

BREAKING GROUND

Carol Richard, AIA, overcame her profession's gender bias to cofound an award-winning, eco-focused architecture firm



PIONEER WOMAN
Richards became interested in structural design in the 1950s, when there were few female architects.

BACK IN THE FIFTIES, ARCHITECT CAROL RICHARD was the kind of girl who loved watching her father tinker in his workshop. She spent hours combing the building site of the house across the street, collecting stray nuts and bolts. "I loved to build things," Richard says. "But I had a late calling [to architecture]." In those days, she explains, girls weren't supposed to grow up to be architects.

When the calling came, Richard enrolled in a five-year architecture program at the University of Arizona, where her talent was quickly recognized. In her sophomore year, a highly demanding design critic proclaimed Richard's project "almost architecture." She considered it high praise.

Still, Richard says her gender was an issue. When she graduated from architecture school in the late '80s, there were only a handful of women in the program. "We had to prove ourselves above and beyond," she says, "especially on construction sites." Once, she was assumed to be the architect's wife, rather than the architect. "I have found that it helps to be able to laugh in all circumstances," she says of the incident.

Richard finally opened her own residential design firm in 1984, and she enjoyed the work. Her passion led to growth: in 1991, she joined forces with fellow architect Janice Wittschiede. To showcase their talent, the duo tackled a major project—their own office—transforming a decrepit 1930s building in downtown Atlanta into a modern, open-flow office of multiple studios conducive to teamwork. In 1999, the firm was awarded the AIA Georgia Sustainability Design Award of Merit. In 2005, Richard and Wittschiede partnered with Peter Hand Associates. Today,

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CAROL RICHARD, AIA, PRINCIPAL & COFOUNDER

the firm known as Richard Wittschiede Hand (RWH) has a team of 21 employees and tackles projects—public, private, and nonprofit—with budgets ranging from \$100,000 to \$40 million. The firm has numerous awards under its belt, and is considered a leader in sustainable design.

RWH is particularly known for its work on educational facilities; the company's portfolio also includes recreational facilities and libraries. Though it has a niche, the firm doesn't adhere to a signature style. "We are always looking with fresh eyes," Richard says. "The needs of the client and the demands of the site inform our choices."

A recent project—designing the headquarters of the American Society of Heating, Refrigeration, and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE), an organization that writes the standards related to building efficiency and indoor environmental air quality—presented the RWH team with many challenges. A restricted budget required the firm to obtain donated equipment and services. But according to Jeff Littleton, ASHRAE executive vice president, the firm overcame those challenges with grace. The end result, he says, "is a sustainability showcase."

But it's Richard's new home in Madison, Wisconsin, designed and constructed in tandem with her husband, engineer Fred Berg, which she considers her personal and professional trump card. Dubbed the Ross

Street House, the 2,700-square-foot, three-story residence has been recognized as the first LEED Platinum residence in the state. Since Richard and Berg are client, architect, and engineer, they had full creative license. Among numerous innovations were a set of fixed louvers positioned about two feet from the front windows to modulate the amount of light admitted from summer to winter solstice.

Richard, who is also interested in interior design, kept the color of the walls light to enhance the sun-drenched effect—an important consideration in a high-latitude region like Wisconsin.

Due to photovoltaic panels and water-efficient systems, the couple's green home saves so much electricity that they are depositing the excess energy back into the grid to help power their neighbor's homes. But that's not what Carol Richard likes best about her eco-friendly home. "I am happiest about the way the natural light bounces and enlivens the space," she says. —PAMELA BLOOM



