



THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE  
OF ARCHITECT  
Custom Residential Architects Network

## CRAN CHRONICLE



### Letter from the CRAN Chair

*By James A. Walbridge, AIA*

Hello,

Welcome to our third edition of the Chronicle for 2015. Once again our CRAN Communications team continues to raise the bar and do a fantastic job. Please enjoy this current edition of the CRAN Chronicle.

Last month in July from the 22nd-24th, two of our CRAN Advisory Group members, John Stewart AIA and Jared Banks AIA, joined me in representing CRAN at the annual AIA National KLA Conference in Denver. For those of you noting yet another AIA acronym to put in your never-ending list, "KLA" stands for "Knowledge Leadership Assembly". This annual event convenes representatives from each of the 21 AIA Knowledge Communities (or "KC's") of which CRAN is part of. The over-arching goal is for all these diverse Knowledge Community representatives to have the opportunity to interface with AIA National Leadership, AIA National Staff and importantly, other members of the different KC's. This gives each KC representative the opportunity learn about what each KC is doing, to find new alignments with other KC's for potential collaborations and establish new relationships.

[Read more](#)

### In this issue

- [▶ Feature Articles](#)
- [▶ In the News](#)
- [▶ Upcoming Events](#)
- [▶ Resources](#)
- [▶ Download this Issue \(PDF\)](#)

### Quick Links

[Post a Message](#)

[Webinar Calendar](#)

[Upcoming Events](#)

[Newsletter Archives](#)

*Write for the CRAN Chronicle!*



### Features

---

## Go-Kart Racing and 5 Other Ways to Enhance Consultant Relationships

By Josh Divelbiss, AIA | [The HR Group Architects](#)

I couldn't stop moving. My heart was pounding, my senses muffled by the fire retardant hood and a snug, insulated racing helmet. My vision was blurred by goggles that became foggy from my heavy breathing. Anxiety and the un-insulated steel warehouse surrounding me aided in my profuse sweating. My teammate swerved into the pit, slammed on the brakes, jumped out and I jumped in. I slammed on the gas pedal and was off, bouncing off plastic barricades, driving erratically and trying to follow the only rule: "No Bumping."



[Read more](#)

## Architectural Mentorship

By Kevin Harris, FAIA | [Kevin Harris Architect, LLC](#)

Following the recent pronouncement by NCARB addressing political correctness offenses caused by use of the term to describe those individuals in the state of job training somewhere between graduation and licensure, "intern", it makes sense to pause and take a closer look at how and why our profession trains its future architects. Unfortunately, NCARB was unable to come up with a substitute moniker to address "those artists formerly know as interns". (Sounds a bit like the rock and roll publicity stunt by Prince). However, these unnamed individuals still exist, as does the need to train them.



[Read more](#)

## The Digital Transformation of CRAN

By Jared Banks AIA | [Shoegnome, LLC](#)

Like many of us, my involvement with CRAN started by checking the box when renewing my AIA membership. For a long time I merely read the weekly KnowledgeNet e-mails, occasionally responding if I could figure out how. My connection to CRAN was pretty thin. I knew that the group was focused on residential work and had a yearly symposium, but not much more. In late 2012 I responded to a call for help with the CRAN Chronicle. The newsletter was looking for contributors for the first issue. As a newly independent architect looking to expand the reach of his voice, I jumped on the chance to share my ideas. The result was an article about surviving the Great Recession as an Emerging Professional. After that first issue, I



joined the committee that handles the CRAN Chronicle and have also written many more articles (this one is my seventh).

[Read more](#)

## Relationships

*Interview by John Altobello | [John Altobello Architecture](#)  
Interviewee Sally Wilson & John Kelsey | [Wilson Kelsey Design](#)  
(Part 1)*

**How a couple, both interior designers, work with their clients and with each other.**

Their office is a separate wing of a sprawling, shingled house on a leafy street in Salem, Massachusetts. I feel immediately welcomed. A sense of organized clutter rules. Neat in the sense that you could easily put your finger on a drawing, a file, a project budget, a client profile and list of her likes and desires. But it's all not so meticulously arranged that there would not be the serendipity of mixing up a bunch of preliminary design sketches, scattering them on the floor while the mind clears, and then later picking them up and going through to re-evaluate.

I imagine lively, free-flowing conversations going on between the two principals of Wilson Kelsey Design, the couple, Sally Wilson and John Kelsey. Their talk would be in the same spirit as the give-and-take approach to considering design options, a Socratic dialogue, in which they discuss the merits and drawbacks of a proposed installation.

