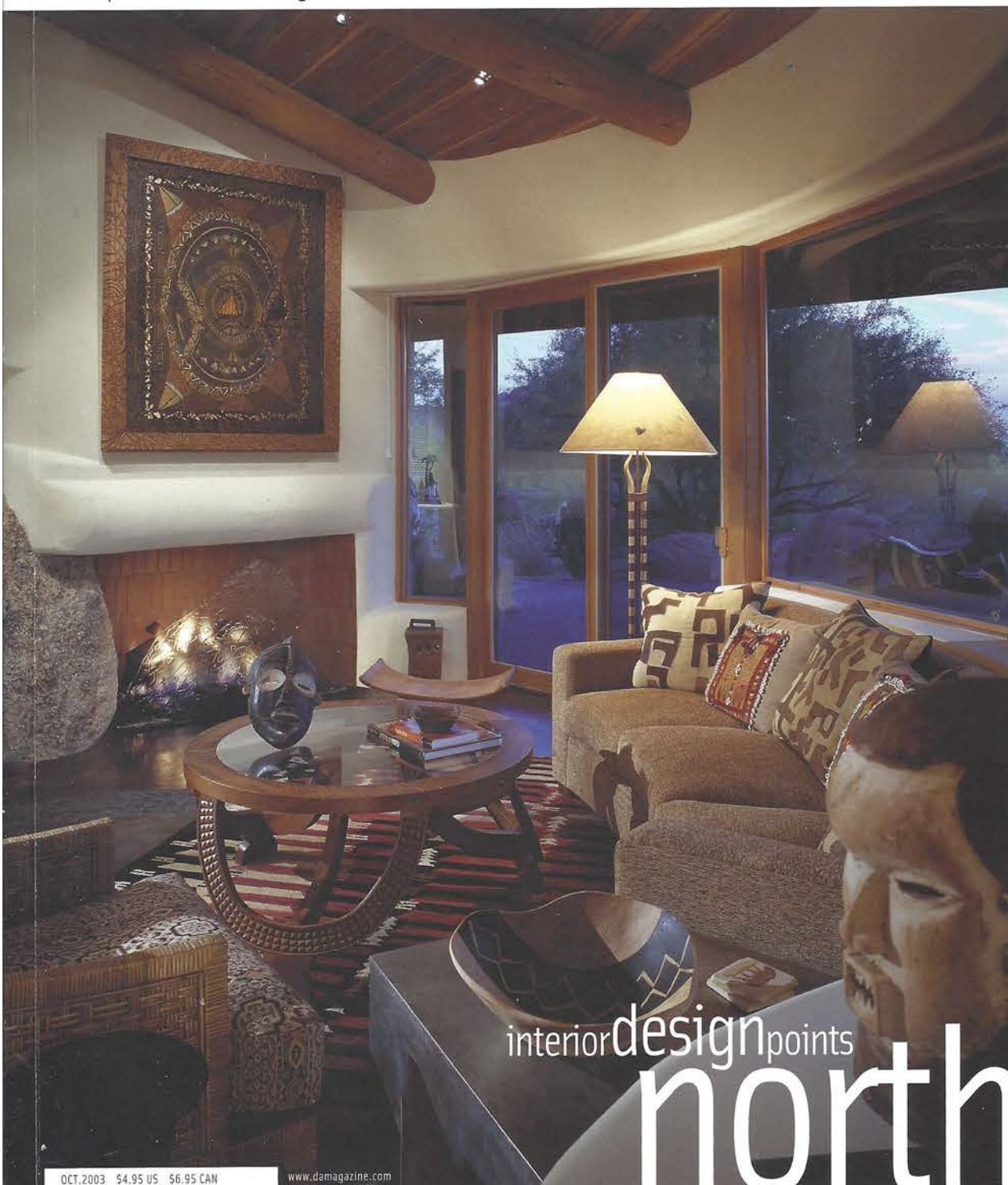


# Design & Architecture

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Arizona Edition\*

\*Inspirations in Design and Art for the Home



Will Bruder  
111 W Monroe St Ste 444  
Phoenix AZ 85003-1711  
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Reconsidering  
the City