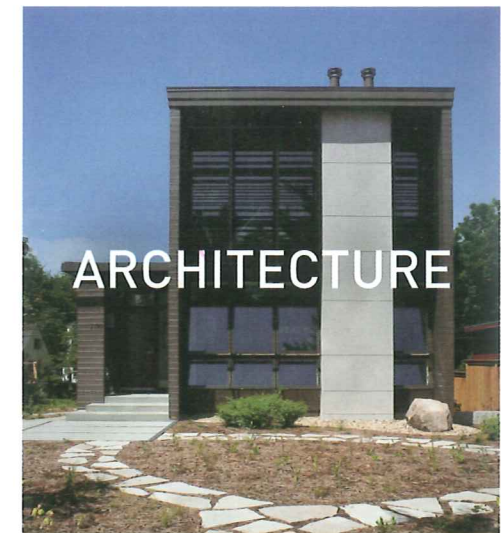
Photo: Zane Williams



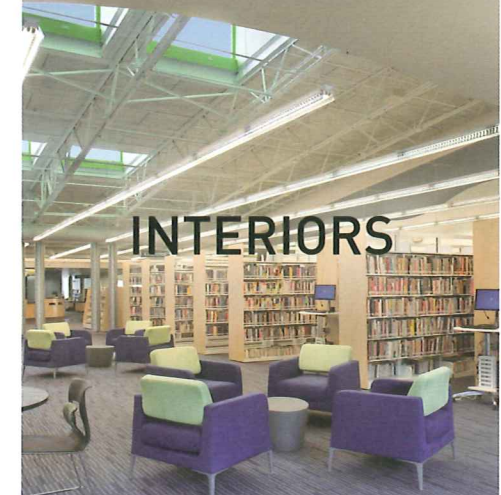
Photo: Creative Sources Photography

RICHARD'S PORTFOLIO / *highlights*

- Ross Street House**
Location: Madison, WI
Overview: A modern camera-box frame house is scaled to blend with the neighborhood.
Cool Detail: Locally-sourced hardwood floors, low-VOC paint, Energy Star appliances, and a 550-gallon rainwater collection tank earned this project 12 of 15 points toward LEED Platinum certification.
- Northlake-Barbara Loar Public Library**
Location: Tucker, GA
Overview: A sensitive renovation maintained the beloved modernist "boat" design while allowing for a playful and colorful reading cove for children.
Cool Detail: Adding a "prow" to the original boat structure expanded the library's space considerably.
- American Society of Heating, Refrigeration, and Air-Conditioning Engineers' (ASHRAE) Headquarters**
Location: Atlanta, GA
Overview: The headquarters are clean, modern, efficient.
Cool Detail: A green roof and ground-source heat pumps helped this project achieve LEED Platinum certification. (project not pictured)



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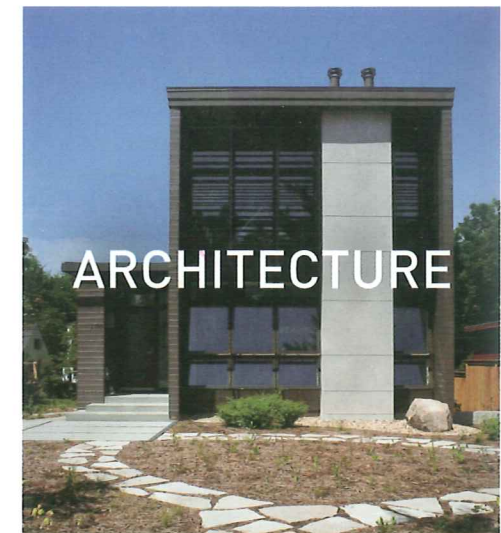
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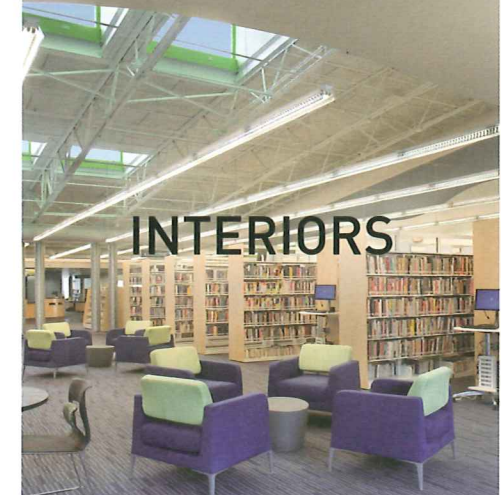
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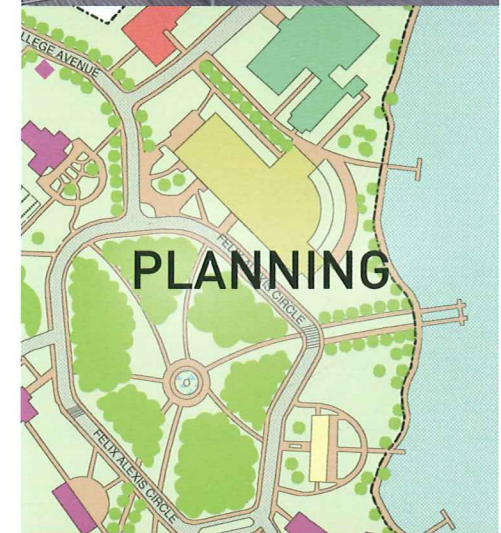
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