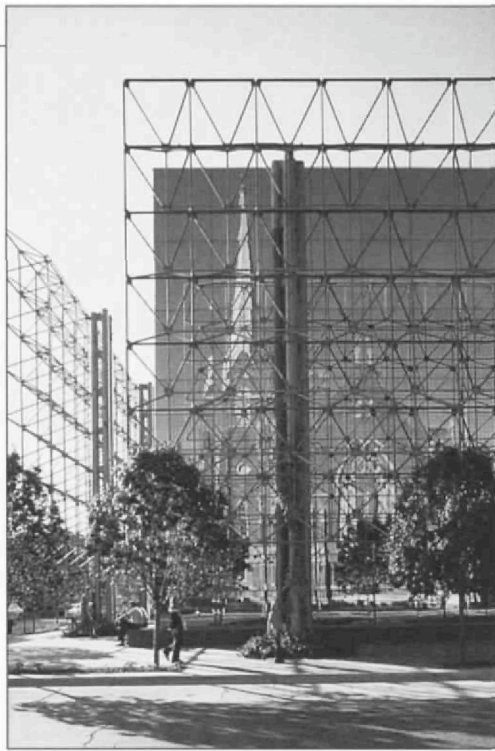


Citelines



Balthazar Korab

Paul Kennon 1934-1990

Indiana Bell Switching Center, Columbus, Indiana, Paul Kennon with Caudill Rowlett Scott, architect, 1978.

When Paul Kennon was appointed dean of the School of Architecture at Rice University in 1989, he was returning to an institution he had served from 1964 to 1967 as associate professor and then associate director. Architectural education was one of his two great passions, and he really never stopped teaching until he died suddenly on 8 January at the age of 55.

During his 22-year absence from Rice, while he led design studios at Caudill Rowlett Scott (now CRSS) in Houston and Los Angeles, eventually becoming its president, Kennon lectured frequently and served as critic at dozens of architecture schools, including Rice. In 1984 he was William F. and Charlotte Shepherd Davenport Visiting Professor in Architectural Design at Yale University. Dynamic, vigorous, enthusiastic, tireless, he sought and inspired excellence. His commitment to high achievement was nurtured by a few key people in his life. In the early 1950s he played football under coach Bear Bryant at Texas A&M College, where he received his degree in architecture. From there he went to the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan – then as now one of the premier American design schools – on an Eliel Saarinen Memorial Fellowship. For an only son born in Kentwood, Louisiana, who studied architecture in rural Texas, the move to Cranbrook was the influence that decisively shaped the rest of his life.

Kennon was profoundly influenced by Eero Saarinen, the Finnish-born architect who redefined American modernism in the 1950s and who hired him upon graduation from Cranbrook. From Saarinen, Kennon learned an approach to architectural design that fused modern technology with social purpose. He inherited Saarinen's way of organizing space and form, and worked on such landmark projects as Dulles Airport in Washington, D.C.



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Herman Miller manufacturing plant, Holland, Michigan, Paul Kennon with Caudill Rowlett Scott, architect, 1978.

He also learned to plan the large, complex facilities that defined international architectural practice in the 1970s and 1980s and for which CRS, under his leadership, was renowned. Through Saarinen as well he met J. Irwin Miller, chairman of the board of Cummins Engine Company in Columbus, Indiana, who would become his patron. Today, in the open-air museum of contemporary architecture that Miller has made of Columbus, there is more of Kennon's work than that of any other recent architect.

The other enduring influence on Kennon was William Wayne Caudill, a founder of CRS and director of the School of Architecture at Rice, who brought him to Houston in 1964 and then to CRS. Through Caudill, the exponent of an interactive method of programming and designing buildings and a gold medalist of the American Institute of Architects, Kennon continued the search for user-responsive design solutions. Like Caudill he was a populist at heart, influenced by his roots in Louisiana and his work in Chile as a Ford Foundation resident adviser in the early 1960s. With Caudill he wrote *Architecture and You* (Whitney Library of Design, 1978). He shared Caudill's high professional standards, commitment to quality, dedication to the firm, and devotion to a partnership between the profession and education. It was this partnership that preoccupied Kennon's all too brief tenure as dean at Rice.

Design was his other great passion. He brought intense, hands-on involvement to the projects under his direction. The results were one-of-a-kind buildings, in the manner of both Saarinen and Caudill. They responded to specific conditions of place, people, and spirit. Devoid of a distinguishing "signature" style, they embraced technology in the service of humanity.

Kennon's was "idea" architecture. Compelling if not always fashionable, his best built work – the small buildings in Columbus, Indiana; the series of multi-purpose inflated structures housing university sports programs; corporate facilities for IBM; factories for Herman Miller and Cummins Engine – were innovative responses to issues of change, energy conservation, productivity, flexibility, adaptability, the workplace, and human values. His work was recognized by more than 100 design awards. He was proudest of his two AIA Honor Awards, a citation from *Progressive Architecture*, and his nomination last year for the Pritzker Prize in Architecture. Kennon is survived by his wife, Helen; his sons, Keith and Kevin; and his mother and adoptive father, Gladys and Taylor O'Hearn. A memorial fund has been established at the Rice University School of Architecture.

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