

In an early Republic that lacked a system for liberal education, Jefferson wanted his model school to emulate an idea of community. So he made a village. And it was laid upon a natural ridge line where topography reinforced a plan that was fundamentally urban in its time. With this, Jefferson rejected the dominant model of older early American colleges that were housed in a single large building. Despite the position of the Rotunda library, for the “Academical Village” to succeed as a lasting idea was more important than

As Jefferson intended, the study of architecture at UVA first began with the pavilions themselves as life-size precedent models of design, and today they still enlighten.

the grandeur of a singular building. The originally open south end symbolized for Jefferson the infinite possibilities the human mind could acquire through inquiry, as the north end Rotunda collected the known world in its library. Between the two, it is fitting to compare the Lawn’s pavilions and connecting colonnades with the ancient Agora in Athens as a “marketplace” of democratic engagement.

I have long admired Pavilion IX in particular for its understated architecture. It is the only pavilion to use subtractive form with a recessed exedra entry. Benjamin Henry Latrobe was a design critic for Jefferson, and they may have been inspired by the Hotel Guimard in Paris. For me, it’s one of the most remarkable buildings in Virginia because the unique façade seems to emit its own glow—capturing the sun as it travels and reflecting it back, creating the illusion of lightness. As Jefferson intended, the study of architecture at UVA first began with the pavilions themselves as life-size precedent models of design, and today they still enlighten.

Each year in April, Virginia celebrates Historic Garden Week with public tours of prominent houses and gardens, so in this month’s ABODE, we’re excited to share our visit with Pavilion IX resident and Dean of Nursing, Dorrie Fontaine. Historian Richard Guy Wilson from the School of Architecture and Mary Hughes, the Landscape Architect for the University, offer insight into the design of Jefferson’s plan, which is perhaps the best conceived tapestry of buildings and landscape in the United States. I hope you’ll take some time in April to visit and observe a little closer the beauty of this place.—*Josh McCullar, Editor-at-large*

Josh McCullar is the publisher of vmodern.com and practices with SMBW Architects in Richmond.



ASHLEY TWIGGS / CHRISTIAN HOMMEL / KENDRA GUIFFRE



A LINE TO DESIGN

A sense of place

Kendra Guiffre says good design is site-specific

We asked the founder of Blueply Design how she got into architecture, what she’s working on right now, and where she finds inspiration (did she say “a coffee mug?”).

Why architecture?

Architecture has the ability to bring something special to everyday life, to help us see things in a new light. Beautiful space connects with people and inspires them. I love working with people to help them realize their vision.

Why did you choose to practice in Virginia?

I grew up in Northern Virginia and did my undergraduate architectural study at UVA. We moved away from Virginia for a while, to Texas and California. When my husband and I were ready to start a family, we wanted to come back to Virginia to be close to family and knew Charlottesville would be a great place to live and work.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 19

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

What was your life like as a child and how did it lead you to design?

My father is an architect. When I was 5, he designed and built a modern house for our family. It really had a huge influence on me. I can even remember visiting the site while it was being constructed.

Tell us about your college studio experience. Was there a stand-out teacher who had a lasting impact on you?

I did my undergraduate at UVA and graduate work at the University of Texas at Austin. They were both great experiences with lots of intense hours in the studio. I will always remember Lucia Phinney, my first studio professor, who still teaches at UVA. She had a great architectural presence and taught us the basics of creating space with a limited “kit of parts.” I still value those lessons today.

“Design doesn’t happen in a vacuum; it’s a dialogue that continues through each phase of the project.”

On process: How does it begin?

With a problem that needs solving, usually the need for more space, or more thoughtful space. Also with the understanding that it is a process. Design doesn’t happen in a vacuum; it’s a dialogue that continues through each phase of the project.

What inspires you?

Simple good design. Anything from a coffee mug to a chair, to a room or a building. I’m inspired by the thoughtful use of materials, color, light, and space.

How does the site or sense of place inform architecture for you?

It is the start of the design. It informs what opportunities or limitations need to be considered. Architecture should bring something new to the site, while respecting what is already there.

What’s in the studio at the moment?

I am very excited to be collaborating on a new classroom building for the Mountaintop Montessori School with Wolf Ackerman. I am also working on several residential renovations.

How would you assess the state of architecture in our region?

We have some of the most beautiful classical architecture here with Monticello and the Lawn and continual innovative new design. I love the presence of Live Arts on Water Street in contrast to its traditional surroundings. It’s great to live in a place that supports both the old and the new.

COMMERCIAL BREAK

Stay awhile

A winery finds a way to say ‘welcome’

Four years ago, a winery in Madison County was named Sweely Estate, it was facing foreclosure, and its 18,000-square-foot visitors’ facility was decorated in a dark French chateau style. Today, it’s called Early Mountain Vineyards, it has new owners, and the tasting room is light and bright.

All in all, a hopeful change. Current owners Steve and Jean Case—former AOL executives, longtime Virginia residents and local viticulture boosters—bought the property in 2011 and set about making it work, both on the books and as a destination. The pair re-established the winery as a social enterprise, with all net proceeds returning to Virginia agriculture and, in particular, the wine industry.

The stone-faced building, set amid 305 acres of primo Piedmont farmland, speaks of luxury and leisure—but many also found its interior less than uplifting. Too many dark materials and not enough daylight meant that the medieval-style chandeliers and stone tile floors read more like “dungeon” than “palace.” So the Cases commissioned a renovation aimed at “opening the space, making it more warm and inviting,” said Early Mountain’s Allison Conway.

Richmond-based architectural firm 3north led the charge. Many existing elements would remain: the massive exposed ceiling trusses, the four chandeliers that march through the space, stone floors, and brick pillars along the long walls.

But within this framework, the design embraces a new sense of airiness. Step one was to enlarge the windows and doors at the ends of the rectangular tasting room, adding glass to bring in light and views (which, after all, are fairly spectacular—rows of grapes against the lofty Blue Ridge).

Another major move was to recast the tasting bar as an appealing squiggle that meanders between the entrance and the fireplace. Its front lined with wood slats reminiscent of wine barrels, it’s echoed by a curving line of pendant lights above, and the wall behind it is a warm hue somewhere between salmon and tangerine.

About two-thirds of the way into the large room, a white freestanding fireplace also has a new look. Whereas before it was a solid monolith, now it’s a cutout, making for a more modern profile that’s matched by the geometric style of the furniture.

Brick got a coat of white paint, which allowed the heavier touches—like metal light fixtures—to take on an air of country elegance. Though the space is very ample, it doesn’t feel cavernous because the groupings of furniture—in subtle shades of white, sand, and jute—both suggest and invite small, manageable groups of people.

Visitors are as likely to hunker down with a board game as to sample the Cab Franc. “The goal was to make it a place to hang out,” said Conway.—*Erika Howsare*



COURTESY EARLY MOUNTAIN VINEYARDS