I'm drawn to John's desk. No computer screen here brandishing a CAD drawing. Rather, his work area is a table covered with old-fashioned drafting tools. He's engrossed in a rendering of a wood-paneled interior. The elevation is exquisite in the detail and the vibrancy of the water-coloring. If I were a client looking at his work, I'd be delighted and enchanted by the way it comes alive and communicates the essence of what's being proposed.

[Read more](#)



*Photo credit © Eric Roth*



*Photo credit © Laura Moss*



*Photo credit © Michael J. Lee*

## In the News

## Nooks and CRANNies: Local Chapter News

---

► **Editorial Note:** Do you have exciting CRAN activities planned for your chapter? The CRAN Chronicle is interested in your local CRAN events, news and stories. Consider contributing by emailing [cran@aia.org](mailto:cran@aia.org). You can also email your most recent chapter contact information to [cran@aia.org](mailto:cran@aia.org) to be sure your information is up-to-date.

### Brooklyn

By Kimberly Neuhaus, AIA,

CRAN Brooklyn got off the ground with an inaugural networking and brainstorming session on June 3rd with nineteen attendees. That was followed up with a second meeting on July 16 that was equally well attended. Each meeting has been hosted by a local firm and we now have volunteer firms lined up to host the upcoming fall meetings. Our September meeting will be a discussion of what tools and technology our firms are using. October will be a discussion of passive house standards and a tour of a passive house recently completed by one of our members. November is slated for a discussion of successful integration of sustainable energy sources within residential projects. Our local Brooklyn AIA chapter has been incredibly supportive in making sure that each meeting has been well publicized and the members of CRAN Brooklyn are looking forward to working together to expand our activities and offerings moving forward.

## CRAN in the News

---

► *CRAN members have been busy writing and publishing books recently*

- **Hutker's** second book, "A Sense of Place", was recently published and was mentioned on [Boston Home Magazine's website](#).

"After designing homes on Cape Cod and Martha's Vineyard for thirty years, Hutker Architects is known for building livable places that respect the region's heritage. Their recently published book, "A Sense of Place," showcases thirteen projects that combine enduring architecture with new innovations—a stunning collection for the library of any sea-lover. With five essays and more than 200 photographs, the book is a tribute to the evolution of the cape house, with naturally weathered boards that honor coastal views and connect generations. The included homes highlight the firm's motto, "build once, well," as Hutker and his principles tap into history and make homes new without banishing the old." – *Boston Home Magazine*

- **Kevin Harris'** book, "The Forever Home", was recently published and was featured on tv station WBRZ2. The video can be found at [their website](#).
- The AIA asked and **David Andreozzi** answered. You can read a [Wall Street Journal](#)

[article](#) focused on houses for oddly shaped lots.

### **Submit Your Work -Houses for All Regions: CRAN Residential Collection Volume II**

The AIA/CRAN, together with The Images Publishing Group, proudly announces its forthcoming publication *Houses for All Regions: CRAN Residential Collection, Volume II*. We invite your firm to submit work for consideration in this unique publication.

Inclusion in the CRAN Residential Collection, Volume II is the highest honor that the CRAN can bestow on a single family custom designed residence. It is conferred by the national CRAN Advisory Group in recognition of design solutions that achieve not only aesthetic merit, but respond to the individual circumstances of place and program. CRAN encourages submissions of residential work of all sizes and styles, as we recognize the wide variety of techniques and traditions in which residential architects practice. Visit the [CRAN page](#) to learn more.



[Read more](#)

### **Available for Purchase! Houses for All Regions: CRAN Residential Collection**



*House for All Regions: CRAN Residential Collection* is the first in a series on international residential architecture published in partnership with the American Institute of Architects' Custom Residential Architects Network (CRAN).

Projects are divided into four climate zones - arid and semi-arid, temperate, arctic, and sub-tropical and tropical - each illustrating how architects adapt their designs to accommodate the challenges posed by the local topography and variations in climate.

[Purchase](#)

## **Upcoming Events**

### **Register Now- 2015 CRAN Symposium**

Join AIA CRAN from **September 19-23** in **Minneapolis, MN** for the 2015 Fall Symposium. This year we will

be discussing *Elevating the Art of Residential Design and Practice* by exploring the role of art in architecture. Please take a look at the website for more information on the schedule of events and speakers. We look forward to seeing you there.

