



History

Legacy Projects

In the early years, both the Ellerbe and Becket firms helped establish twentieth century American architecture as a formidable force throughout the world. In their planning and design process, they challenged the norm by developing systems that elevate the quality of the built environment, sustaining businesses, communities, and individual well being. The two organizations, both individually and together, have focused on designing buildings that uniquely reflect the client and context, can adapt to future change, and have stood the test of time.



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History

Founders



Franklin Ellerbe

1870 - 1921

Ellerbe Becket Founders

Franklin Ellerbe

Thomas F. Ellerbe Sr., FAIA

Welton Becket, FAIA

Born in Mississippi, Franklin Ellerbe moved to Minnesota as a child. His career began as a building inspector for the City of Saint Paul, Minnesota. Although Franklin did not have a formal education in architecture or engineering, he was well respected for his understanding of all aspects of building construction. In 1909, when a residential architect offered Franklin drafting space, the 39-year-old took a bold step away from the security of his city job to the uncertainty of a career in architecture and engineering. With the encouragement and support of his wife, Mabel Ellerbe, and his three teenaged children—Rachel, Jean, and Thomas—the space became the office of F.H. Ellerbe, Architect. In 1919, his son Thomas joined the firm after returning from military service.

Franklin completed his first project in 1909, the Old Fireside Inn, a combination dance hall, retail store, and apartment building that stands to this day in the St. Anthony Park neighborhood of Saint Paul. In 1911 Franklin took a partner, Olin Round, and the growing firm counted 18 employees by the end of the following year. Together they designed the original Mayo Clinic building in Rochester, Minnesota, completed in 1914—the same year their partnership came to an end.

Franklin Ellerbe completed a large number of projects throughout Minnesota, South Dakota, and Ohio and developed solid and trusting relationships with clients, who included Drs. William and Charles Mayo, the Benedictine Sisters in Duluth, Lucius P. Ordway (one of the original investors in 3M), Jack Kahler, Rochester, Minn. hotel developer, and Drs. George Crile and William E. Lower, founders of the Cleveland Clinic. He designed residences, banks, manufacturing facilities, hotels, hospitals and clinics, schools and insurance companies.

In 1921, Franklin suddenly became ill at the family's summer home in White Bear Lake, Minnesota. Thomas transported his father via train to Rochester for surgery that proved to be too late. Franklin Ellerbe died two days after the surgery at the age of 51. His son took over the firm.





History

Founders



Thomas F. Ellerbe Sr., FAIA

1892 - 1987

Ellerbe Becket Founders

Franklin Ellerbe

Thomas F. Ellerbe Sr., FAIA

Welton Becket, FAIA

In 1921, Thomas F. Ellerbe became the leader of Ellerbe & Company at the age of 28, when his father died unexpectedly. He presided over the firm for nearly half a century. During those years he tirelessly expanded and grew the practice, becoming one of the nation's most respected leaders in medical, education, and corporate architecture and engineering.

Tom worked alongside the physicians of Mayo Clinic to understand how to design a building that best served patients and doctors. As a young man, he was involved with bringing electricity to rural areas, helped develop planned residential communities, and supported organizations that believed in cooperative values. In 1978 he was honored with the Hall of Fame award from The Cooperative Foundation, an organization that he co-founded in 1945. Tom believed that the firm's success was due to his dedicated, hard-working staff, so when he was ready to step down in 1966, he bestowed the ownership of Ellerbe Architects, Inc. on his employees.

At the age of 94, Tom spent the second-to-last day of his life meeting officials about the restoration of Memorial Hall at the Saint Paul City Hall and Ramsey County Courthouse. Days later, hundreds gathered in Memorial Hall at the statue of the God of Peace to honor him. George Latimer, former Mayor of Saint Paul said, "A great city is composed of many ordinary people who together do extraordinary things, but today we honor someone who was not ordinary. He was an uncommon man." Latimer commented that Ellerbe had fulfilled an oath once taken by the city leaders of ancient Greece, who promised to leave their cities "more beautiful, more good, and more just than they had found them." Tom, who worked with Swedish sculptor Carl Milles to create the God of Peace statue in 1932, hoped that it would become a symbol to the world for peace.

Tom was married to Eleanor Koehler for nearly 70 years. His son, Thomas Jr., described his father as "a man who lived life to the hilt." He enjoyed boating on the St. Croix River, riding horses, dining on gourmet food and entertaining.





Welton Becket, FAIA

1902 - 1969

Ellerbe Becket Founders

Franklin Ellerbe

Thomas F. Ellerbe Sr., FAIA

Welton Becket, FAIA

Welton Becket is credited by many as the architect who defined mid-twentieth century architecture of Los Angeles, California. Instead of defining a particular style, he was dedicated to serving the client in every way possible and was often quoted as saying, "A building should reflect the client, not the architect. I see no reason why I should express Welton Becket." He believed well-conceived, executed buildings included all aspects of design—a philosophy he dubbed "Total Design." He believed that by truly understanding his client, design ideas followed.

Born in Seattle and drawn to architecture—both his father and brother were builders—Welton entered the practice of architecture as chief designer for a Los Angeles firm in 1929. His practice really began when he teamed up with his University of Washington classmate, Walter Wurdeman and Los Angeles architect Charles Plummer to form Plummer, Wurdeman and Becket. In 1938, the two young men set out on their own, forming Wurdeman and Becket. When Wurdeman unexpectedly died in 1949, the firm was renamed Welton Becket and Associates.

Welton's career spanned 40 years and his structures graced five continents. He was quick-thinking and skilled, confidently leading top executives, Hollywood celebrities, government officials, and educators through the rigors of architectural development. He attracted and retained talented employees by rewarding good work and his firm handled complex projects, infusing new directions into modern, corporate buildings. Colleagues said Welton loved his work and golfing, and was a friend of some of the world's leading dignitaries who, like those in the office, called him "Welt."

Throughout his career, Welton Becket focused on how to best serve his clients and just as he believed, excellent design ideas followed in that service. He is often associated with shaping Los Angeles' iconic "Hollywood" style, but his legacy extends well beyond the city limits. Through architecture, Welton Becket's contributions helped shape post-WWII lifestyles, through buildings where people worked, lived and had fun. His sons, Welton Becket II and Bruce Becket, are architects, as is his granddaughter Cayce.