West By  
Midwest

The Architect's  
Architect

Lighting in  
Home Design

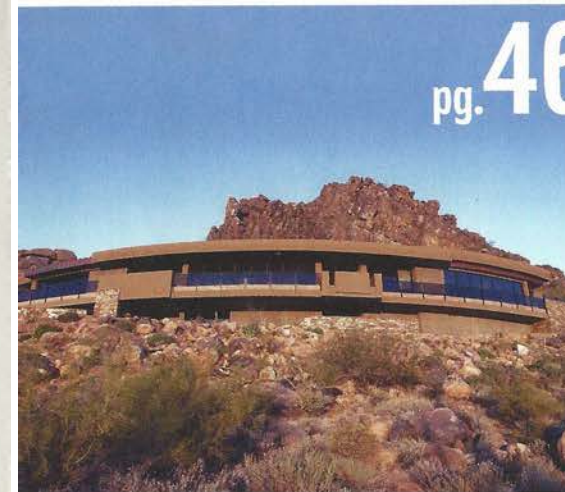


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{ writer Dana Hutt }

# ARIZONA'S LEADING ARCHITECT RECONSIDERS THE CITY

**L**ocally, he is best known as the architect of the Phoenix Central Library. Nationally, he is recognized as a trailblazer – a desert sage and shaman – who has forged a distinctive style of regionalist architecture in the American West. He has been awarded numerous prizes and held prestigious teaching positions across the country. Now, with a career of nearly 30 years and 200-plus buildings to his credit, Will Bruder – the former longhaired iconoclast – is seen as the godfather and dean of a loosely affiliated group of architects based in Arizona dubbed the “Arizona School.” (His studio has spawned many talented emerging architects, including Wendell Burnette, Rick Joy, and Jack deBartolo). And, at the ripe old age of 57, the Phoenix-based architect is boldly taking on what promises to be a major shift in his career.

Bruder's current projects signal this change. This spring saw the opening of the Nevada Museum of Art in Reno (lauded as “an ambitious attempt to reconnect Reno with the stark beauty of its high-desert setting”) – the most recent of his designs realized outside of Arizona. Awaiting construction are libraries in Portland, Maine, and Madison, Wisconsin, a house in Marin County, California, and multi-unit urban



projects in Phoenix and Tempe. Can Bruder dispense with the “desert shaman” moniker once and for all?

Born in Wisconsin and trained as a sculptor, Bruder came to Arizona in the late 1960s to work with Paolo Soleri, the visionary architect who apprenticed with Frank Lloyd Wright. In 1974, Bruder opened his own studio in New River, a then-remote outpost north of Phoenix. His early work drew from apprenticeships (with Soleri and Gunnar Birkerts),

\*below & left: The most dazzling display of Bruder's structural expression is the hanging roof of the Phoenix Library, which is supported by a system of tensegrity and detached from the adjacent walls to leave a gap for natural light.





\*The openness and curvilinear plan of the Cox House provides an ideal place for entertaining and communing with the desert setting.



photo by Tim Hurstley

appreciation of the Sonoran desert, and cross-country trips to experience buildings, especially the work of Wright and Bruce Goff. (To this day he is a relentless traveler and passionate architecture hound). Like Wright – Arizona's first famed architect – Bruder possesses a keen sensitivity to site and seeks to realize an architecture that expresses the nature of its materials and is appropriate to its time and place. He says, "Architectural excellence is about trying to achieve buildings that celebrate our time in hopes that they become timeless markers that blur the edge of time."

