangular room, its long side walls infilled with glass and resting on low stone foundation walls (which, also like Thorncrown, enclose ductwork for the heating and cooling system). Cooper Chapel is somewhat larger than Thorncrown, however: twenty-four feet wide by eighty-four feet long and rising fifty-four feet to its skylighted peak. (Thorncrown Chapel’s dimensions are twenty-four by sixty feet by forty-eight feet high.)

Cooper Chapel’s rear facade, like the front, is sheathed in vertical redwood siding, but the sides of the chapel are largely sheets of glass, held in place between steel-and-wood columns set at six-foot intervals. On the exterior, paired steel brackets curve outward from the columns, supporting the gable roof’s overhanging eaves. Inside, bent steel I beams painted bronze connect to the columns to provide structural bracing, at the same time creating a dramatic web of pointed arches where they intersect high above the chapel’s flagstone floor.

Daylight fills the chapel, coming in through the glass side walls and the skylight (which extends most of the length of interior), continually altering the patterns made by the structural steel web. Explaining what he intended, Fay Jones said: “In creating a path to the sky, there’s an ever-changing amount of light, and it has a decorative quality as it plays over the structural members. It’s a constantly changing shadow pattern.”²

As daylight fades, pairs of uplights flanking each column suffuse the chapel with a warm glow. Decorative steel grilles cover the lights, creating patterns on the steel web above.

Jones designed all of the chapel’s furnishings and fixtures, including-in addition to the lighting-such things as door pulls, pews, and a pulpit. The pews and other interior wood trim are oak stained to blend with the bronze finish of the steel structural members.

A simple one-room, wood-clad office building, constructed at the same time as the chapel, nestles into the side of a hill at the north end of the property, where it is not noticeable from the pathway up to the chapel. It is considered noncontributing to the significance of the chapel itself, but does not detract from the integrity of the chapel’s design and setting.

Cooper Chapel History

John B. Cooper, Sr., developer of the Bella Vista retirement community, conceived Mildred B. Cooper Memorial Chapel in memory of his wife, and the Coopers’ children commissioned the chapel as a gift to the community. Located on a small hill in Bella Vista, the chapel was designed by E. Fay Jones and constructed in 1988. Expanding and elaborating on themes from his acclaimed design of

Thorncrown Chapel, in Cooper Chapel Jones demonstrated his exceptional ability to explore the expressive potential of what he called a “generating idea.” Because it was considered a worthy encore to his design of Thorncrown, Cooper Chapel played a key role in Jones’s selection for the 1990 AIA Gold Medal.

Cooper Chapel was Fay Jones’s encore performance as a designer of sacred structures, and it was a highly regarded encore. *Architecture* magazine said, “Cooper Chapel quietly commands a dignity and presence uncommon among buildings of our era. It is a harmonious celebration of strength and delicacy. . . .”³ Focusing on the chapel’s relationship to its site and to nature more generally, a *Friends of Kebyar* article stated:

It is an open structure which strives to meld into the landscape. In a sense it becomes a transparent, light-filled structure which attempts to establish a meaningful interaction and interchange with the site, inviting the natural nuances of nature-time of day and seasonal changes-to condition the quality and mood of the interior space.⁴

Inevitably compared to Thorncrown Chapel, Cooper Chapel distinguished itself in several ways. Most obvious was the use of steel in its construction, a deviation from Thorncrown’s design that allowed Jones to give Cooper Chapel a more delicate appearance and a distinctive design motif in the form of Gothic pointed arches. As noted by *Architecture* magazine, the curve of the arches “relays a gentle flow quite unlike the crispness in Thorncrown’s straight wood members.”⁵ Recalling Jones’s two and one-half years of engineering school, Robert Ivy went farther, asserting that Jones’s use of steel within the genre of organic architecture put him in a class of his own:

The chapel interior’s exuberant metal construction reveals Jones’s training in engineering, and is reminiscent of such nineteenth-century masters in metal as Gustave Eiffel and Joseph Paxton. Jones’s characteristic cross-shaped bracing in wood and curving steel redefines the term “organic” architecture, in which structural necessity and ornament effectively combine. The result is characteristic of Jones alone.⁶

Ivy also noted another difference between Thorncrown and Cooper: “Unlike the overriding transparency of Thorncrown, Cooper Chapel captures space more forcefully, cupping it with its delicate arches and holding it between the solid stone floor and well-defined end walls.”⁷

Jones himself described the chapel as “a steel building inside a wood building,”⁸ and both the wood and the steel industries cited Cooper for distinctive use of their products. An article on “Uses of Wood Framing” in *Progressive Architecture* claimed that “while steel channels are used extensively as columns and brackets, the impression that the building gives is one of being made of wood.”⁹ *Modern Steel Construction*, on the other hand (and more justifiably), called Cooper Chapel “a spider-like steel structure.”¹⁰

There were, of course, similarities between Thorncrown and Cooper Chapels, something that was not at all bad. William Marlin wrote: “Like Thorncrown, Cooper is a Rousseauesque reverie, permeated by pastoral vistas.”¹¹ Andrea Oppenheimer Dean pointed out that “Jones further explored the themes begun at Thorncrown with two additional buildings *that helped him win the AIA Gold Medal* [emphasis added]-the Pinecote Pavilion, at the Crosby Arboretum in Picayune, Mississippi, and the Mildred Cooper Memorial Chapel in Bella Vista, Arkansas.”¹² Finally, at Cooper Chapel as at

Thorncrown, Fay Jones used the “operative opposite,” his concept of reversing the rule of Gothic construction by using a light, delicate material in tension-steel, in the case of Cooper; wood at Thorncrown-rather than stone in compression, as in Gothic cathedrals.

Saying in an interview, “Just because a Chartres was built didn’t stop them from doing a Notre Dame,”¹³ Jones nevertheless worried a bit that some would think he was “in a rut.”¹⁴ He hoped, however, the designs for Thorncrown and Cooper would “move people to recognize that there is a rich range of subtleties going on, a whole bunch of things that make one building different from another.”¹⁵ He went on to explain:

I’ve always felt that if you have a generating idea, and if it’s a really genuine thing, it’s going to take maybe ten buildings to fully explore the expressive potential of that idea. . . . [W]e are talking about a simple rectangular building, a simple basic form . . . and yet I think there’s a real valid challenge in taking something that basic and somehow enriching it, striving for some kind of poetry.¹⁶

Cooper Chapel was proof that Thorncrown Chapel, though widely regarded as Jones’s masterwork, was not the culmination of his career but a milestone in his exploration of the expressive potential of a powerful generating idea. The exploration continued with Cooper Chapel, itself “a stunning landmark”¹⁷ and “a dark jewel in a deep setting . . . a place of splendid solitude.”¹⁸

As a worthy encore to Thorncrown Chapel, an important factor in Jones’s selection for the 1990 Gold Medal, and because it is unique among Jones’s work in the manner of its use of steel, Mildred B. Cooper Memorial Chapel is exceptionally important.

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