

As a self-described “Army brat,” prominent and nationally acclaimed Architect, John Grable, FAIA spent his childhood moving from city to city and no doubt gleaning a small piece of the landscape at each stop. California, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania and Vicenza, Italy, were all called home for portions of his life. “Upon my father’s retirement from the military,” Grable said, “he was transferred to Texarkana to serve at Red River Army Depot. My family and I were dazzled by the depth and beauty of the environment and culture of Texarkana. Our travels had exposed us to many different cultures, and we knew instinctively there was something special about Texarkana.”

Grable is one of four siblings with parents who believed their children were capable of great things and encouraged them to believe it as well. While living in Italy, as a child, John’s mother took him for walks through the ancient streets and as they walked, they discussed the beautiful Renaissance Era structures they saw. She noticed in John a natural aptitude for understanding angles and lines and nudged him in a direction where those skills could be put to use. He recalled with a laugh that his decision to become an architect came, “when my mother told me this is what I would become.” Her encouragement was instrumental in sparking the dream that eventually made him the incredible success he is today.

“My architectural education began when I was 16 years old, working for the gifted firm of Moore and Thomas Architects. John Moore was a graduate of the University of Texas in Austin led by the 1950’s era of legendary faculty known as The Texas Rangers. They were immortalized in Alexander Caragonne’s book *The Texas Rangers*. Caragonne describes them as one of the most significant chapters in the history of postwar American architectural education. Joe Thomas was a graduate of Texas Tech University and both were talented, gifted, modernist architects who were producing a timeless body of work in the Ark-La-Tex area.

AN ARCHITECT’S ANGLE

BY KARA HUMPHREY

Green Lantern
photos by Dror Baldinger FAIA



“This experience left an indelible impression on my education as they embodied a work ethic and eye for materials and detailing that produced timeless architecture. I entered and graduated from the School of Architecture at the University of Texas in Austin. I was over-prepared from my apprenticeship with Moore and Thomas Architects. My professors in Austin were from the same generation, and their influence pushed me to the next level of performance in the demanding profession. I am proud to say I taught Masters Programs at both University of Texas and Texas Tech over the last 20 years—a fulfilling role which allowed me to extend the gifts I received from my mentors and teachers.”

As part of Grable’s UT school curriculum, he collaborated with eight other students on a design build project in West Austin. It was an impoverished, rural community, and “the project manifested itself into a new community center built from reclaimed materials.” It was his involvement in this endeavor which further clarified for John the power of architecture and at its most basic level, its role in “providing communities with basic shelter, self-esteem and pride in their history and community. The key lessons were that the profession of architecture is fueled by empathy and compassion for the human condition and land. This formula holds true throughout all levels of complexities of commercial and residential projects over the last five decades.”

Inspiration for architectural projects may manifest from many things, but exposure to beautiful works, skylines and the histories of various locations lend themselves to creating a bit of an edge in that department. John’s childhood adventures in all the great



Water Glass
photos by Leonid Furmanskyy

cities of his father’s duty stations afforded him the opportunity to experience different styles, ages and functionalities of structures in many environments. Even with his exposure to spectacular buildings in America and abroad, Texarkana still carved out a place in his memory for some of our standout buildings. “Texarkana has a plethora of architectural gems from classic to modern structures. One building that stood out was the downtown Buhrman-Pharr four story warehouse and general store. I was amazed at the

integration of the brick and glass facade at street level and the beauty of the virgin timber framing, utilized to support the loads of a warehouse. I would spend many Saturdays with my father talking with the sales staff who allowed us to explore the upper levels of the structure where there were many hidden unique products unsold from bygone eras. This gave me a deep appreciation for the genius of the American worker and the diminishing skill sets, as my generation was educated in the new



Brushy Top
photo by Dror Baldinger FAIA



Music Box
photo by Dror Baldinger FAIA

ways of the future. The craft of the building left a lasting impression on form versus function, which I utilize in my practice.

“I remember working on the 1960s Model Cities Program that reshaped traffic and public spaces in downtown Texarkana. I remember expressing my concerns on the projects during the Moore and Thomas period and fought to preserve the buildings being demolished to serve as parking lots. I even tried to compromise with the demolition scope of work and preserve the street level facades of masonry to preserve the fabric and scale of the beautiful city. I was proud to work on the renovation of the Belk Jones Clothing Store that was led by Joe Thomas, Jr.”

In truth, it isn’t incredibly hard to find a place to live. There are spec houses available around every corner and more continue to pop up with surprising speed. These houses can satisfy needs and make a beautiful home. “A spec home is typically conceived with a different set of values,” John said. “But the motives are not always in line with the five basic needs of mankind: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. These ideas represent the core of the education of the architect.” When customers want more out of their custom

“We are ultimately the stewards of people’s dreams, and our role is to usher them through to fruition.”

—John Grable



photo by John Grable Architects

home, hiring someone who will make these five basic needs the priority of the design can set their minds at ease. Building a house is about more than just the wood and nails or the colors and style. It’s remembering you are creating a place to raise children, make memories and build family legacies. It’s about all the day-to-day moments that make up a life. Hiring an architect means you are trusting a true professional with that enormous responsibility, and it’s one Grable takes very seriously. “We are ultimately the stewards of people’s dreams, and our role is to usher them through to fruition. This is what is most important and defines our level of practice that embraces the client, land and structure in a timeless fashion.” He is also able to bring that attention to detail to his larger projects. “Although we are proud of the residential and ranch projects, we are most proud of the commercial civic projects that embody all the attributes of the residential client but are

shared by a larger group of people and become a lasting impression, education and appreciation for design that embodies a story of the user group and land.”

The accolades and awards for Grable are many, but the most notable distinction of John’s career is his designation as a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects (FAIA). This distinction



names him as one of only three percent of AIA members who have been recognized with the “highest membership honor for their exceptional work and contributions to architecture and society.” (aia.org) Fellows must “have made significant contributions to the profession and society and exemplify architectural excellence.” (aia.org) Some qualifications of this elite group include having: “made notable contributions through their work in education, research, literature or the practice of architecture; actively, efficiently and cooperatively led the Institute or a related professional organization; made notable contributions in public service or work in government or industry organizations through leadership; and made notable contributions to the public through alternative careers or volunteer work.” (aia.org) It is only the most seasoned,

talented and successful architects who earn this honor and John Grable's contributions to design have earned him a spot among them. He is a veritable giant in architecture.

We all know that Texarkana has produced its fair share of truly successful people like Grable. He has always believed there is something very special about our city. Looking back on his time as a Texarkana resident, he remembers “classmates who graduated the year before me, and the year after me, have all gone on to prove themselves with great distinction in their respective fields on a worldwide scale.” Through his beautiful works and the architectural firm he has built in San Antonio, he has most definitely secured his place among them. Building cities, building dreams and building lives, John Grable, FAIA has forever left his fingerprint on the world. TM



Light and Shadow
photos by Dror Baldinger FAIA



Ghost Hangar
photo by John Grable Architects

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