[Learn More](#)

[Register Now](#)

### Upcoming Webinars

#### Computation, Metrics, and Data Analysis in Practice

Tuesday, September 22, 2015 | 2:00 - 3:00pm ET | Earn 1.0 AIA LU | [Learn more](#) | [Register now](#)

*Sponsored by:* AIA Technology in Architectural Practice

Registration fees: **Free**

#### Guide to Using AIA Contract Documents and Software **In-Person!**

Friday, September 25, 2015 | 9:00 - 5:00pm ET | Earn 6.5 AIA/CES LUs | [Learn more](#) | [Register now](#)

*Sponsored by:* AIA Contract Documents

Registration fees: **\$299** (Members and Non-Members)

## Resources

### New AIA Member-Only Research Databases Now Available through BRIK

Professionally-reviewed research is available through the Building Research Information Knowledgebase (BRIK). The BRIK collection is free and can be navigated by categories such as building type: [housing facilities](#). This portal now includes a [subscription feature](#) to three EBSCO databases: the Sustainability Reference Center, Art & Architecture Complete, and the Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals. The EBSCO-powered portion of BRIK is offered to AIA members and to NIBS members. A free test drive of these databases is underway through September, after which members can subscribe for a nominal annual fee.

[Learn More.](#)

### AIAU Courses for CRAN Members



Take the latest courses in residential architecture on AIAU. New courses include the best of the fall CRAN Symposium, firm strategies for sustainability, netzero residential construction, and managing design-build projects.



You'll learn from top instructors on your schedule, from anywhere in the world. Once you complete a course, we'll automatically update your AIA transcript with your continuing education credits.

Check out these great courses:

[CRAN Symposium 2014: Paradise Planned](#) | Earn 1 LU / HSW / RIBA

[CRAN Symposium 2014: Traditions of Home](#) | Earn 1 LU / HSW / RIBA

[CRAN Symposium 2014: The New Modern House](#) | Earn 1.5 LUs / HSW / RIBA

[CRAN Symposium 2014: The New Traditional House](#) | Earn 1.5 LUs / HSW / RIBA

[Profiting From Design Build for a Residential Practice](#) | Earn 1.5 LUs / RIBA

[Avoiding or Reducing Architect-Contractor Conflicts in Small Projects](#) | Earn 1.5 LUs / RIBA

[Fundamentals of NetZero Residential Construction](#) | Earn 1 LU / HSW/ RIBA

[Small Firm Sustainable Strategies: Applying Sustainable Principles to Small Projects](#) | Earn 1.50 LUs / HSW/GBCI / RIBA

Individual courses are \$25 for AIA members and \$40 for non-members. Buy four or more courses and save 15%, no promo code needed.

[Check out more great courses on AIAU >](#)

Did you know anyone can join AIA Custom Residential Architects Network for FREE? Sign-up on [AIA KnowledgeNet](#) and start a discussion in the [AIA CRAN Discussion Forum](#).



The American Institute of Architects  
1735 New York Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20006



This message was intended for: %%emailaddr%%

The AIA strives to provide information that is most relevant to you. To update your contact information or add an AIA Knowledge Community, update your [AIA.org Account](#).

[Unsubscribe](#).



## Letter from the Chair

*By James Walbridge, AIA | 2015 AIA Custom Residential Architects Network Chair*

Hello,

Welcome to our third edition of the Chronicle for 2015. Once again our CRAN Communications team continues to raise the bar and do a fantastic job. Please enjoy this current edition of the CRAN Chronicle.

Last month in July from the 22<sup>nd</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup>, two of our CRAN Advisory Group members, John Stewart AIA and Jared Banks AIA, joined me in representing CRAN at the annual AIA National KLA Conference in Denver. For those of you noting yet another AIA acronym to put in your never-ending list, “KLA” stands for “Knowledge Leadership Assembly”. This annual event convenes representatives from each of the 21 AIA Knowledge Communities (or “KC’s”) of which CRAN is part of. The over-arching goal is for all these diverse Knowledge Community representatives to have the opportunity to interface with AIA National Leadership, AIA National Staff and importantly, other members of the different KC’s. This gives each KC representative the opportunity learn about what each KC is doing, to find new alignments with other KC’s for potential collaborations and establish new relationships. At the Assembly, we all had the opportunity to listen to and speak with Robert Ivy, FAIA, current CEO for the Institute, Elizabeth Chu Richter, FAIA, 2015 AIA National President and Russ Davidson, FAIA, incoming 2016 AIA National President, about the current state of the Institute and the direction we are heading. In the discussion, Russ Davidson, FAIA spoke about the importance of relationships as being a core fundamental value the Institute needs to reinforce, cultivate and leverage as we move deeper into the Repositioning agenda and into the future.

