

McMonigal Architects



Don F. Wong

The inscription by the entrance says McMonigal Architects. And while the namesake of this six-person firm—Rosemary McMonigal—is quick to point out that “everyone in the firm gets involved in every project,” her involvement is clearly exhaustive. With about 25 projects going at a time, McMonigal devotes approximately 60 percent of her practice to residential work. “Designing a house is an extensive process,” McMonigal says. “We want to design houses that are unique to the site and the people, and we focus on getting clients to leave enough time for the design process.”

From that initial client-architect interview to ground breaking, designing a house can take up to one-and-a-half years—and that may come as a surprise to people accus-

tomed to the rapid-fire construction phase of many suburban tract-home developments.

“Our clients want a house that they are going to live in for a long time and that is adaptable to change,” she says.

McMonigal doesn’t brandish an individual style because she wants the clients’ needs and personalities to show through. When working with a new home owner, she often searches for the intangible. “We’ll look for memories of houses—feelings they had about houses,” she says.

Designing your own house from scratch is a bit of an anomaly in Minnesota, where only one percent of the region’s newer houses are architect designed. “Much of the land here is builder controlled,” says McMonigal, who frequently lectures and holds workshops with various community organizations to help educate the public about the role of architects.

Though a large share of her commissions are detached single-family homes, McMonigal says there is a growing need for greater housing diversity in the region. “The Midwest is slow to adapt to the tighter density of town houses,



Greg Page

apartments and duplexes,” she says. “Here everyone wants his own piece of land and a fence around it.”

As a neighborhood advocate, McMonigal has been involved in upgrading the urban environment, not just placing individual houses on the landscape. She’s helped survey housing stock and initiate neighborhood improvement programs for the Audubon Neighborhood Association in Minneapolis. She’s also been involved in the Northeast Planning Council, and has taught courses in home improvement and neighborhood planning through the Citywide Advisory Committee on Home Improvement Education (CACHIE). In addition, she’s participated in Project Link, a program in which professional women collaborate with Twin Cities area school teachers to enlighten school children—especially girls—about careers in math and science-related fields. Most recently her office completed two neighborhood-planning projects, including a traffic and urban-livability improvement project for Northeast Park, and a multiunit study with Maxfield Research Group for the Marcy-Holmes area in Minneapolis.

McMonigal began her architectural career at a time when few women held prominent roles in the profession. She graduated from the University of Minnesota with degrees in architecture and environmental design in 1981 and worked initially in the corporate setting of Cenex Inc.’s in-house architecture-and-engineering department. She received a fellowship in 1982 to work with Arkkitehtitoimisto, a Finnish architecture firm. If Cenex offered her the management skills that she later would need to steer her own firm, Arkkitehtitoimisto taught her the art of detailing,

the fine-tuning of good design.

Although most closely associated with residential design since opening shop in 1984, McMonigal has branched into the expanding market of child-care facilities. Her approach to designing child-care centers is to create a familiar, homelike environment in which, through an attention to scale and detailing, children feel they have control over their surroundings. The need for more after-school facilities is increasing along with a growing need for day-care centers, and

McMonigal says that schools and park boards will need to master a stronger role in developing child-care facilities.

“For many kids, child-care centers provide a learning opportunity that they might not get at home,” she says. “It becomes a social avenue for young kids.”

McMonigal says her office has reached a comfortable size, enabling her to remain personally involved in all projects. That personal touch is the hallmark of her firm.

Eric Kudalis



James Erickson

Rosemary McMonigal (opposite) produces a range of work, from urban-design studies to residential and child-care projects. Among her designs are the Rieser residence (top) outside Stillwater, Minn., and the Capitol Child Care Center in St. Paul (above).