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"Right now we have an explosion of information, but an implosion of meaning."

—Cuban-born American artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957 – 1996)

Guest Editor Rand Elliott, FAIA

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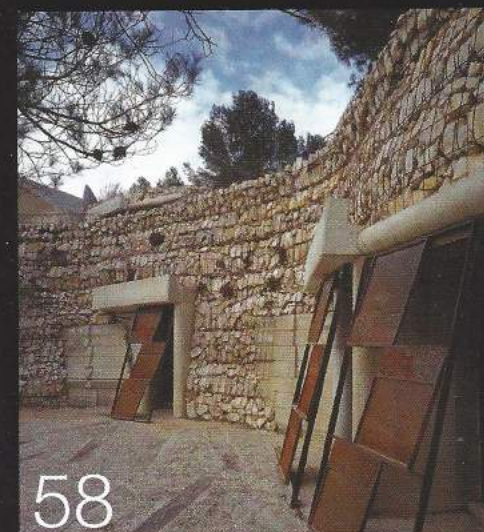
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Cover: "Untitled" (Party Platform - 1980-1992), 1991; Black paper, endless supplies, 7 in. at ideal height by 40 in. by 26 in. Installation view at the Camden Arts Centre, for "Symptoms of Interference, Conditions of Possibility," 1994 (© The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation, Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery).

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profile



Will Bruder: artist as architect

Reported by Kelly Bauer
Written by Kelly Bauer and
Jennifer Thiele Busch

The Southwest boasts untouched desert landscapes, dramatic sunsets, and extensive scenery offering respite and solace. Many brilliant minds have come to this beautiful and challenging environment to savor its unique natural beauty and to seek new possibilities inspired by its defining horizon and dramatic light. In the design world, early adapters were Frank Lloyd Wright and Paolo Soleri, along with a handful of others who brought their Modernist principles to a new place.

Nationally and internationally recognized architect Will Bruder happens to be one of them. Regardless of peer pressure, status, or popular trends, Bruder has honed his work to his own vision, producing with his studio exceptional and award-winning buildings. His work is regarded as sculptural, perceived as a journey into the unknown. It is not driven by form or style. "I have come to see the world from a different perspective and with greater clarity, with perhaps less and less tolerance for fads and fashion," he explains.

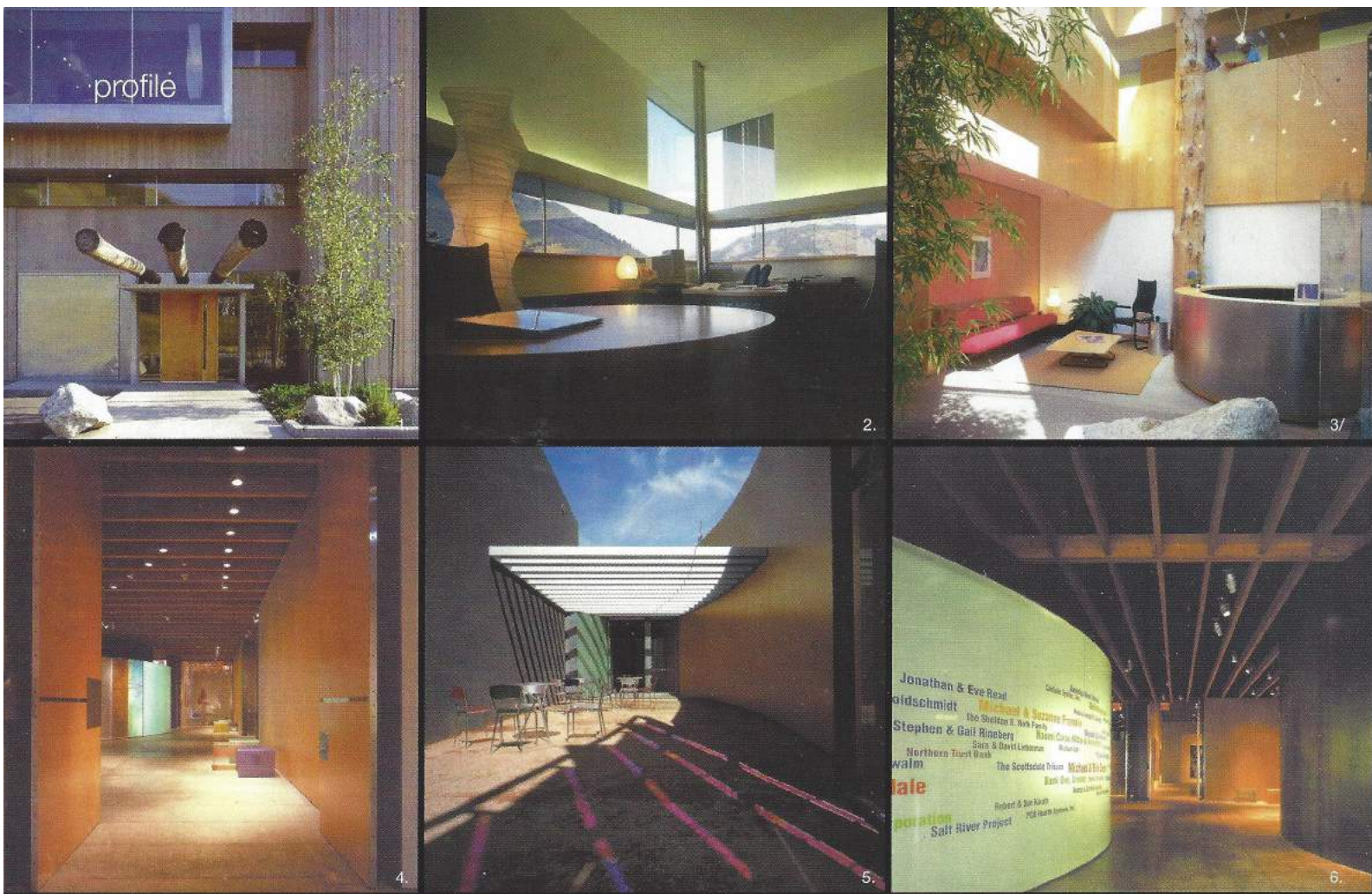
When Bruder came out of the Midwest in the late 1960s, he had in the back of his mind the possibility of striking out in a place where he could cut his architectural teeth. He opened his own practice immediately after getting his license in 1974 and started carving out a distinctive path for himself, building his first studio off the back of