When you step back and think about it, as architects, we are constantly forming new relationships; with clients, with project team consultants and collaborators, with new employees, firm members and peers, with governmental agencies and policy makers and importantly, with so many members of the general public based on the work we do. Architects are leaders and part of our leadership responsibility is cultivating relationships to broaden our civic reach, grow our businesses and keep the importance of what architecture can do squarely in the public eye. Making relationships is a never-ending cycle for the architect.

In May, the AIA National Convention was held in Atlanta, Georgia from the 13<sup>th</sup> through the 16<sup>th</sup>. CRAN’s presence was strong as we continued to strengthen our relationships with AIA leadership, with our sponsors, with our peers and with the convention attendees. The three CRAN-sponsored educational sessions were very well received. Our CRAN Forum, sponsored by Houzz, evolved into a unique format that has served as the gestation for a new Pre-Convention Workshop educational session to be submitted for the 2016 AIA National Convention in Philadelphia. Especially notable



was our joint reception, sponsored by Graphisoft, with the Housing & Small Project Practitioner KC's, the Small Firm Round table and the National Association of Home Builders.

This all leads us to our Eighth Annual CRAN Symposium to be held in Minneapolis, Minnesota, next month from Saturday, September 19 - Wednesday, September 23, 2015. This year's event will be at the Depot Renaissance Minneapolis Hotel located centrally in downtown Minneapolis. We are very excited about our keynote speaker, Julie Snow, FAIA and the host of talented speakers enlisted for this year whom will provide the attendees with a diverse collection of educational sessions to engage in. Of course, the home tour is a special highlight and this year we are fortunate to have our Symposium attendees experience the AIA Minneapolis "Homes by Architects Tour", one of the most prominent tours of its kind in the country!

The growth and success of the Annual CRAN Symposium is a direct result of the relationships we, CRAN, have cultivated and been so very fortunate to have. It starts each year with selecting the location and then engaging with the local AIA Component Chapter and if present, the local CRAN Chapter. Their participation is vital for our planning and with their consistent contributions, the Symposium becomes more than what we expected it to be. We then work with an amazing cadre of sponsors to assist in providing the capital to finance the event. Many of these sponsors are repeat partners whom have been with us for many of these Symposiums. Their patronage and support is nothing short of amazing. Next, we are tasked to recruit an array of speakers to provide the content for the event. As a result of the positive experience in their participation, many of our past speakers assist in providing us with recommendations and referrals for potential speaker candidates. This asserts the strong relationship we have with these talented individuals, whom generously offer their time to be a part of our Symposium. The attendees to the Symposium are so very integral to our success. Without them, there simply is no Symposium. We are blessed to have not a few, but a large contingency of the attendees each year be repeat guests. Finally, we have the awesome members of the CRAN National Advisory Group and extraordinary staff at AIA National whom devote tireless hours of hard work and commitment to this enormous effort year in and year out.

The summary above clearly speaks to the character and strength of relationships developed through trust, respect and mutual alignment of values. All these relationships contribute to the growth of the CRAN "Family" year after year. I invite you all to come to Minneapolis and join us for another fabulous Symposium. We look forward to seeing you there to share a great experience with us and continue a strong tradition of relationship building amongst your peers.

Respectfully,

James A. Walbridge, AIA, 2015 AIA Custom Residential Architects Network Chair

[Return to the CRAN Chronicle homepage](#)



## Go-Kart Racing and 5 Other Ways to Enhance Consultant Relationships

By Josh Divelbiss, AIA | [The HR Group Architects](#)

I couldn't stop moving. My heart was pounding, my senses muffled by the fire retardant hood and a snug, insulated racing helmet. My vision was blurred by goggles that became foggy from my heavy breathing. Anxiety and the un-insulated steel warehouse surrounding me aided in my profuse sweating. My teammate swerved into the pit, slammed on the brakes, jumped out and I jumped in. I slammed on the gas pedal and was off, bouncing off plastic barricades, driving erratically and trying to follow the only rule: "No Bumping."

This was my go-kart racing experience—or, I should say, my team building experience with a team working on a complex project. What resulted after several hours of exhilarating fun was a shared experience and a better, more personal understanding of the client, contractors, consultants and coworkers who were all engaged on the same project on a daily basis.

Architects generally need two things to get a project off the ground: a client and a team of consultants. A happy client and an attractive residence will lead to future work and, we hope, a successful career. To achieve these goals we assemble the best suited consultant team within our network. Taking time to acknowledge your design team and foster a healthy relationship is crucial to the success of your business— now and in the future.