Bruder, like Wright, designs each building specifically for the client and site. The work of Midwest architect Bruce Goff taught him the importance of listening to the client, and Bruder often references Goff's phrase "because of and not in spite of the client." "He is such an amazing listener," says Ed Riddell, who (with his wife Lee) commissioned two Bruder buildings – an office building and most recently, a house near Jackson, Wyoming. "It just amazed me how he could roll with the punches in terms of things that we felt were important for our needs, not necessarily design-wise, just

needs-wise and adapt his design to really both maintain the integrity of the design and yet meet our functional needs." The Riddells, who first met Bruder when he was selected as architect for the Teton County Library, have since become good friends with him as well as enthusiastic clients. Riddell says, "One of the things that's really neat about Will's buildings is, I think, the exteriors don't always show just how amazingly these buildings work on the inside and how well they are embraced by the users."

"It's clearly changed my life," says Bob Cox who bought his Bruder-designed house from the previous clients while it was being built and worked with the architect to realize his original vision. "Living in an organic architecture is a wonderful experience that's hard to describe. It's like living in a sculpture; every aspect of the house is an art form." Cox, a graphic designer, has since collaborated with Bruder on architectural signage for several of his buildings including the Phoenix Central Library, Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Nevada Museum of Art. "It's not only a house but a relationship," he adds, noting not only the friendships that Bruder has with his clients, but also ones between Bruder home and building owners.

Bruder's architecture is marked by variety as form, materiality, and spatiality change from project to project. The broken block masonry and curvilinear contours of the Cox Residence in Cave Creek renders the house as a rugged composition of shadow and light. The purple-black copper slag of the Deer Valley Rock Art Center blends into the nearby boulders of an archaeological site. The concrete block walls of Temple Koi

*"Living in an organic architecture is a wonderful experience that's hard to describe. It's like living in a sculpture"*



Photo: Grant Mudford & Dean Burton

\*Bruder's most recent high-profile building, the Nevada Museum of Art in Reno evokes the nearby Black Rock Desert.



Ami in Scottsdale are laid in a pattern of unevenness to reflect nature's asymmetry. The angular, canted masonry walls of the Byrne Residence in North Scottsdale suggest the fissures of abstract canyon walls. The undulating plan of the Townsend House echoes the shapes of the clients' mid-century modern furniture and creates spaces to showcase their collections of fine and decorative art. For his buildings in Jackson, Wyoming, such as the Teton County Library and the Riddell House, Bruder suggests "place" in large part through materials. The Riddell House suggests the frontier's vernacular work buildings with its simple profile and iron-stained cedar siding. To locate the regional identity of a place, he looks to "the built history and what craft traditions exist, what material choices are logical, and occasionally what craft

use elements like he does, incorporating black iron, copper, stainless with softer tones," says Matt Gibeau of Metalworks Inc., a metal craftsman who has worked on numerous Bruder projects, including the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, the Riddell House, and the Phoenix Central Library. Because of Bruder's nontraditional designs, camaraderie between tradesmen often develops, which, he adds, is something you don't see on other jobs. Gibeau says, "After everybody gets a little bit of a clue, they really give 110% and in Arizona that's pretty hard to come by."

The Phoenix Central Library – Bruder's largest and still most acclaimed work to date -- is the literal embodiment of his definition of excellence: a simplicity and accessibility borne of distillation and editing. Built for a fraction of the

**"I'm interested more in the whole idea of cities and streets and the spaces between and places that existed before cars"**

choices you can retrieve from the past in a new way or even an old way that's been lost."

Art and craftsmanship also play an integral role in his work and thinking. When discussing his work and process, he makes frequent references to artists, many of them sculptors: Richard Serra, James Turrell, Isamu Noguchi, Walter de Maria, Alexander Calder and Christo. With his background in sculpture, Bruder brings an artist's sensibility to his process, working to shape each building individually. "I've never seen anybody

cost of most prestigious public buildings, the Central Library is celebrated for its environmentally sustainable design that minimizes energy usage. The building also stands as a strong argument for his belief in "place-making." It pays homage to Arizona history through the exterior use of copper siding, which alludes to the area's mining legacy. Making use of geological metaphor, he likens the building to a great mesa, the interior atrium to a "crystal canyon." On the top floor, the great reading hall, with its dramatic floating roof, is a spectacular living room for



Photo: Bill Timmerman

the whole city. For Bruder, timelessness and rootedness to place is an antidote for a society starved for community.

