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troy bankord

The Uncompromising Landscape Designer

:: Kurt von Behrmann

"I have been called a purist," says Troy Bankord. Having been informed of the fact by an individual who intended it as a slight, Bankord philosophically considered the ramifications of the label. "Why not start with the vision of a purist to make it the best that it can be?"

It is difficult to refute his logic, particularly since it comes from a successful landscape designer with an impressive resume of past clients. While his singularity of purpose has sometimes put him at odds with some, those less inclined to be creative, it demonstrates a specific perfectionism that finds an ideal place among those who enjoy thinking outside of the proverbial box. However, his logic may not be for everyone. It is a point Bankord willingly accepts.

More than idealistic rhetoric, Bankord was given the opportunity to put his principles to the ultimate test. Ironically enough, it came when he worked on a Frank Lloyd Wright property.

"Personally, it was very frustrating," says Bankord on the project that had him working directly on the Wright's landmark Biltmore. Dealing with an individual, who for Bankord was more interested in the bottom line than architectural perseverance, conflict arose immediately between the then owner and the preservationist minded designer. Cutting corners and replacing the original brick floor with red tile, the differences in concept for the remodeling became a deal breaker according to Bankord.

[When you buy a Frank Lloyd Wright house there is a certain commitment]

Not unlike the architects who created the styles he appreciates, such as Frank Lloyd Wright – known for his persistence of vision and being at odds with patrons — and the other mid-century modernist known for their uncompromising approaches, Bankord is unapologetic about his commitment to making everything the best that it can be. He is also deeply concerned with the preservation of American architectural history. For him, it is a responsibility shared by clients and designers.

"When you buy a Frank Lloyd Wright house there is a certain commitment," says Bankord quickly adding, "You don't buy it, then bastardize it or tear it half down. That's my belief. When you buy a property of that stature you are buying a piece of art, a piece of history."

Offering the explanation that red brick needed to be replaced because it could cause injuries, while the red tile replacement the owners wanted would not, Bankord was deeply frustrated and left the project. "Apparently you are going to hurt yourself on a brick floor, but not a red tiled floor," he observed. It was this logic that broke the proverbial camel's back.

Not all projects involving well known architects end in disillusionment.



[I believe in interior and exterior spaces flowing together]

Known for his contemporary designs, homes by the late Valley architect Ralph Haver, who passed in 1987, have become much sought after. Responsible for designing the 1964 Cine Capri, which was demolished much to the dismay and anger of protestors in the 90s, the popularity of his style, particular with baby boomers, have meant few of his homes remain on the market long.

Taking advantage of one available, Bankord set his mind to restoring the Haver home he acquired. The condition of the place was hardly pristine.

"It looked like a mobile home up front," says Bankord. With rust issues, cheap plywood and nonexistent landscape, to top off the wrecked condition of the house it was painted baby blue; there was much work to do. Fortunately, the original cabinets were in tact. With the price being reasonable, according to Bankord, \$171,000.00 at the time of purchase, he began the process of undoing the damage caused by neglect and time.

"It is easy for me to do other people's projects, and tell them exactly what they need to do without a doubt in my mind," says Bankord. When it comes to his own personal endeavors, the path is not so clear cut. "I am more in tune with the options," says Bankord. It explains why this renovation took longer than anticipated.

With the demands of his own thriving business and his very hands on approach, it is not uncommon for the detail driven designer to polish, dust and hose down a property himself. Originally slated to last six months, the Haver home took two years. Bankord has no regrets on the investment. "There is pride in knowing you have saved them (mid century homes) from being turned into Tuscan track homes, or being leveled," says Bankord.

When the landscape designer makes a statement, it is expressed with the zeal of a visionary. It is the same certainty of purpose and overwhelming sense of direction that would have made Ayn Rand's protagonist, the idealistic architect Howard Roark from the "Fountainhead," proud. Or for that matter the author herself.

Looking the part of a man with a determined mission, the forty-something Bankord has the broad shoulders and blonde Nordic features that give him the heroic appearance of a man who is more than able to stand his own ground and overcome obstacles. But his passions, landscaping and design, were not the first parts of his career.

Raised among contractors and designers, the Pecatonica, Illinois native would eventually attend Marquette University. Earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in broadcast journalism and a double minor in political science and business administration, he came to the Valley with the intention of becoming broadcaster.

Fate, and staying with his cousin, Barbara Bankord, who was an established Valley landscape designer known for her use of native plants, all of these things would conspire to turn the aspiring journalist into the passionate designer. Accompanying his cousin, the exposure would be a turning point. It would also provide the experiences that would shape his concepts for future projects.

"I believe in interior and exterior spaces flowing together, says Bankord, "It is about the two working cohesively."

"I certainly have an infatuation with the contemporary," admits Bankord, but that has not prevented him from designing Italian gardens and Mediterranean landscapes with a tropical feel. As he freely admits, he loves a challenge. The notion of doing just one

thing, or doing the same thing over and over again, has never been part of this agenda. The challenges of the new are what keep his relentlessly busy mind in constant motion.

For many, designing in the demanding climate of the desert is in and of itself a challenge. With hot days, warm nights, and little time for plants to rest, creating landscapes that are aesthetically pleasing that can survive the harsh realities of our sun require landscapers with polished skills. One can have it all, as long as you know where to look. While it may appear the choices are limited, for a veteran versed in the intricacies of plant life, there are options. "There is a lot that will work here that they don't realize," says Bankord.

The Haver home Bankord has reconstituted represents a sophisticated sense of organization, and on many levels the realization of his ideas in perhaps their purest form. It is also an exhibition for his ideas. The merging of outdoors with the indoors via glass doors, the clean surfaces and fascination with contemporary design are evident. They even express themselves in the choice of art work.

What emerges from Bankord's latest personal creation is a sense of everything being conceived holistically with the details given special care from the smallest plant to the largest tree. It gives proof to the statement he made when he said, "When I walk in front of a project, I can see it finished almost immediately." It is not surprising that a designer committed to finite details would also see his work in much the way a musician or visual artist might. "I have to get the idea out of my head, or it will haunt me forever," says Bankord. ■ ●

