

ASK THE DESIGNER

An Architect's View

By Jodie Ahern

Rosemary McMonigal, AIA, started her Minneapolis architecture firm, Rosemary A. McMonigal Architects, in 1984. She received degrees in architecture and environmental design from the University of Minnesota in 1981. After first concentrating on commercial buildings, McMonigal was asked by several building owners to design their homes. Now two thirds of the work done by her six-person staff is residential.

Minnesota Monthly: What house styles are typically Minnesotan?



DANIEL CORRIGAN

Rosemary McMonigal

Rosemary McMonigal: In the early days architecture in Minnesota represented a craftsman style. The labor and materials locally available were apparent in our style; that's why we saw log homes; that's

why we saw Native American homes such as the teepee. Over time as railroads and other transportation came to the area it brought with it styles that were prevalent on the East Coast.

MM: What were these East Coast homes like?

RM: Originally most of them came from Europe and a lot of them were English in history, with adaptations to fit our climate and budget. Most were pretty modest to begin with, though certainly in the 1800's things became more lavish. In the Twin Cities area the lumber barons and the milling families built more expensive, larger homes.

MM: What architectural style was most prevalent in the Midwest?

RM: In some areas of Minnesota there is a real German influence—a lot of stonework. On Nicollet Island we see an Italianate design. There's a lot of Gothic architecture in Twin Cities housing too.

MM: What about the Prairie houses?

RM: The Frank Lloyd Wright style was unique and expressed strongly in the Midwest. It was a welcome move away from the classic styles that were imported from Europe. Frank Lloyd Wright stopped to

ask what impact the nature of the prairie would have on our houses.

MM: Some of the more elaborate houses in Kenwood look as if they are a mishmash of a number of different styles. Do you find that charming or awful?

RM: At times charming; I think you can combine styles, as long as you have the sense to balance. Often we find the public doesn't understand why maybe a Tudor on the outside looks different when it's contemporary on the inside. Architects express the interior and exterior together. It's kind of a contradiction to walk outside and see a strangely Tudor house with a contemporary interior. You see that all the time, that mishmash of character and style; I have a hard time with that.

MM: Do you prefer to design in contemporary style?

RM: Yes, and in my mind, if people are open it's nice to see what fits the land and what fits the history of the area and the

history of the people, and draw some of that out. A client in Stillwater had a true prairie site, so we combined Prairie School features with aspects of the couple's background—they had worked for years on an Indian reservation in New Mexico, so we brought some of their background to the project, their love of the forms and shapes of that southwest architecture.

MM: Can you build a contemporary home that would fit into an older neighborhood?

RM: First you need to understand the neighborhood—the setback of the houses from the street, the scale of the houses, their height, their massing, their roof shapes and forms, exterior spaces, yard spaces, and landscaping. It's actually very exciting to design houses in the city versus in the suburban areas. In the city, the automobile and the pedestrian are still separated, so it still allows for an entry sequence from the street. That's different

from suburban houses, where the driveway becomes the entrance.

MM: What do you foresee as the neighborhood of the future?

RM: I think we're going to see a focus again on what makes a neighborhood, why we want to live in a neighborhood. So many people left the city because they could purchase lower-priced housing and larger pieces of land, and there was a perception of better schools, a perception of safer neighborhoods in the suburbs. I think we're going to see people reevaluate this. How far are they really willing to commute?

MM: How will ecology affect the type of housing we build in the future?

RM: Land-use planning is going to become an issue. I see people with their large plots of land, mowing their big fields of grass and spending more time serving grass than it spends serving us; I think maybe they'll give up some of that land for a neighborhood park.

In architecture, ecology means using different materials—certainly redwood and cedar siding is not going to be around forever at the rate that we're using it.

MM: What do you think the style of Minnesota homes will be like in the future?

RM: I hope it will move away from being as big as possible. Maybe people are going to be willing to say what makes a house attractive other than square footage.

I try to convince people all the time to build as small of a house as fits their needs. I question the need to build three eating areas: a dining room, a nook, and stools at the island. My husband and I live in 880 square feet, and we are quite comfortable. But we have yet to do a house that small for anyone. I question a living room, a family room, a den, and an entertainment room. We have just so much time, and it's so limited, I would think people could build one space to serve all those needs, and address some of our environmental concerns. Build some higher quality small houses.

Minnesota Vernacular

Architect Rosemary McMonigal points to some local examples of classic architecture (in Minneapolis except where noted):

Modest Greek Revival Cottages

—1848: Godfrey House, Chute Square.
—1849: Stevens House, moved twice, now in Minnehaha Park.

Wood-framed, painted cottages similar to styles in New England.

Second Empire 1855–1885

—1877: Grove Street Flats, Nicollet Island.

Mansard roof with dormer windows, heavy cornice details, stonework.

Gothic Revival

—1856: Cutter House, Fourth Street Southeast and Tenth Avenue Southeast.

Steep roof, highly decorated gables, pointed arch windows, one-story wraparound porch with flattened arches.

Queen Anne 1880–1900

—1500 and 1600 blocks of Dupont Avenue North.

Steeply pitched, irregular shaped roofs; dominant front-facing gable; patterned shingles in gables, bay windows; spindles on prominent one-story porch.

Richardson Romanesque 1880–1900

—1888: McKnight-Newell House, 1818 LaSalle Avenue.

—1891: James J. Hill House, 240 Summit Avenue, St. Paul.

—1892: VanDusen House, 1900 LaSalle Avenue.

Image of wealth; masonry walls; rough-faced, square stonework; towers.

Colonial Revival 1880–1955

—Fremont Avenue South between 18th and 19th streets.

Accentuated front door with decorative crown; columns supporting front porch; double-hung windows; image suggesting refinement combined with nationalism.

Tudor 1890–1940

—English Tudor, Country Club Historic District, Edina (45th Street, Arden Av-

enue, 50th Street, Browndale Avenue).

Steeply pitched roof; gable turned to side with front cross gable; often timbering; tall, narrow windows; massive chimney; clad in brick, stone, stucco, and siding.

Craftsman 1905–1930

—1905: Brook House, 1600 Mount Curve.

—1910–20: Bungalows on Portland Avenue between 46th and 47th streets, on Park Avenue between 43rd and 44th streets.

Low-pitched, gable roof with wide overhang and unenclosed eaves; decorative beams or braces; tapered columns supporting porch.

Prairie 1900–1920

—Willey House, 255 Bedford Street Southeast (Prospect Park).

—1907: Gray House, 2409 Lake of the Isles Parkway East.

—1913: Purcel House, 2328 Lake Place.

—1915: Bachus House, 212 36th Street West.

Low-pitched hipped roof with wide overhang; two-story with one-story wings and porches; emphasis on horizontal lines.

Spanish Colonial Revival 1915–1940

—1929: 501 West Minnehaha Parkway.

Low-pitched, red-tiled roof with little or no eaves; usually stucco; one or more prominent arches.

Art Moderne 1920–1940

—1937: 3748 Edmund Boulevard.

Flat roof, corner windows, glass block.

Modern, 1935–

—Ranch, split-level, contemporary, shed, international, A-frame, geodesic dome, earth-bermed.

Neo-Eclectic, 1940–

—Neo-French: High hipped or mansard roof, cornice dormers.

—Neo-Tudor: Steeply pitched front gables, timbering details.

—Neo-Victorian: Spindles, other Queen Anne detailing.

—Neo-Mediterranean: Stucco walls, rounded arches, red tile roof.

—Neo-Colonial: Colonial door surrounds, dentil moldings, colonnaded entry porch. ■