Your design team includes anyone involved in the design process, most notably engineering consultants and residential general contractors, but this can also include building officials, product representatives, specialty consultants, and sub-contractors. These team members provide the knowledge and tools needed to develop a project confidently and with less stress. Your team is so integral to the design process that the importance of developing these relationships over time should not be overlooked.

The following ideas for engaging with consultants—both professionally and personally—will help you build healthy professional relationships, liven up the design process, improve the quality of work, and make everyone's work more enjoyable:

**Hold a project kick-off meeting:** In-person attendance is mandatory and becomes a great opportunity for everyone to meet for the first time, get reacquainted, or put a face to an email address. The agenda should be brief and allow time after the meeting for non-project related items.

**Schedule regular one-on-one meetings:** Meeting in a smaller group is a great way to understand the specific challenges a consultant may be encountering, receive feedback on project status, and discuss other project pursuits and future business opportunities.

**Attend the same local building industry networking events:** Introduce each other to new contacts, grow your network, and be seen as a team. Attend an event that covers topics or views that you both are interested in, for instance, upcoming revisions to the building code or design guidelines.

**Make it out of the office in time for happy hour:** Schedule this after a major milestone or project completion. Limit the business conversations and make it personal.

**Sponsor an activity:** Whether it's community service, volunteering for an event, or attending a sporting event, team building thrives when centered on an activity. Get creative and have fun; the activity doesn't have to be costly. The importance is collaborating with your team on items unrelated to daily project tasks. Additional benefits include being active in the community, developing future client relationships, and marketing opportunities.

Whether it's go-kart racing or a local watering hole, the key is to tailor events and activities to your team's culture and shared interests. Try team building activities for a month, with one or multiple consultants. If it's successful keep going; if not, adjust and attempt another activity. The goal is to build a relationship of trust and collaboration, and ultimately better project outcomes. Let us know your thoughts, what worked for you and what did not.

**About the Author:** Josh Divelbiss, AIA is an Associate at The HR Group Architects in Sacramento, California. He is a member of the Sacramento County Design Review Advisory Committee and the AIA CRAN Chronicle Committee.



## Architectural Mentorship

By Ken Harris, FAIA | [Kevin Harris Architect, LLC](#)

Following the recent pronouncement by NCARB addressing political correctness offenses caused by use of the term to describe those individuals in the state of job training somewhere between graduation and licensure, “intern”, it makes sense to pause and take a closer look at how and why our profession trains its future architects. Unfortunately, NCARB was unable to come up with a substitute moniker to address “those artists formerly known as interns”. (Sounds a bit like the rock and roll publicity stunt by Prince). However, these unnamed individuals still exist, as does the need to train them.

Does the removal of the term internship throw the notion of mentorship into question? I ask because the Wikipedia gurus define internship as “*job training for [white-collar](#) and professional careers*”. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internship> I suppose the synonyms for intern are out of the question. Certainly apprentice, protégé, and mentee must all engender some offensive connotations. But I will leave this problem for NCARB to solve.

Although now the learning side of the Mentor – Intern equation is blank, the Mentor half remains. So what is a Mentor? Like so many associations in Western architecture, the root of this term began in ancient Greece. The word “Mentor” owes its origin and role to a character in Homer’s book, *The Odyssey*. Mentor, who was the goddess Athene in disguise, was a trusted advisor and friend to Odysseus and became the guardian and teacher of his son,

Telemachus. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/mentor>

To properly address a role whose origin is named after a powerful goddess in disguise, the CRAN Chronicle committee decided to solicit the sage advice, experiences, and recommendations from members of the AIA CRAN Knowledge Community Advisory Board. We inquired about the importance of mentoring and why a practitioner should engage in the process, what was to be gained, and was looked for in selecting a protégé, mentee, or “artist formerly known as an intern”. Items in quotes below are taken directly from the survey results.

Without exception, every respondent felt it was extremely important to the future of our profession, and strongly recommended that other architects volunteer their time and mentor emerging professionals. Arguments in favor of this exercise varied from being an imperative for the survival of the profession, to necessary for undoing the damage that some schools of architecture have created. Mentoring is also seen as a form of payback. To pass along to future generations the benefit of the knowledge and advice one has received from others in addition to what one has learned through the school of hard knocks. One commented, “Surviving in our profession is too hard to do without help”.

So what does the Mentor get out of this volunteer relationship? Or is the protégé the only beneficiary? As it turns out, the Advisory Group felt that in most situations, the Mentor gains as well. Examples ranged from a heightened awareness of what was being emphasized in the schools, the realization of just how much has been mastered, the cultural dynamics and attitudes of another generation, and the usefulness of new programs and advances in digital technology, to an exposure to the contagious energy and enthusiasm of a younger professional. “Their eagerness to learn from me is inspiring”.

