

HOMER DELAWIE 1927-2009

Architect's modern design seen in local landmarks

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Homer Delawie was headed for a career in forestry before a vocational test steered him to architecture.

He made his mark with modern designs that embraced nature and with well-known projects in San Diego, including SeaWorld exhibits and the fountain plaza at Balboa Park.

His work can be seen at Coronado's Ferry Landing, the San Diego Zoo and in postwar modern houses featuring huge glass walls, wood siding and dramatic designs that made the dwellings appear to float over lush canyons.

Mr. Delawie died Friday of complications from Parkinson's disease at San Diego Hospice, another building he designed. He was 81.



His passion for architecture and belief in community involvement spurred his activism with the city's Historic Resources Board, the San Diego Planning Commission and the Save Our Heritage Organisation, which he helped start with Robert Miles Parker.

"He was committed to making the world a better place," said his son Gregory Delawie of Alexandria, Va. "He loved to create beautiful buildings and .□.□. spaces that people would enjoy."

Mr. Delawie moved to San Diego in the late 1950s and worked with pioneering architect Lloyd Ruocco. He was a partner in the firm when he left in 1961 to start his own business.

Less was more for Mr. Delawie, friends and colleagues said.

"He had a wonderful simplicity and attention to detail," said architect Adele Chapman, who went to work for Mr. Delawie 30 years ago. "He was considered a maverick in architecture. He was one of the primary architects who started the midcentury modern movement. It's very difficult to design a simple building and make it look good."

Local architect David Marshall said Mr. Delawie was recognized as a master architect.

"His humanistic modernist designs were an honest reflection of San Diego style," Marshall said. "He used large areas of glass and incorporated natural materials .□.□. he used a contemporary style that reflected our climate."

Marshall, who served on the Historical Resources Board with Mr. Delawie, said his colleague "would fight to protect good architecture and was open to helping other architects. He was interested in good design and what was best for the city."

Mike Stepner, former San Diego city architect and planner, said Mr. Delawie was a mentor to him when he joined the city staff and Mr. Delawie was on the planning commission. "His guidance was invaluable, and his credibility as a professional was a great asset (to the city)," Stepner said.

In addition to being a planning commissioner for 13 years, Mr. Delawie was president of the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects and served on several state and national AIA committees.

Homer Delawie was born Sept. 24, 1927, in Santa Barbara to Fred and Gertrude Delawie. He served in the Navy and was set on joining the forestry service until he took a Veterans Administration vocational test that showed an aptitude for architecture.

He attended the fledgling school of architecture at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo. He graduated in 1951 and became the school's first licensed architect.

Friends and family said his favorite projects included Plaza de Balboa, which he designed with Joe Yamada and which has been renamed the Bea Evenson Fountain; the Coronado Library; the downtown Metropolitan Transit System building; and the three houses he built for himself and his family.

In addition to his son Gregory, Mr. Delawie is survived by his wife, Ettie, of Point Loma; children Claire Sosna of San Diego, Shandell Sosna of Marin County, Tracy Delawie of Olympia, Wash., Scott Delawie of San Diego and Stephanie Sosna of Bozeman, Mont.; and three grandchildren.

A memorial will be held at 5 p.m. July 20 at the Bea Evenson Fountain in Balboa Park, between the Reuben H. Fleet Science Center and the Natural History Museum.

The family suggests donations in Mr. Delawie's honor to the National Parkinson Foundation; San Diego Hospice and the Institute for Palliative Care; or California Polytechnic State University, School of Architecture, San Luis Obispo.

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