

MARGO P. JONES FAIA RETIRES

Margo P. Jones FAIA retired from architectural practice in January of 2022. In 1984 she founded Margo Jones, Architects, and in 2014 transitioned the firm into the partnership of Jones Whitsett Architects. JWA will continue under the able leadership of firm partners Kristian Whitsett AIA, and Dorrie Brooks AIA.

Margo received her B.A. from the University of Chicago, and her Masters of Architecture from M.I.T. She was elevated to Fellow of the AIA in 2016 for her professional leadership. She is a longstanding member of the WMAIA, and served as a board member and president. With other female FAIA members she founded WMAIA's Women in Architecture Committee. She served on the Massachusetts Board of Registration of Architects, and was an officer of the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards. She is an officer of Landmark Trust of the USA, and a member of the Greenfield Historical Commission.

We thank Margo for taking time to talk with the WMAIA newsletter about her impressive career.

How did your approach to your own practice change over the years?

I came to understand the importance of “many hands”, and assembling the best possible professionals to work together. I may have been somewhat headstrong in the beginning; I guess I had to prove myself.

What changes have you seen in the architectural profession as a whole, and in the Valley as a design environment?

When I started in this profession, folks drew with pencils on vellum, we erased and played on trace paper, made cardboard models. It was a fairly linear process. Doing it all on computer--in 3D models--has made everything much more detailed and interactive. You can see what the design is doing, and bring the many disciplines together. The valley is a great place for practicing architecture! There is a general commitment to the natural world, to the environment, and to being inclusive. It's been a privilege to practice here.

Can you tell us about being an early advocate for sustainability and human-centered design?

I went to an architecture school that championed vernacular architecture and human scale. It's an engaging philosophy, and I have tried over the years to be true to that mindset. Making buildings that conserve energy and use local materials is a function of having clients that are close to the land, often with fairly limited budgets.

In your fight for diversity in the architectural field, how did you move ahead, and what doors do you think you helped open?

Looking back, I believe I was able to “pass” as a token female because I was nice and it appeared that I wouldn't cause trouble. But once in place, I did cause some trouble, and proud of it! I didn't open doors, the women who have come after me did, but maybe I encouraged their progression. I'm so pleased that tokenism is much less prevalent now, but we have a long way to go to diversify this profession and include all the talents that are out there.

What do you want people to know about you, that they may not know?

I play bridge.

What will you be doing in the next few years?

I feel that it's time to put the younger folks in charge, and I'm going “out to pasture” with a smile on my face. I've signed up for a historic preservation board (Landmark Trust of USA), I'm on the Greenfield Historic Commission, and an active volunteer on the Greenfield Tree Committee. But most of all, I intend to enjoy family (especially grandchildren!), travel, and having fun with my partner, Philip.



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If you could illustrate the 43-year arc of Margo Jones Architects to Jones-Whitsett Architects, which projects would you choose? 4

- 1. Newton St. School, Greenfield, MA:** The big break into public school construction that launched the MJA/JWA specialty.
 - 2. Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival: Ted Shawn Theatre, Becket, MA:** Addition/renovation & other campus projects. An incredibly creative client -- Liz Thompson could read plans in a glance, and pushed us to evolve the design.
 - 3. Whately Elementary School, Whately, MA:** Our second big break -- for an all-new public school. The Building Committee was terrific. Laura Fitch was the main designer for the project--in an ever-developing partnership with key staff.
 - 4. Many fun projects at The Bement School, Deerfield, MA,** including while working at Pierre Belhumeur's office (before I opened my own office). 7
 - 5. My office at 308 Main St., Greenfield, MA:** A historic tax credit project that taught me a lot about historic renovations, and gave us a new home lasting many decades. Big windows, special masonry, and a terrific downtown location.
 - 6. Fadiman-Colt house, Whately, MA:** Historic preservation/addition renovation. Residential projects help keep our eye on details and human dimensions. This client, two renowned authors, was especially culturally interesting.
 - 7. Williamstown Elementary School, Williamstown, MA:** Ann McCallum was on the building committee; she convinced her fellow committee members that we offered the best design skills. Peter Turowski and I saw the project through. Really proud of its strong "parti" and masonry bearing wall construction, high performance envelope & even some solar.
 - 8. Crocker Farm School, Amherst, MA:** Addition/renovation. We were able to transform a solid, well built "factory" type design into a lively, daylight, diverse school. An awesome teaching staff! 8
 - 9. Colegrove Park Elementary School, North Adams, MA:** Historic preservation on a solid building and a tight site. Dorrie Brooks shepherded this difficult project through. We saved an important North Adams edifice, despite many skeptics along the way.
 - 10. Gardner Elementary School, Gardner, MA:** New 1000 pupil school: a "school in the woods". A large team collaboration, with Kristian in the lead. A great building committee and stalwart design team.
- Each project had special moments, growth opportunities, architectural highlights, and memorable client interaction. I've been so fortunate!



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