Demonstrating a willingness to learn is key consideration when selecting a protégé to mentor. Other important characteristics mentioned by the Advisory Board members include enthusiasm, self-motivation, creativity, sharing, thoughtfulness, commitment, and curiosity. “They must want to learn and be curious about their chosen profession”. The relationship the results was likened to was dating, in that a chemistry must exist between parties. A deep passion for the profession is mandatory. “I lose patience with lumps and people who refuse to focus on evolving”, and “not (someone) just looking for a job or experience”.

The Mentor / protégé relationship must remain mutually beneficial. Both parties must realize value. It is a two-way proposition. Otherwise, it cannot be sustained. “You give, you receive, you thank”. There is much to be gained on both sides. Understanding that life does not come with a prescribed curriculum, it is important for the protégé to realize that it is not the professional’s job to pick up where the college professors left off. Continuing the education of the inexperienced is not the individual professional’s problem. Any intern or protégé relying solely upon altruism and expecting each elder to help carry the load of “bettering the profession,” to give them the proper exposures, advice, and experiences, especially in a profession where mere survival is as demanding on the individual as is architecture, is like walking on thin ice. “How very little I really knew when I was younger and how arrogant I must have sounded to a seasoned professional!”

It is the protégé who should drive the search and the relationship. Get actively involved with the AIA and with CRAN in particular. You will find there an endless supply of experience and talent coupled with a willingness to share knowledge. The rapid success of this knowledge community is due to this attitude that is shared by its participating members. The sharing process between CRAN members is an already existing phenomenon, and one that welcomes any engaged protégé’s, or “artist formerly known as an intern’s” participation. We share a passion for custom residential architecture, and a commitment to improving our communities, our architecture, and our profession.

The protégé must become actively engaged with their mentor. Schedule get-togethers, ask questions, and find ways to show appreciation and give back to the mentor. It is a symbiotic relationship. Use your mentor as a resource for information about practice and life and practical knowledge, and openly share your advice and experiences with the new digital technologies. Do not be afraid to ask and answer questions! Frequently it’s the silly questions that engender the best discussions. Above all, remember to treat the relationship with respect. This is timeless advice. You never know when a Mentor is acting under the influence of Athena (in disguise). Who else could have Mentored the two architects Iktinos and Kallikrates with their design of the Parthenon?



## The Digital Transformation of CRAN

By Jared Banks, AIA | [Shoegnome, LLC](#)

Like many of us, my involvement with CRAN started by checking the box when renewing my AIA membership. For a long time I merely read the weekly KnowledgeNet e-mails, occasionally responding if I could figure out how. My connection to CRAN was pretty thin. I knew that the group was focused on residential work and had a yearly [symposium](#), but not much more. In late 2012 I responded to a call for help with the CRAN Chronicle. The newsletter was looking for contributors for the first issue. As a newly independent architect looking to expand the reach of his voice, I jumped on the chance to share my ideas. [The result was an article about surviving the Great Recession as an Emerging Professional](#). After that first issue, I joined the committee that handles the CRAN Chronicle and have also written many more articles (this one is my seventh).

Involvement with CRAN is a bit contagious. It starts small, but grows and grows as one sees how much the Custom Residential Architects Network does, and has to offer. Personally my involvement became super charged around the first of the year when I was invited to join the CRAN Advisory Group. As a member of the CRAN AG, I was asked what I'm passionate about, and what I'd like to accomplish in the coming year(s). Having spent so much time working on the CRAN Chronicle and trying to spread the word about all the great things CRAN does, it was pretty obvious what I wanted to do. (hint: [this other article that I wrote for the CRAN Chronicle](#)). I now lead the CRAN Digital Transformation subcommittee, tasked with energizing our digital presence.

### CRAN Digital Transformation

Did you know CRAN is on Facebook, Houzz, and Twitter? If you are on any of those social networks, you should follow us (which will help us to know to follow you as well). Here are some links:

- [Facebook](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Houzz](#)

Do you know why CRAN is on those social networks? We are still figuring that out as we busily experiment with them. Is CRAN an internal community of residential architects talking to each other? Is CRAN a voice and a rallying point for residential architects to speak to the larger community—to the rest of AIA, to the AEC industry, to clients? Could CRAN's online activities be an example and inspiration of how a member could promote their own residential expertise? My view is that we have an opportunity to expand the voice of residential architects, to promote our members, to connect with the general public, and also to build a supportive community for ourselves. Wouldn't it be amazing if CRAN becomes the go to source for residential expertise? Imagine news outlets asking CRAN and its members for advice and commentary. Imagine students in school, interested in



similar paths to our own, coming to CRAN for resources on how to become successful architects focused on residential architecture. A prominent digital presence will help make all that happen.

