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**Revisiting Rudolph**

*The tide is turning for a pivotal Modernist master*

*By Mike Singer*

In the late 1950s and 1960s, Paul Rudolph was one of the most prominent architects in the world. (Image 1)

Rudolph, an itinerant Methodist minister's son from Alabama, taught some of today's most prominent designers: Norman Foster, Hon. FAIA; Richard Rogers, Hon. FAIA; Robert A. M. Stern, FAIA; Charles Gwathmey, FAIA; Stanley Tigerman, FAIA; David Childs, FAIA. Rudolph also chaired the Department of Architecture at Yale University's School of Art & Architecture (which he also designed) from 1958 to 1965—a particularly fertile time in both architectural education and architecture.

"Rudolph was this amazing instructor who made you do things and think things you never thought you had in you. In our class there were 15 people, and half were from other countries. He called us his 'little United Nations,'" says Carl Abbott, FAIA, a former Rudolph student who returned to Yale in 2008 to rededicate the School of Art & Architects as Rudolph Hall, after a multimillion dollar renovation by Gwathmey Siegel & Associates.

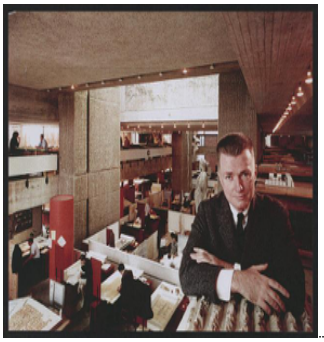

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**Image 1: Paul Rudolph overlooking the drafting room of his Yale Art & Architecture Building (now Rudolph Hall), where he served as dean to an influential generation of postwar modernists. Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.**

With its staggered towers, corrugated concrete surfaces, and complex interior spaces, Rudolph Hall was as difficult as the architect, himself. (Image 2)

"Rudolph's whole life was architecture and his students were his family," says Abbott. "He was very violent to some [students] and amazingly generous to others. If you were in a group he really cared about, he would push you harder than you could ever stand, and he would make you see things in your own work that you could never have possibly seen."

A mysterious fire gutted Rudolph's school in 1969, only six years after it opened, damaging the building and destroying student work, instructor materials, and administrative files. It also damaged Rudolph's reputation at a time when campus unrest—at Yale and hundreds of other schools around the country—represented a perfect metaphor for a broken academic system.

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**Image 2: Yale's Art & Architecture Building, dedicated in 1963 and rededicated as Rudolph Hall in 2008, marked the first appearance of the corrugated**

**concrete walls that became Rudolph's signature. Photo: Derr Scutt, courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.**

The curricula within America's "citadels of learning" were out of step with the social change that students desired. But the physical citadels, the results of campus growth and monolithic planning throughout the 1950s and 1960s, were also out of step with burgeoning ideas about community, access, and social equity.

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Although he completed an eclectic mix of over 150 buildings, and designed an almost equal number of unbuilt ones during five decades of practice, Rudolph has been categorized—and marginalized—as a Brutalist who fell out of favor in the 1970s when the architectural milieu shifted away from High Modern concepts of form, procession, and materiality.

While that may have very well been the end of Rudolph's legacy, he has come roaring back in the last several years—and there's plenty to reconsider.

**Restoring the Last Modernist**

**Image 3: Healy Guest House, aka Cocoon House, on Sarasota's Siesta Key, 1948. Notable for its cantilevered roof and water bank overhang, the house generated widespread national publicity for Rudolph and Ralph Twitchell. Photo by Greg Wilson.**

"[Rudolph] cultivated the image of a maverick who would save architecture from the monotony of the dominant International Style by reintroducing subjects that he said had been 'brushed aside,' namely: monumentality, decoration, symbolism, and urbanism," writes Timothy M. Rohan, associate professor of art history at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, in *The Architecture of Paul Rudolph* (Yale University Press, 2014). "Rudolph advocated a heroic approach to modernism that extolled individuality, aesthetics, and creativity." Rohan's book is the first scholarly monograph on Rudolph since his death, in 1997, and it provides much-needed context for the architect's long and often misunderstood career.

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From Rudolph's Sarasota, Fla., beach cottages in the 1940s and '50s—such as the Healy Guest House (Image 3) and Revere Quality House, to his role as one of the developers of the expressive concrete monumentality known as Brutalism in the 1960s' Government Service Center in Boston, Orange County [N.Y.] Government Center (Image 4), and Endo Laboratories, in Garden City, N.Y. (Image 6), Rohan's book has prompted a re-evaluation of Rudolph's work, and his working style.

