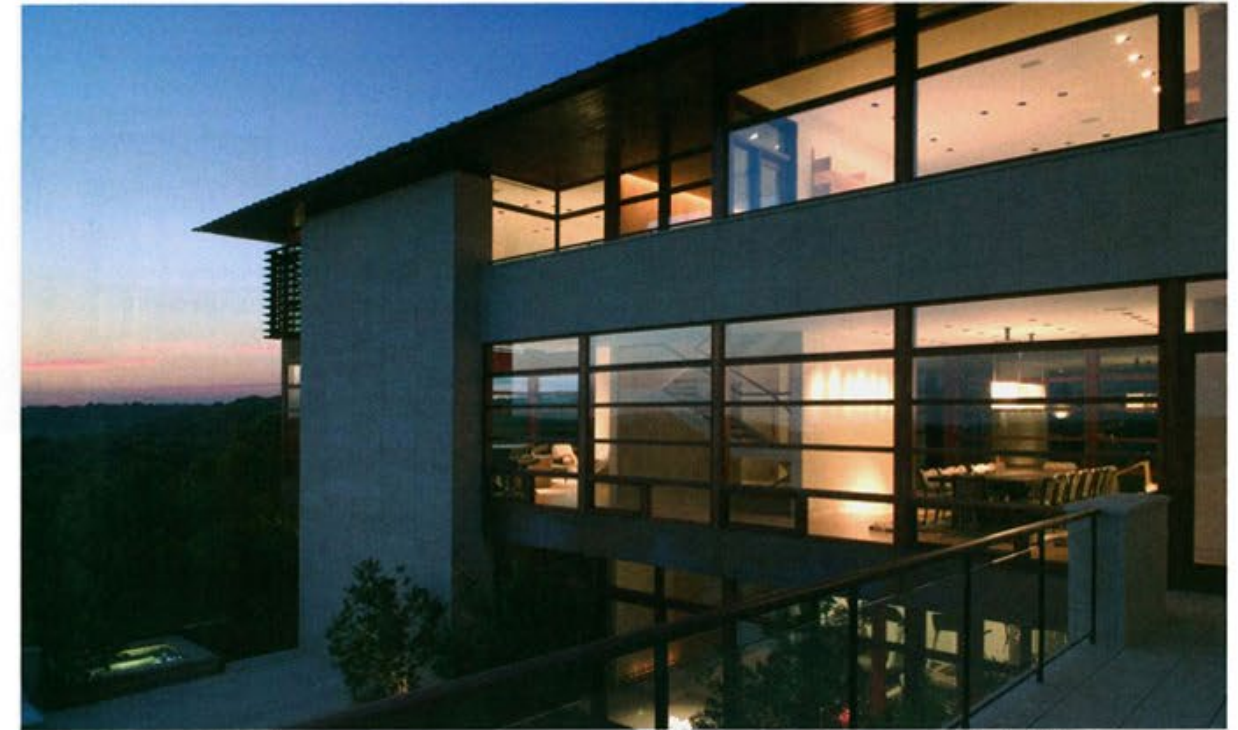


FROM ANTIQUITY TO ARTFULLY MODERN: MIL BODRON

DALLAS-BASED DESIGNER MIL BODRON MAINTAINS A FLOURISHING CAREER IN TEXAS, BUT HIS ROOTS LIE IN THE NORTHSIDE OF MONROE. BY MARY NAPOLI
INTERIOR PHOTOGRAPHY BY TIMOTHY KOLK



PHOTOGRAPH BY CHARLES DAVID SMITH | www.csphoto.net

Bodron's firm, Bodron + Fruit, has been well respected and in high demand in the Dallas-Forth Worth area and beyond for quite some time and often known for their impressive work with contemporary architecture and interior design, but it was the magnificent beauty of Bayou State, the scale and proportions of antebellum homes and the work of Monroe's modernist architects, like Saul Mintz and Milton King, that planted a seed in the designer's mind at the earliest of ages.

