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Five Questions

Architect Arthur Hanlon, a partner at Shope Reno Wharton, explains how his firm's designs keep pace with clients' wishes, while remaining rooted in traditional values.

① Shope Reno Wharton's founders are no longer with the firm; how has the company evolved?

Over the years, we have evolved from an "I firm" to a "we firm." We have five partners, and we have a certain set of values we associate with every project. We always have at least two of the partners starting each project, because we want a design aesthetic that reflects where we have been and integrates those elements and ideas. We don't want five little fiefdoms. The strength of a partnership is that you have different perspectives. Everybody has his own strengths.

② SRW has been widely recognized for its Shingle-

style homes, often situated on a waterfront. Is that still the case?

That was most people's first introduction to us. It clearly continues to be a staple of what we do, but over time, our design vocabulary has expanded as locations and clients have become a little more diverse. We have gotten to do Tuscan, log-style, mountain homes in Aspen, and traditional, specific-architect-inspired homes in Westchester. We like clients who engage us to push the envelope. We don't only do big projects; smaller houses can be just as exciting. Our mantra these days is, "Do a smaller home of better quality."

③ How do you see high-end residential style evolving?

In addition to a trend toward smaller

homes of better quality, we also see a desire for more openness. There is a lot less demand for single-use rooms. The dedicated media theaters in the basement are disappearing, because you can go buy an 85-inch television that's pretty close to the 120-inch projection screen. People are looking for a refuge from modern life. We can't escape our iPhones and e-mail, so people want homes that help them to relax. Our company's logo is a bird making a nest. It's what we really are trying to do: create nests for people and give comfort. Many clients want the exterior of their home to look somewhat traditional while feeling more modern on the inside.

④ How do you balance those wishes?

We are a little skeptical about how acutely modern some of the interiors out there have become. You don't want to have too large a dichotomy between the outside and the inside. Our goal is to blend the modern with the traditional. We don't tend to do a lot of boxy designs. We like to do buildings that are like "frozen music," where you can walk around a corner and encounter something unexpected, fun, and interesting. Architecture is frozen music in that we write our "musical composition" through the way we design these buildings.

⑤ How has the desire to "build green" affected your designs?

Green is an interesting thing. Everyone talks about green, but to us, green is really building a building the right way the first time so it lasts 100 years. Waterproof it in a way that will endure; that's green. Green is sort of baked into our designs; if you have a tight envelope and good windows and good detailing and you are picking the appropriate materials and systems for the appropriate sites, you are far ahead of the game. If you are putting Marvin pine windows on a waterfront site, they will be great for ten years, but then you will need new windows. One of the best things you can get from hiring an architect is our advice on systems, because we pick things out that are appropriate for your environment and budget and just make the most sense.

INTERVIEW BY ROBERT KIENER