As CRAN we have a lot to say, but we also have a lot to listen to and pass along. Our members and local chapters do so much that we need to be able to easily receive and send out this information. We need to figure out strong protocols for how our members and chapters send us information, and in turn how we best share that with everyone else. This will mean we can put more effort into broadcasting rather than collecting. The more we do to make it easier for CRAN to receive information, the better.

Right now I'm looking for other CRAN members who are interested in helping me develop the Digital Transformation committee, and in turn make CRAN an even more visible champion of custom residential design. What do you think? Does this sound exciting? Something you'd want to be a part of? There's no reason why CRAN can't have a bigger voice, online and off. We already do so many great things as a community and as individual contributors. Let's build a platform to help share.

If you have thoughts on CRAN's digital presence, want to join the Digital Transformation committee, or are ready to play a bigger part in CRAN in another capacity, [e-mail me](#). There is a separate (but obviously connected) sub-committee looking for help: [AIA/CRANtv](#). If either CRANtv or transforming CRAN into an adept digital powerhouse sounds interesting, join the team making it all happen. Oh and again, if you are on [Houzz](#), [Facebook](#), or [Twitter](#) make sure to follow us. We are always looking for things to share and there's no better way for us to promote our collective awesomeness than when our members share what they are doing with us.



## Relationships (Part 1)

Interview by John Altobello, AIA | [John Altobello Architecture](#)

Interviewee Sally Wilson and John Kelsey | [Wilson Kelsey Design](#)

*How a couple, both interior designers, work with their clients and with each other.*

Their office is a separate wing of a sprawling, shingled house on a leafy street in Salem, Massachusetts. I feel immediately welcomed. A sense of organized clutter rules. Neat in the sense that you could easily put your finger on a drawing, a file, a project budget, a client profile and list of her likes and desires. But it's all not so meticulously arranged that there would not be the serendipity of mixing up a bunch of preliminary design sketches, scattering them on the floor while the mind clears, and then later picking them up and going through to re-evaluate.

I imagine lively, free-flowing conversations going on between the two principals of Wilson Kelsey Design, the couple, Sally Wilson and John Kelsey. Their talk would be in the same spirit as the give-and-take approach to considering design options, a Socratic dialogue, in which they discuss the merits and drawbacks of a proposed installation.

I'm drawn to John's desk. No computer screen here brandishing a CAD drawing. Rather, his work area is a table covered with old-fashioned drafting tools. He's engrossed in a rendering of a wood-paneled interior. The elevation is exquisite in the detail and the vibrancy of the water-coloring. If I were a client looking at his work, I'd be delighted and enchanted by the way it comes alive and communicates the essence of what's being proposed. There will, no doubt, be much conversation between Sally and John about the design. The detailing is John's area of expertise. Sally will be the one to later present the work-in-progress to the client for further feedback.

I'm eager to find out more about their professional practice, their relationships with their clients, and, to be sure, their own professional and personal relationship.



Photo credit © Laura Moss

*The couple's professional background*

JA: In those early years when you both worked at a big, corporate firm, did you recognize that there might be some complimentary talents that would bring you together later on? If so, when and how did the awareness come about?

W / K: At the time, we weren't thinking about business ownership and could we/might we work together. We were both focused on honing our craft and "Would the projects we were working on be published?" Looking back, our skill sets were already expressing themselves. At Hugh Stubbins, we were both expected to be able to prepare our own construction drawings. John was very good spatially and could put together a tight set of construction and millwork drawings. Sally was unafraid of color and pushing the aesthetics of the projects she worked on. We both enjoyed discussing and exploring thoughts and ideas as we worked together on projects. Sally would question. I would consider. And vice versa. We quickly developed a respect and trust for each other's point of view, as well as the process of reconciling those points of view. It's clear today that these conversations built a terrific foundation for our future marriage and business partnership.

*Know your own individual strengths*



Photo credit © Eric Roth

JA: After you established your own firm, what helped you recognize your individual strengths and expertise? Was there any haggling about this, or did you just get it from the start?

