



Industry mourns loss of J. Gruzen of Gruzen Samton

February 23, 2015 - Front Section

Architect Jordan Gruzen died at home on January 27th, at age 80 surrounded by his family. Gruzen, whose career spanned six decades, played a significant role in enriching the urban landscape of 20th century metropolitan New York where his firm, Gruzen Samton, was based. Friends and family remember Jordan as a man of great accomplishment, joie de vivre, warmth and optimism who fully embraced life in both work and play.

Scope of Work and

Professional Contributions

Gruzen and his firm were architects and urban planners. While their work was national and international in scope, their greatest concentration of projects was in New York City and New Jersey. The firm had a broad portfolio of project types including schools, universities, courthouses, transportation terminals, residential complexes, facilities for the elderly and synagogues.

The firm's work created new neighborhoods, revitalized the waterfront and contributed to the character of the City. Significant works in Lower Manhattan include Stuyvesant High School, NYPD Headquarters at 1 Police Plaza, Southbridge Towers, Chatham Towers, Chatham Green and five residential buildings in Battery Park City. Notable education projects include public schools throughout New York and New Jersey, and dormitory and student life buildings at Stony Brook University, City University of New York, Touro College, Columbia University, The Cooper Union, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Yale University and Cornell University. Gruzen's contribution to Jewish cultural facilities included nine buildings for the Hebrew Home for the Aged, projects for the Jewish Theological Seminary, The Kraft Center for Jewish Student Life at Columbia University, and synagogues including Temple B'nai Jeshurun in Short Hills, New Jersey. One of Gruzen's favorite projects was the 1967 horse stables in Central Park at 86th Street. The design put programmed space below earth mounds and orchards and, if built, would have been one of the City's first "green designs," thirty years before the movement.

Gruzen's firm was also known for large-scale planning particularly on the waterfront. The firm developed two plans, Litho City and Lincoln West, on Manhattan's West Side, which were predecessors to and inspiration for today's Riverside South. In addition, the firm was involved in the development of Queens West on the East River in Long Island City and Roosevelt Island's Manhattan Park and South Town residential complexes. In New Jersey, the firm designed ferry terminals in Weehawken and Edgewater, and numerous residential developments in Jersey City, Fort Lee, Hoboken, Guttenberg and West New York that revitalized the New Jersey waterfront.

Gruzen particularly enjoyed the intellectual challenge of international work, which added fresh

cultural dynamics and physical landscapes to the design process. The firm's projects include the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, civic work in Tel Aviv, residential and office buildings in Tehran and Nairobi, new housing developments in Dubai, and a new town plan for Bell Helicopters in Isfahan.

Philosophy of Architecture

Gruzen's philosophy of architecture was largely shaped by the cultural and artistic influences in his parents' home as well as by MIT. Jordan wrote, "[MIT was a] school in which to develop the complete person...I took as many courses in planning, art, music, and philosophy as I did in architecture." Jordan wove his love of art into his projects, ensuring artist commissions were incorporated into his buildings. Gruzen also strove to integrate his buildings into the fabric of the city. He was driven by a desire to create socially responsible work that influenced the urban design and streetscapes of neighborhoods. This is captured in one of Gruzen's favorite projects, the award-winning renovation of Museo Del Barrio at 104th Street on the Fifth Avenue Museum Mile. Jordan spoke of the project: "The fundamental idea of the design is to connect the street with the courtyard and with the lobby, both spatially and visually. This, in turn, creates a stronger relationship to Central Park, unifying these elements and providing a sense of accessibility and the spatial sequence of layering."

According to Jordan's partner Peter Samton, one of Jordan's great contributions to the firm was "his ability to identify and bring to the firm talented designers and practitioners...who enabled the firm to create such a large, vital and multi-faceted body of work. Jordan was constantly re-energizing the firm with new people who specialized in various building types, and who worked together as teams to create varied and creative output, enabling the firm to rejuvenate itself constantly. Jordan achieved this through his gregarious personality, love of design, and large and diverse network of colleagues and friends."

Gruzen's influence on architecture and New York also extended beyond the structures he designed. He was a passionate preservationist and as a co-founder of Action Group for Better Architecture, served as a leading figure in the fight to save McKim, Mead & White's Penn Station. Although he and his cohorts failed to save the iconic structure, their efforts raised awareness and contributed to the passage of New York City's first landmarks law.

Biographic Material

Jordan was born in Jersey City on April 5, 1934 to Barney Sumner Gruzen and Ethel (Brof) Gruzen. Jordan's father, who was known professionally as B. Sumner Gruzen, founded the architectural firm Kelly & Gruzen with Colonel Hugh A. Kelly, in 1936. Jordan's mother was a professional opera singer with the Metropolitan Opera House. Jordan received his Bachelor of Architecture at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Master of Architecture at University of Pennsylvania and was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to Italy. In the early 1960s Jordan and MIT classmate Peter Samton joined Kelly & Gruzen. Jordan and Peter became partners in 1967, and changed the firm name to Gruzen and Partners, then to The Gruzen Partnership, and in 1986 to Gruzen Samton, which merged, in 2009, with IBI Group and is now known as IBI Group-Gruzen Samton.

Professional Accolades

The work of the firm received five national AIA design awards and numerous city and state AIA awards over eighty years. Gruzen was a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects (FAIA), a former Chairman of the AIA NY Chapter Committee on Architecture for Justice, a former Chairman of the AIA NY Chapter Committee on Housing, an active member of the Urban Land Institute and Building Congress, as well as a member of many other urban planning and architectural organizations.

Personal Life

Jordan was a resident of Battery Park City and Amagansett, Long Island, where he actively engaged in his communities and lived in the apartment building and houses that he designed. Gruzen was noted for his athleticism and love for skiing, sailing with the Manhattan Yacht Club on New York Harbor, playing tennis at Devon Yacht Club, and exploring Gardiner's Bay on his Sunfish. His philanthropy included helping to found The Interfaith Community and Lower Manhattan's Knickerbocker Chamber Orchestra. He was also an active participant in New York New Visions during the reshaping of Lower Manhattan after 9/11.

Survived By

Jordan is survived by his wife, Lee, their two daughters, Rachel of Amagansett, New York and Georgia of Altadena, California, and his son, Alex and wife Karen of Austin, Texas. His is also survived by his brother, Maxson of San Diego, California, Alex's mother, Joan Gruzen of New York City, and grandchildren, Elsa, Ava, Sonja and Bear.

Donations in Jordan's memory can be made to the Knickerbocker Chamber Orchestra.

<http://www.shop.knickerbocker-orchestra.org/main.sc>

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