

Beyond walls and rooftops: Local architecture makes state's 'best' list

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Architect David Corban has been feeling rather humbled lately, as the Naples home he built and lives in has landed on the same Top-100 list as the Sanibel guest home that inspired him as a child.

In launching the "Florida Architecture: 100 Years, 100 Places" competition to

identify the best in the state's architectural achievements, the Florida chapter of the American Institute of Architects has identified 100 buildings that represent the best in the state's architectural achievements. Five buildings in Collier and Lee counties made the list.

Mr. Corban's residence, the Haldeman Creek house, is a home atop the water; a contemporary play on an old stilt house, indicative of Pine Island. Clean lines, but warm cypress. Walk in the door, see straight through the house and out

the water. The breeze sweeps over the water and the house takes advantage, welcome and wide open; the deck, the living room, the kitchen, the scene all melding into one.

His childhood inspiration, the Walker guest house on Sanibel Island, designed by internationally renowned architect Paul Rudolph is also among the Top 100. A

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1950s experiment in coupling modern style with rural seaside living, the guesthouse utilizes the simplest of materials in an elegant manner. It has been immortalized in books and studied by architecture students all over the world.

"I tell people that building might be one of the reasons why I became an architect," Mr. Corban says of the Walker guesthouse, remembering how he stared at the house and its contraptions as a boy. He describes the emblematic pivoting panels — when down, the panels serve as enclosing walls, making the space cozy and den-like, while shielding the dwelling from rain or storms; when up, they shade the structure, serving as a ventilating element and transmuting the guest home into the landscape.

Looking much like cannonballs, the counterweights to pulley the panels held the young Mr. Corban motionless and transfixed.

"It's very active," says the architect, now 46 years old. "It doesn't sit there. It moves, it pivots, it hinges." And it leaves an impression on a child's fascination, hence his career. "I try to make buildings that will have lasting effects on people," he says. "That building definitely did on me."

The other three Southwest Florida buildings with impressions moving enough to make the AIA Florida Top 100 list: The Edison and Ford Winter Estates along the riverfront in Fort Myers and St. Agnes Catholic Church and the Neugebauer House in Naples. Beginning this week, the public can rank the nominated buildings, voting on their favorite by visiting the AIA website at www.aiafla.org.



COURTESY PHOTO

The Haldeman Creek House by architect David Corban.

Architect Joyce Owens says AIA's purpose for the competition is to "engage the public to connect with architecture," because, as she sometimes worries, "Architecture's kind of going by the wayside. People are not appreciating the value."

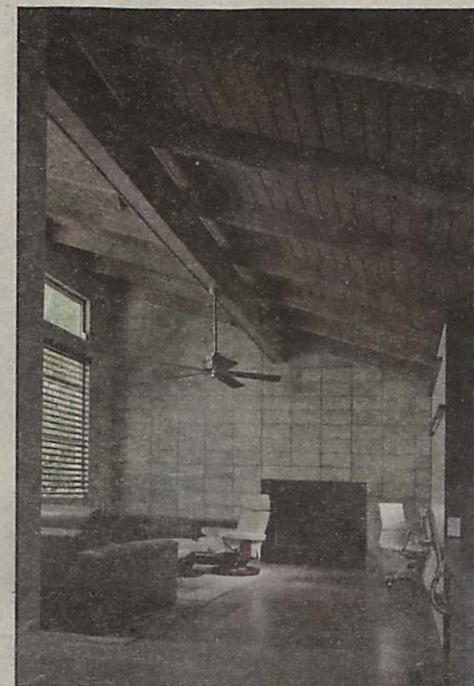
Yes, she encourages the public to vote, but more, "Hey, pay attention," she says. "That's my mantra, I guess."

As a catalyst to connecting to architecture, here are some of Mr. Corban's musings on our local nominees.

Of the historic Edison home, Mr. Cor-

ban admires the deep porches and deep overhangs, which allow the breeze to come through while keeping the sun out. He considers the space the "ultimate home office," mirroring the man and his inventive self, as the home solved Mr. Edison's lust to live and work in the tropics.

Regarding St. Agnes Catholic Church, he applauds architect Andrea Clark Brown for her balance of creativity and relevancy, for "bringing the outside in" with her use of natural light. He acknowledges many people are involved in designing a church



and says, "Design by committee is not the easiest thing to do." Ms. Clark Brown, he adds, "did it beautifully."

He marvels at the cleverness of the contemporary Neugebauer house. Architect Richard Meier respected the standards of the Port Royal neighborhood, adhering to set roof dimensions, but he gave his roof some slope. Instead of having his roof peak in the middle, he put a valley in the middle, inverting the roof, turning it upside down and sending gazes soaring.

"It's very flattering to be thought of in the same breath as these guys," Mr. Corban says of his nomination. As far as the contest, he says, "It just goes to show a lot of world-class architecture has been done and is being done in Florida."

A moment later he stresses, "And in Southwest Florida." ■