"Bruder did a magnificent job in trying to capture something that was Southwestern in its feel," says Terry Goddard, the former mayor of Phoenix who oversaw the building's construction during his tenure in office. "But I think there's a much more elemental aspect. It's a really great functioning building and people intuitively like it. It's inviting. And, in fact, I think the greatest proof of the desirability of great architecture is that the readership in the Central Library went up so dramatically when the new building opened." Assessing its impact on Phoenix's architecture, Goddard says, "It set the most incredibly high standards that anybody could possibly do." The

*\*The iron-stained cedar siding of Riddell House links to the material traditions found in the vernacular buildings in rural Wyoming.*

*\*The great reading hall on the top floor of Phoenix Central Library is one of the region's most spectacular public spaces—a living room for the city.*



photo by: Tim Hurley



\*Phoenix Central Library stands out from the low-density urban context along Central Avenue with its distinctive form and dramatic use of materials—copper, stainless steel, glass, and fabric “sails”—as an example of Bruder’s interest in place-making.

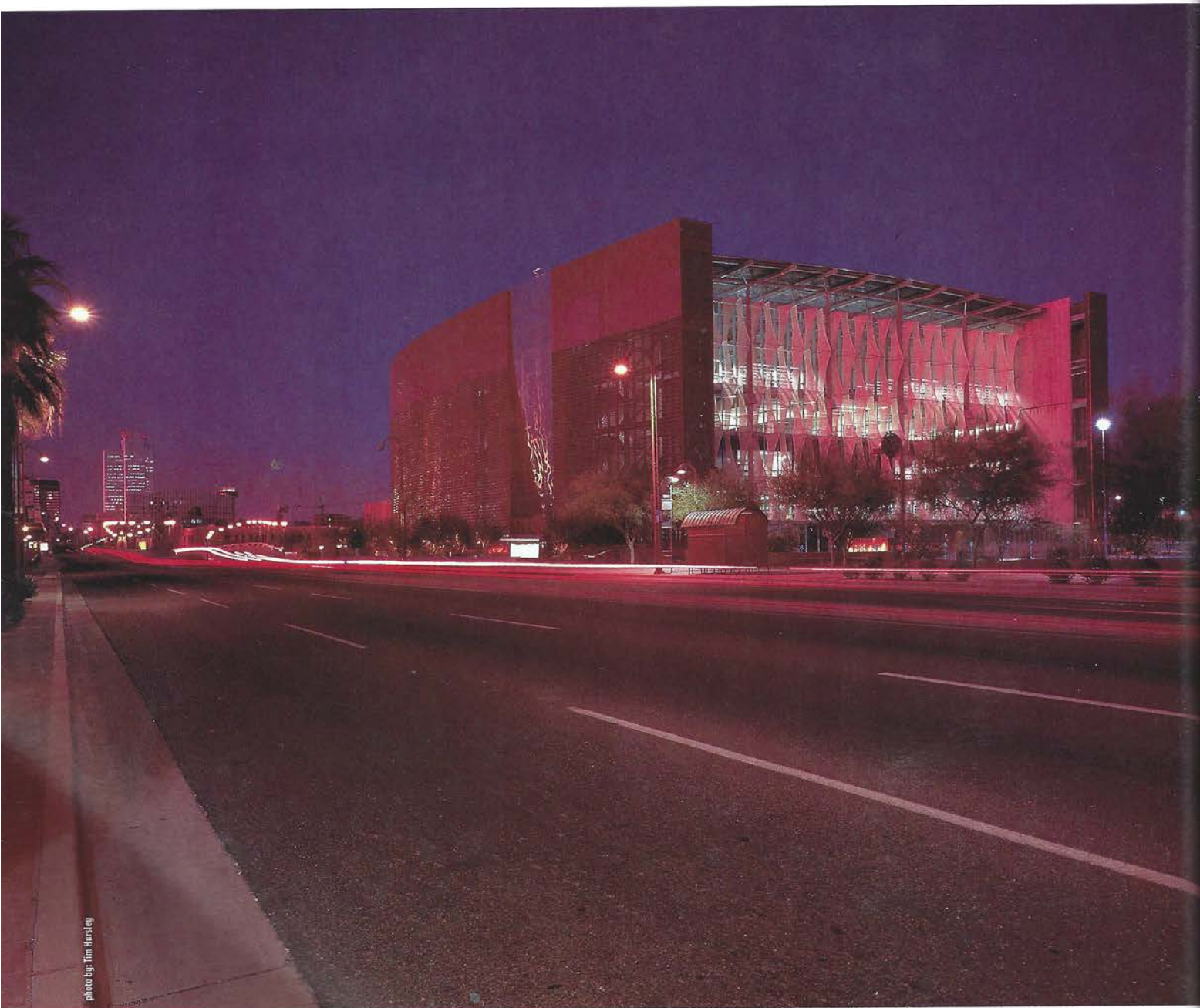


photo by: Tim Hursley



public and critical success of the Phoenix Central Library catapulted Bruder into the national spotlight and whetted his interest to do more urban, civic-minded projects.

In 2001, Bruder began perhaps the most profound transformation of his career. Relocating from the home and

designing object-buildings, he newly focuses on the scale and proportion of the total urban context. “I’m interested more in the whole idea of cities and streets and the spaces between and places that existed before cars,” he says. It’s a curious fact that, given these proclivities, Bruder still chooses to live in Phoenix—a city

quality of the space of this long linear garden environment.” Interestingly, in a Sunbelt mecca of single-family housing, Bruder has a real opportunity to explore his interest in the urban context.