W / K: John and I never needed to haggle, thank goodness. Although in the beginning we both did everything that a project required, Sally doing her own drawings and John doing what color selection he needed, by the time we had worked together for 10 or so years, it was just clear that John was better, and faster at sketching and preparing construction documents than Sally. Sally was quicker and had more insight with colors, fabrics and decorative arts. So one day Sally said to John, “why don’t you do all the drawings for all of our projects, and I’ll do all the furniture, fabrics and colors?”

*Decide who is better at grasping the overview*

JA: A question for John: When you realized that Sally had the capacity to grasp the project overview, how did you get yourself in gear to define the details?

John: First, I’m comfortable with Sally “being in charge”. So it’s very easy for me to take a “back seat” when she comes to me with a vision of a project. First, we sit down and discuss the vision and its possibilities. I offer thoughts and comments. In doing so, I can wrap my arms around what it is I will

need to develop. From there I will take the idea and develop it spatially, volumetrically and architecturally. Sally will then overlay her furniture, finishes, fabrics, decorative lighting, etc. I further develop the architectural solution through Sally's and the client's feedback, drilling down through the layers of details to be sure they work and are coordinated throughout the space.

#### Be clear about who handles what

JA: Which one of you handles the conversations with the builder, the craftspeople, and others involved with the project? Who handles the client?

W / K: It depends upon whether it is a mostly renovation job or a decorative job. If renovation, John is the point person, and if decoration, Sally is the point person. A project that includes both would have John talking with the builder, sub-contractors, and Sally dealing with the faux-finish artists, the upholsterers, drapery workrooms, with custom mill shops being a cross over trade, where both Sally and John might work together.

#### Understand the client's vision

JA: How do you incorporate the client's vision into a project? Of the two of you, who is better at understanding the vision, getting to the core of the client's wishes?

W / K: That's a mystery. It's the intangible that makes one designer fit best with a client versus another. It's our skill at communication and connecting to feelings that helps us realize a project. Sometimes it's related to the budget. Sometimes it's what the architecture will let you do. (Or both...) Often it's about exploring options and ideas which help the client express and prioritize needs, wants, and desires. We're both equally good at that, in our own areas. John is better at providing the vision to the spatial aspects of the interior, and the interior details. Sally is always better at fulfilling the decorative components. We work together to bring both of these aspects together to complete the picture.

#### Drilling down

JA: Does it take a long time to drill down to the client's vision? Or is it clear right away?

W / K: It usually doesn't take a long time, but it is rarely "right away". Sometimes you have to draw a client out to find out what they need and want. Our solutions are always thoughtful, and therefore we never predetermine what a solution will be, but really think about what the client and we have talked about and investigate several options. It is important to think deeply and not just superficially about a project. We find that sometimes the client doesn't realize the depth of what they need. We guide them to paths they never thought they would take. These are the best projects - the not superficial ones.

#### Get to know who you're working with

JA: When a client is reluctant to reveal their real desires, how do you manage to investigate, to get to the underlying truth?

W / K: Through a combination of looking at pictures with them, or asking lots of questions about their likes and dislikes, even being very specific, and we ask questions about things that seem unrelated to the task at hand. In some ways, we ask questions rather like you would at a dinner party, when you meet a new person. You need to explore getting to know them. Sometimes they don't reveal things because they can't visualize what they want, and they are afraid to admit that

they are struggling to articulate it. By working with them, we get to know them, and ease their fear of expressing themselves.



Photo credit © Michael J. Lee

### Provide solutions

JA: How do you deal with a situation where a client does not have a vision, or does not yet believe s/he has one?

W / K: We may provide several solutions, based on the information we have, that we think are good. Once they see option on paper and begin to understand the potential for their own spaces, we are able to have a conversation that will establish an overall design direction.

### Trust

JA: When does the element of trust enter into your relationship with the client? How important is trust? What makes it happen?

W / K: For a client, there has to be at least some trust for them to even enter into an agreement to work with us. Of course, trust builds over time. The initial design presentation is the critical point. Even if it isn't perfect, or the final one, they can see that we are addressing their needs, and are close to their vision. As our solutions align with their vision, and our attitudes and words make



sense to them, the trust builds. We need to demonstrate that we are open-minded and that we understand their many needs, and their family and their values.

**Connect on an emotional level**

JA: Over the course of your career, when did you start to get it about the client? Was this a process that took a long time?

W / K: With residential work, it was when we realized that we not only had to demonstrate competency, but we needed to make sure we connected with them on an emotional level, and that they liked us. When we did corporate work, it was much more important to demonstrate business skills and design competency. But residential work is much more about close relationships. People want to work with people they like. We had to learn to open up our personalities more than our business side. Again, akin to a dinner party and meeting new people. It's all personal.