"He drew every day, from when he was a teenager to the last weeks of his life," said Rohan. "He didn't become a larger-scale shop like his contemporaries I.M Pei and Philip Johnson and Marcel Breuer. At the most, in New York in the late 1960s, he never had more than 30 architects and never partners. He believed that nothing should come between you and your work, and didn't think architectural partners were a good idea.

"He had close supervision of everything and his approach was very artisanal," said Rohan. "He was never a brand. His office may have changed, but it always had a nimbleness and an adaptability to it. We are living in an age of low overhead—I think architects today can appreciate that anew."

After his 1960s rejection Rudolph turned inward, to lavish interior-design projects during the 1970s that made use of reflective surfaces, curvilinear geometry, and experimental lighting, including Rudolph's own Beekman Place residence and the townhouse of 1970s fashion designer Halston in Manhattan along with numerous Fifth Avenue apartments. In the 1980s, he reworked many of his expressive Modernist ideas in projects overseas, such as the Colonnade Condominium in Singapore (Image 9) and the Lippo Centre in Hong Kong.

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**Images 4 and 5: Customized fluted concrete blocks were used in Rudolph's Orange County Government Center, Goshen, N.Y. (1963–71), which narrowly escaped recent demolition attempts. Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.**

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But, unless you were a hardcore Rudolph junkie, you wouldn't necessarily have known about these projects. They were not part of the Rudolph brand that, for many observers, reached its apogee in the late 1960s; nor were they as prominently featured in architecture media when they were completed.

"How do you preserve a legacy when you don't know it's a Rudolph?" asked Sean Khorsandi, AIA, co-chair of the Paul Rudolph Foundation. "I went through a five-year undergraduate bachelor of architecture program at Cooper Union, and I never once heard of Paul Rudolph.

"Rudolph's government and civic projects may be among his most important, but the range of his career is staggering—including super-lush New York City interiors people never got to know and see," said Khorsandi. "People like to categorize him as a Brutalist, but he had many phases and was very multifaceted, including prefab, urbanism, interior design, and glass-and-steel towers in Asia.

"He, in many ways, was the last modernist and became a fall guy for Modernism as Post-Modernism ascended. There has been an overabundance of attention on projects that were torn down," said Khorsandi.

**Heightened Awareness, Increased Preservation**

It's not hard to see the connection between a reconsideration of Rudolph and the demolition threats faced by some of his projects. He has become a preservation cause, for sure, but a particularly challenging one due to market forces or, in other cases, failing structure or deteriorating materials. Two of the three public schools Rudolph designed are now gone: Sarasota's Riverview High School, built in 1958, was torn down in 2009, and the Chorley Elementary School in Middletown, N.Y., built in 1964, was demolished in 2013.

In 2007, Rudolph's residential *oeuvre* was diminished with the destruction of three homes: the 1979 Louis Micheels House in Westport, Conn. (Image 10), the oceanfront 1956 Cerrito House in Watch Hill, R.I., and the Twitchell House

in Siesta Key, Fla. The destruction of all three is documented in Chris Mottlaini's revelatory photo essay, *After You Left/They Took It Apart (Demolished Paul Rudolph Homes)*.

But the tide may be turning. On Jan. 5, Randolph's sole surviving public school, Sarasota High School (Image 11), reopened for the first time since 2009 to nearly 2,000 returning students. Built in 1959 without air conditioning or modern security systems, Rudolph's aging school was part of a $42 million campus restoration effort that preserved the iconic roofline and façade while taking Rudolph's structure down to the studs before rebuilding the interiors.

"The construction team put it back as close as we could from an exterior point of view to Rudolph's original building," said Paul Pitcher, project manager, Construction Services Department, Sarasota County Schools. "You will hear people say that we destroyed the inside of the building, but we are here to support students and we saved the building. Given the asbestos abatement and what it took to get the building back to where it needed to be, we will have spent more on this building than if we had just knocked it down and built a new building."

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**Images 6, 7, 8: Bold expressive concrete statements at Endo Laboratories, Garden City, Long Island, N.Y., 1960–64; a national real estate investment firm bought the property in 2005, renovating its interiors for use by a variety of tenants. Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.**

Elsewhere, restoration of the interiors as well as the exterior mosaic patterned sunscreens that envelope the Jewett Arts Center at Wellesley College (1958) (Image 12) has been completed. Executed from 1955 to 1958, the arts center was Rudolph's first significant project outside Florida—a commission he received over other better-known contemporaries at the time such as Eero Saarinen and Edward Durell Stone.

