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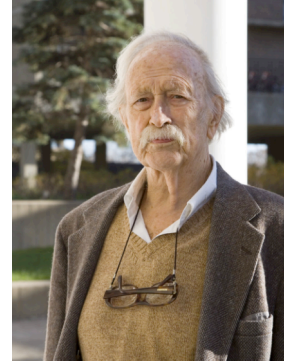
Contact: Jennifer Gilhoi, Communications Director

Phone: 612-338-6763 Email: gilhoi@aia-mn.org

Images available upon request

Rapson, shown at right

Photographer: Don Wong



A Legendary Architect, Ralph Rapson, FAIA, Passes Away

Minneapolis, Minnesota – Ralph E. Rapson, FAIA, born September 13, 1914, died March 29, 2008 in his home, from heart failure. Rapson will be remembered as one of the foremost architectural draftsmen of the 20th century. His integrated approach to architecture recognized and bridged the gap between education and practice as a role model for architects. Tom DeAngelo, FAIA, AIA Minnesota President said, “Ralph defined the character of the architectural community here in Minnesota for generations. He influenced us not only through his design leadership, but by cultivating a design community of architects within the profession at the University of Minnesota.”

Rapson’s career began with his completion of studies at University of Michigan’s College of Architecture in 1938, when he was invited by Frank Lloyd Wright to apprentice with him at Taliesin. He studied at the Cranbrook Academy of Art, then under Eliel Saarinen before joining the Saarinen architectural office, immersing himself in Cranbrook’s interdisciplinary approach to metalworking, sculpture, photography, graphic design, architecture, city planning, and textile design. It was at Cranbrook that Ralph rendered his first design for the “Rapson Rapid Rocker,” a masterpiece of modern furniture design that debuted formally as part of the Knoll Furniture line in a 1945 exhibit at Bloomingdale’s.

Rapson moved to Chicago in 1941, where he worked with such architects as Fred Keck, won a series of significant national design competitions for post-War housing, and experimented with new technologies and materials. He subsequently headed the design curriculum at the New Bauhaus in Chicago under Lazlo Moholy-Nagy. He was also chosen to design one of the first “Case Study” houses, a seminal project in American post-WWII housing design. After being recruited in 1951 to design the first modern American embassies in Europe, he worked on ten embassy, consulate, and staff housing projects, including the Stockholm and Copenhagen embassies.

Rapson was recruited in 1954 to become Dean of the University of Minnesota’s School of Architecture (now the College of Design, School of Architecture – CDeS). He was the first dean of a school of architecture to combine educational administration with an architectural practice. Over the thirty years of his tenure, he molded the leadership of two generations of architectural practice, cultivated a student body possessing peerless drawing skills, brought in visiting professors such as Buckminster Fuller and Siegfried Gideon, and elevated Minnesota into the top half-dozen architectural programs in the nation.

Over the next fifty years, the architectural office of Ralph Rapson and Associates designed projects that helped establish and define the modern architecture movement in Minnesota. From a dozen homes in the University Grove neighborhood to such widely heralded private residences such as the Pillsbury and Brooks houses. From the Hope Lutheran, St. Peters, and St. Thomas churches to a credit union later converted to the Minneapolis Southeast Branch Library. From performing arts

centers and his own glass house in Wisconsin to the multicolored towers of Cedar Riverside. The building for which he is probably best known, the Guthrie Theatre, was heralded as one of the most innovative and important theater designs of the post-War era, a civic icon that gave physical manifestation to Tyrone Guthrie's vision for the nation's first regional repertory theater.

Rapson, the first AIA Minnesota Gold Medal Award recipient in 1979, was passionate in all he did, and gave back to the profession in numerous ways. He was integral in the Minnesota Architectural Foundation (MAF), a group established in 1970 to serve charitable, scientific and educational purposes relating to the encouragement & improvement of the architectural environment. Su Blumentals, FAIA, Blumentals Architecture, a long-time foundation member and student of Ralph's reflected, "I have often wondered what my career path would have been had not Ralph, upon becoming the head of the School of Architecture, changed policy to allow women to enroll. I would have been out of luck." He influenced so many generations as a mentor in this and similar ways. He leaves behind a wealth of inspiration among the architectural profession and students. The Ralph Rapson Traveling Fellowship, first awarded in 1989, gives young Minnesota architectural graduates or practitioners \$10,000 to \$12,000 to advance their education in architecture through foreign or domestic travel-study, is one such example.

"Ralph always approached architectural practice and career with enthusiasm paired with style, grace and optimism," said DeAngelo. "We will continue his legacy to inspire great design and connect architectural students and the profession. He will truly be missed."

The American Institute of Architects Minnesota, founded in 1892, is dedicated to strengthening our communities, improving our built environment and providing exceptional design. For more information on the organization and Minnesota architectural firms, reference our Web site at www.aia-mn.org and pick up a copy of Architecture Minnesota, the award-winning architectural magazine of the Midwest.