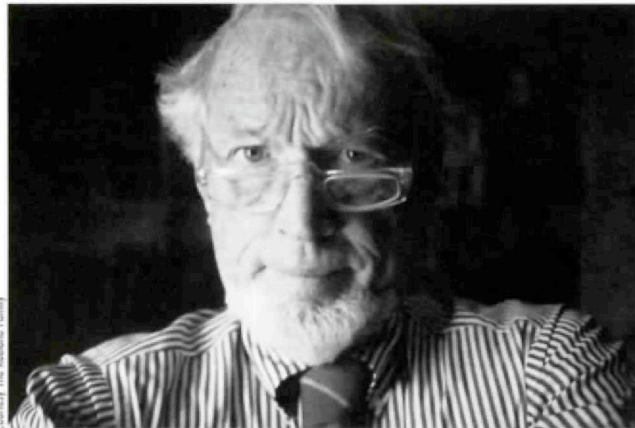


Burdette Keeland Jr. Remembered

BY JOE MASHBURN



Burdette Keeland Jr., 1926-2000.

When architect and educator Burdette Keeland Jr. passed away May 26, 2000, at the age of 74, he left behind not only a legacy of distinguished buildings, but also a legacy of memory. His influence on associates, students, and the city of Houston was profound. To help assess that influence, *Cite* asked Joe Mashburn, dean of the University of Houston's Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture, to recall his former teacher and colleague.

In 1960, Houston felt young, and the campus of the University of Houston was a rougher place than it is today. The odor of the stockyard across Calhoun Road was strong; the few UH buildings sat in Bermuda grass. The College of Architecture was located in a one story "temporary" building behind an asphalt parking lot. I remember Burdette Keeland Jr. emerging from his gray MGA roadster and walking across that asphalt with his suit jacket over his shoulder and smoking a thin cigar. As students, we thought that this was the way it should be for an architect — a cool sports car, a sleek Italian jacket. We wanted to be like him. In the summer between my first and second years I bought a well used 1953 Austin Healy 100. Keeland made me, and others, feel like anything was possible.

When I first met Keeland he had just returned from Yale, where he had received his master's degree while teaching as an assistant professor of architecture. He inspired students in many different ways. Students knew about his work first hand, and saw it published in such magazines as *Arts and Architecture* and *Architectural Forum*. Keeland designed buildings that we admired, among them the 1954 Parade of Homes house in Bellaire and the Essex-Houck Building, an office building completed in 1961 that today exists only in photographs. Many of us at UH had not posted stellar academic records in high school, and because Keeland had also gone to UH, we thought he might have had a similar record. He did. He had left Texas

A&M's mechanical engineering program with seven "Fs" — a fact he revealed in *50 from 50*, a publication of the College of Architecture that honored 50 of its graduates on the school's 50th anniversary. Once more, he had made anything seem possible.

Keeland and fellow architect Howard Barnstone comprised most of our review juries. They seemed merciless: anything could be said, and anything could be criticized. It was not uncommon for students to be told to leave architecture and find something else to study. It was leave or fight, and the battles would be fought through the work on the walls.

During the 1960s and early 1970s, Keeland occupied a one-room office, first in a building with Barnstone and later in a space shared with former UH College of Architecture dean Bill Jenkins. Sometimes associating with other architects and sometimes using just his own small staff, Keeland produced impressive work, including the Kipling Street Townhouses, an office building on Greenbriar near U.S. 59, the Virginia Street Townhouses, the Horne beach house, and the Williams beach house. Appreciation for Keeland's work has grown in recent years. The Williams beach house was featured in a talk given at Yale by Vincent Scully, and the 1954 Parade of Homes house and his Winchell Photography Studio have been included on Rice Design Alliance architecture tours.

Born in Mart, Texas, in 1926, Keeland arrived in Houston at the age of six months. He loved the city. Beyond his own work and teaching, he helped shape Houston through his service as the first president of the Park People and on the city's Planning Commission. Keeland joined the Planning Commission in 1964, and in 1981 was appointed its chairman. During the 1980s he was responsible for guiding several ordinances through the commission, among them the 1982 Development Ordinance, which brought a small element of planning to the unzoned city. Keeland was also active in the Contemporary Arts Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and designed an installation for the MFAH's then freestanding Cullinan Hall in 1969.

Years after I had left the University of Houston and was teaching at Texas A&M, Keeland invited me back as a juror of his students' work. During the jury I talked a long time about the reasons a student gave for his proposal. Then Keeland interrupted me: "All that doesn't matter. He told you why he did it." Keeland had cut through it all — an essential, eternal need in academia. I and many others will miss him deeply. Burdette Keeland Jr. cared, and he fought for what he cared about. To him, anything *was* possible. ■

Photographs of Houston by Alex S. MacLean

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