Following widespread preservation protests, Rudolph's Orange County Government Center, once on the chopping block, has been saved but stands mostly vacant—at least for now. UMass Dartmouth's campus, which contains 16 of Rudolph's best buildings, now operates the website Paul Rudolph & His Architecture that chronicles his work and offers some perspective on preserving not just a suite of buildings, but an individual talent's legacy.

**New Generation, New Appreciation**

Today, a new generation of architects and design enthusiasts are paying homage to Rudolph in both word and deed.

"I grew up around the Umbrella House" said Florida native Lawrence Scarpa, FAIA, principal at Brooks + Scarpa. "The Umbrella House (Image 13) was built in 1953 [in Sarasota]. Air conditioning existed, yet Rudolph shaded the house with an umbrella canopy, buying tomato sticks from local farmers to construct the slats. It is so ahead of its time—not just in its beauty but in the way it coexists with nature.

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**Image 9: In the 1980s, Rudolph found work mostly in Asia, where his first completed project was the 27-floor Colonnade Condominium in Singapore, shown here under construction in 1980. Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.**

"When I built my own Solar Umbrella House [in Venice Beach, Calif.], Rudolph's Umbrella House was my inspiration," Scarpa explained. "Like the original, it has proper orientation, shading, and cross-ventilation. But it also has 80 solar panels, and the solar canopy is part of the architecture. Our utility bill is less than $500 a year. When I start projects, I look for historical precedents, and I always wind up in the 1950s and '60s. It was a magical time of new technologies and building thinking."

Susan Harkavy grew up three blocks away from the Umbrella House in a two-bedroom house in Lido Shores, Fla., that Rudolph designed in 1946. (Image 14) She returned decades later for a visit and encountered a sympathetic addition that expanded the original structure, which remained mostly intact. Memories flooded back on how the house changed her life.

"When I got to college, I found myself veering towards European modern art history classes and I didn't know why," said Harkavy, who now lives in New York City.

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**Image 10: Preservationists have lost the battle to save several important Rudolph structures, including the Louis Micheels House, Westport, Conn., which was built in 1979 and demolished less than 30 years later, in 2007. Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.**

"I went to Yale—which of course had so much Gothic architecture—and I didn't realize it but the house where I had lived for 18 years had seeped into my being, and I just felt like Modernism was home. When I started my own business, the clients I chose were all modernists. I ended up writing a letter to

the editor of *Interiors* magazine after it had done a four-page story on the renovation of the Umbrella House, about how Rudolph had charted my career direction."

"I didn't learn anything about Paul Rudolph in architecture school," said Joyce Owens, AIA, who is now using his original drawings to help re-create a full-scale replica of Rudolph's first solo commission—the 1953 Walker Guest House (Image 15)—in a project spearheaded by the Sarasota Architectural Foundation.

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**Image 11: Rudolph's sole surviving public school, Sarasota High School (1958), reopened in January 2015 after an extensive renovation that preserved the building's iconic façade. Photo by Greg Wilson.**

The house, which still stands on Sanibel Island, Fla., will be duplicated exactly from Rudolph's original drawings as a kit of parts, so visitors can tour it later this year on the grounds of the Ringling Museum of Art, and in other venues in the future.

"For various reasons, Paul Rudolph was dealt a bad deal at some point. This is my way to help restore his legacy," Owens said.

As we approach the 100th anniversary of Paul Rudolph's birth, in 2018, projects like the Walker Guest House, along with increased scholarship and preservation, are painting a new place in modern architectural history for a designer committed to teaching and practice, and driven by a consistent vision to improve and reinvent. He showed the world that Modernism is so much more than a steel and glass box.

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**Image 12: Rudolph was a master pen-and-ink draftsman, as shown in this 1956 perspective rendering for Wellesley College's Jewett Arts Center, his first major commission outside of Florida. Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.**

*Mike Singer is a frequent contributor to* AIArchitect.

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**Image 13: The lattice-encased Umbrella House, built in Sarasota, Fla., in 1953, is the inspiration for Larry Scarpa's,**

**FAIA, own solar-powered umbrella house. Photo by Bill Miller.**

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**Image 14: The Harkavy House, 1946, Siesta Key, Fla., where Susan Harkavy grew up. Photo: Ezra Stoller.**

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**Image 15: Walker Guest House, Sanibel Island, Fla., is Rudolph's first solo commission and will be duplicated and installed on the grounds of the Ringling Museum of Art in**

**Sarasota this fall to increase public awareness of Rudolph as the centennial of his birth approaches in 2018. Photo: Ezra Stoller.**