his rental apartment in downtown Phoenix, then moving to a home and studio of his own design in the desert beyond the edge of the city.

After the completion of the Phoenix Central Library, the project that brought his studio national and international acclaim, he returned to the heart of the city to pursue increasingly frequent and complex public and private projects. His unique portfolio has enabled the studio to grow, and to celebrate its 33rd year the practice has become Will Bruder + Partners, a collaboration of Bruder and three partners, who have been pivotal colleagues for more than 10 years. There are now projects in play throughout the West.

Bruder first revealed his position as an independent thinker with the design motif for his own home. Tapering his house into the topography and considering climate conditions for energy efficiency, he also designed his home with minimal views of the city. His primary views to the northwest would show him the unspoiled desert landscape, not the banality of mass civilization. His unconventional education and somewhat atypical apprenticeships—he received a BFA in sculpture from the University of Wisconsin, and his formal design training came through apprenticeships with architectural designer Michael Johnson and visionary architects Paolo

Images 1 - 4: Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, Nev. (photography by Grant Mudford).
Images 5 - 7: Burton Barr Phoenix Central Library, Phoenix (photography by Bill Timmerman). Images 8 - 9: Temple Kol Ami, Scottsdale, Ariz. (photography by Bill Timmerman).



He never forgets that “architecture, in order to be transcendent, needs first to connect with people where they live—metaphorically and physically.”

Soleri and Gunnar Birkerts—had taught him to look at a place more from the viewpoint of an artist, rather than from a traditional architectural approach based on pragmatism or theory. “I see and ask questions of the places that I have had the privilege of working,” he says.


Lately, Bruder has the privilege of working in an expanding range of locations and on increasingly complex project types. In Phoenix, several multi-family condo projects are underway, and there is a new branch library coming out of the ground. The firm’s largest building and interiors project to date, the 350,000-sq.-ft. Dial Henkel U.S. headquarters and R&D facility, will open in late 2008. “We are master planner/architects for both the CBD 101 (central business district) in Glendale, Ariz., a 77-acre sustainable, mixed-use, agrarian, urban vision with 4.8-million-sq.-ft. of buildings, and TAXI, a mixed use project on a gritty, 18-acre site between the railroad tracks and the Platte River in Denver,” he reports.

Bruder’s self-described design process is fueled by intensive investigations into the uniqueness of each setting geographically, climatically, and topographically in regard to either its urban or rural context. “From there

we are inspired by the sensual textures of light and materials that inform the identity of a place,” he explains. With that research in play, his process with his colleagues is to design from the outside in and the inside out. “I strive to poetically choreograph ideas of form, space, and materiality into an architectural vision that becomes a celebration of our clients and of the communities that our buildings inhabit,” he says.

“Through architecture, my goal is to create original inventions of beauty and function that are simultaneously simple and complex,” continues Bruder. He never forgets that “architecture, in order to be transcendent, needs first to connect with people where they live—metaphorically and physically.” As a result, Will Bruder’s buildings blend intellectual rigor with an artful aesthetic. ☐

Kelly Bauer, IIDA, is a principal at richard + bauer, the Phoenix-based firm she founded with architect James Richard, AIA, in 1996. This studio based, integrated architectural and interiors practice focuses primarily on higher education, research, and library design. Bauer completed her education in interior design, graduating from the University of Arizona in 1982. Along with Richard, she was *Contract* magazine’s “2007 Designer of the Year.”

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Images 1 - 3: Riddell Office, Jackson, Wyo.; Images 4 - 6: Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Scottsdale, Ariz. (photography by Bill Timmerman).