

archichat

Photography by Jaime Lagdameo

JAY BAKER, FAIA | Jay Baker Architects www.jaybakerarchitects.com

hometown grew up in Omaha, Nebraska **education background** Received a Bachelor of Architecture degree from Iowa State University and a Master's degree from Rice University, where he subsequently taught architectural design for 10 years.

FOUNDED IN 1991, **JAY BAKER ARCHITECTS** HAS PRODUCED A BODY OF WORK RECOGNIZED FOR DESIGN EXCELLENCE AT LOCAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL LEVELS. FOR CONTRIBUTIONS AS PRACTITIONER, TEACHER AND VOLUNTEER IN SERVICE OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT, JAY BAKER WAS HONORED AS A FELLOW OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS IN 2002. WE SPENT A WONDERFUL AFTERNOON AT HERMANN PARK WHERE JAY HAS BEEN ACTIVELY INVOLVED WITH THE HERMANN PARK CONSERVANCY IN BRINGING NEW LIFE TO ONE OF HOUSTON'S PREVIOUSLY UNDERUTILIZED ASSETS. ONCE LITTLE BIGS OPENS THIS MONTH ON ZOO CIRCLE DRIVE OVERLOOKING THE LAKE, WATCH OUT FOR A NEW CROWD RIDING THAT LITTLE TRAIN AT "HAPPY HOUR"!

YOU ARE KNOWN FOR A LARGE AND VARIED BODY OF AWARD-WINNING RESIDENTIAL WORK. WHAT ARE SOME COMMON THREADS IN HOW YOU APPROACH DESIGN?

Jay Baker Architects is a residential practice, and ours begins by defining program and place. Program defines *need* and just as importantly, *want*.

Place is something else again. What an architect sees as *place* is typically seen by a client (initially at least) as *property*. The difference is substantial, for in *place* resides the clues to prompt a tailored response: sun orientation, vegetation, vehicular and pedestrian access, neighborhood scale and adjacent structures, among other things.

Fundamentally, uniting program with place depends on scale and proportion. Scale involves respect for already existing adjacencies. Proportion involves the relationship between what is built and what is not. Indeed, it is as important to consider what *not* to build as much as what to build. Craft at the conceptual beginning is vital, for without it, craft at the assembly stage means relatively little. It has been very interesting over the years to compare similarities between the earliest doodle and the more refined documentation that appears later in the process.

Our process promotes logical investigation in pursuit of the authentic, as authenticity trumps the simply unique. As collaboration concludes on a project, our clients share authorship of something that is readily familiar to them, but that they hadn't seen before.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT BEING AN ARCHITECT?

I grew up with a creative family, so I've always been involved with making things. But for me, the collaborative process is the most enjoyable aspect of practice. Of



jay baker | sandra gunn

course, that means collaborating with the talented and enthusiastic people in my office. Foremost, though, it means collaborating with our clients. A good architect becomes better at his or her craft by having big ears before getting any big ideas. As collaboration leads to advocacy, the client gets the very best building that they have learned (and can afford) to build, no matter the scope, budget or aesthetic sensibility.

YOU'VE HAD A LONG VOLUNTEER CAREER WITH THE RESTORATION OF HERMANN PARK, AND YOU RECENTLY RECEIVED THE CIVIC VISION AWARD FROM AIA HOUSTON FOR YOUR WORK THERE. TELL ME ABOUT THAT.

Not all design opportunities come about as the result of a commission. Sometimes one has to see an opportunity, become architect-citizen and simply raise your hand.

In 1992, as incoming President of Rice Design Alliance (RDA), I was challenged to address the downtrodden nature of Houston's Hermann Park. It seemed to me that using design as a catalyst for change was not only appropriate, but might be uniquely effective.

The RDA, along with the Houston Parks and Recreation Department and the Friends of Hermann Park as partners, sponsored an international design competition focused on the historic heart of the park. Winners were promised the commission. It was initiated in February of 1992; by the submittal deadline in October, we had received 117 entries from 26 states, Italy and Puerto Rico. The competition renewed interest in the entirety of Hermann Park's 455 acres, and in 1993 a Master Plan by Laurie Olin began. By 1997, the Master Plan was adopted by City Council, and by late in 2008, \$51 million had been raised from both public funds and private donors for capital improvements to the park. The competition winners completed

FAVORITES

Gadget Anything Apple makes

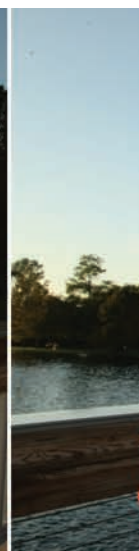
Gift Getting my Dad's sense of humor

Favorite Book lately, *The Story of Edgar Sawtelle*

Restaurant The Grill Room at The Four Seasons in New York

Building The Kimball Art Museum, The East Wing of the National Gallery of Art

Motto Take note of your surroundings, value the power of imagination, and get involved



their Heart of the Park project in 2004.

My ongoing involvement has been as Board Member of the Hermann Park Conservancy where I chair the Projects Committee.

ANY TRUTH TO THE RUMOR THERE IS GOING TO BE A "MARTINI BARGE" IN THE PADDLE BOAT LAKE?

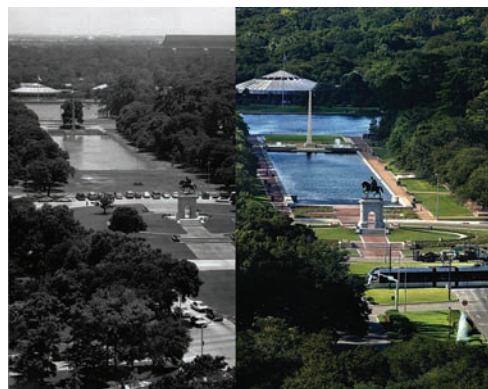
He laughs....

WHAT WAS THE PROUDEST DAY OF YOUR LIFE?

That's a really hard question. I have two lovely daughters, so I can't pick the birth of one over the other. So, I'll say the day we broke ground on the reflection pool in Hermann Park, after 9 years of working to make it happen. I look forward to many more days like that one.

WHAT PERSON HAS BEEN THE MOST INFLUENTIAL IN YOUR LIFE?

My grandfather, Sam Reynolds. He was a U.S. senator and a champion golfer. He taught me how to play golf, showed me what it was to be a gentleman, and built me a treehouse when I was 8 and he was 75. Ever since that treehouse, I was fascinated by the process of making something. The desire to be an architect came pretty early.



pool aerial before and after



south blvd. house



shelby house