The move to downtown has brought Bruder a newfound sense of perspective and balance: “I’m interested in doing less at one level but raising the quality of what that is,” he says. He has effectively tempered his frenzied intensity toward architecture with a renewed interest in teaching, dialogue, and collaboration. In another key shift, Bruder now recognizes the benefits of the computer as a drafting and rendering tool, citing how it allows him to repeatedly edit a drawing to a richness and simplicity. No longer making final ink drawings (which makes him sad), he nonetheless sees the worth of gaining freedom to work more quickly.

As he grows out of the desert-guru persona, Bruder muses on the drawbacks of being pigeonholed into any style: “I’d like to be known as the person who has the courage to ask the questions and challenge what is and redefine what is possible.” \*

***“Architectural excellence is about trying to achieve buildings that celebrate our time in hopes that they become timeless markers that blur the edge of time.”***

studio complex in New River where he lived since 1975, Bruder cut his hair and moved to downtown Phoenix to begin a new life. More than a change of address, the move coincides with what is a major attitudinal shift of the architect’s interests. “Everything that’s happened in the last three years has been nothing but good,” he says. “It’s just been a whole other sensibility”—and one that is decidedly urban. He now talks about buildings as components of the urban fabric and says, “the fabric is more important than the buildings themselves.” Rather than

that is hardly imaginable without cars and where, he notes, there are no great recent examples of community making.

But Phoenix too may be seeking for a new urban paradigm. Dovetailing with his heightened interest in urbanism, Bruder recently designed two multi-unit complexes in Arizona: Laloma, a five-unit live-work building in Scottsdale, and the Vale, a 46-unit mixed-use live-work complex in Tempe for the same developer. What intrigues him most about the Vale are the shared public areas: “the stairs, the connections, the trellises, the

\*The future Madison Public Library in Wisconsin marks Bruder’s response to the setting of his native state.