"My introduction to architecture was all the old plantation homes in south Louisiana," he says. "As a child, I knew all the Louisiana antebellum homes by name and most of them by floor plan. To this day, I love old, classical houses. Just the old ones, not the new ones."

As early as the age of ten, Bodron felt a distinct connection to architecture and design. A precocious child, he would flip through magazines looking for house plans, while his family relaxed on Sundays after church. He studied local structures diligently and was able to recognize the various styles and eras instantly. It seems as though he was a born designer.

"There was a great little modern house down the street from where I grew up that was owned by a man named Milton King. He was one of the great, early modern architects in Monroe. I think that is probably my earliest exposure to modern architecture as a kid. I always loved their house. He designed many of the great modern houses here in town that have sadly been renovated beyond recognition. He also designed the Jewish Synagogue and classical buildings like Georgia Tucker School."

Houses, such as the ones designed by King, sparked an interest in Bodron that led him to investigate other styles of architecture that his hometown had to offer. As a young boy, his afternoon hours were spent

exploring the streets in search of unique designs rather than at the ball field. He spent countless hours roaming neighborhoods on his bicycle and beginning his own education in architecture.

"Growing up, our family lived on Auburn. I would ride my bike toward the levee and take a right on Third to look at all the houses. I would zig zag all through the Garden District. Then I would look at all the old houses on Riverside Drive and ride down to Park Avenue and Pargoud. I rode all over looking at the different houses."

Although a child with no serious knowledge of architecture, he gained a respect for structures that were in sync with the design and style of the time period in which they were built. From plantation homes built in the classical style to modern design created in the mid-century, young Bodron was fascinated with the specific details and signature aspects of the different styles. There was little doubt in his mind that a career in architecture was in his future.

After studying at USL in Lafayette, now ULL, Bodron finished his degree in Architectural Design at Louisiana Tech. He moved to the Dallas area after graduation and began to build his resume by working with large firms. His professional experience expanded his knowledge and introduced him to talents he has not previously developed.

"I always had a blatant interest in interior, as well as the exterior architecture," he explains. "So eventually, after 10 years of working with architects in design and development, I decided to go to work for an interior architecture firm, as I wanted to hone my interior abilities."

This experience allowed him to broaden his perspective of interior design and cultivate his expertise. He began to do freelance work, and the projects began to come more and more frequently. Friends called his attention to the fact that his individual talents were being requested so fre-



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are hiring us, because they know we are detailed people."

When it comes to the different styles and periods of architecture, Bodron, like many other architects, believes that the house should stay true to the style in which it was built. Part of what makes Bodron such a respected and sought-after designer is his attention to detail and structural integrity, no matter the style of architecture. However, his designs are functional and livable.

"We never renovate something to the way it was originally, because it was of a different era. Because of the price of real estate and the value of the land, we have to bring them up to snuff to function in the way we live today."

Bodron designs for many serious art collectors in the Dallas area. He often works with art enthusiasts who spend small fortunes on priceless works of art to adorn their walls. With such incredible canvases on the walls, one might imagine that the entire room would be designed around the art, but Bodron explains that it is quite to the contrary. The art often rotates yearly, and furnishings, fabrics, and fixtures are chosen for their beauty and scale, but also for their ability not to overpower the room. Bodron creates rooms that are beautifully neutral, significant and rich in their own right, but submissive enough to not obstruct the overall focus.

"I say this somewhat flippantly, but there is truth in it. One of my best clients once said to me, 'We work so well together, because we both know exactly what we both want. We are both looking for the most beautiful nothing we can find, when it comes to fabrics and rugs.'"

His firm, most often associated with modern design, has garnered national praise for many of their renovations, most recently the impressive seven-acre, Dallas area property that was designed by famed New York architect, Phillip Johnson, who also designed Lincoln Center. Bodron + Fruit accomplished an astounding restoration of the residential structure, which more so resembles a museum than a single-family home. Their work was so exceptional that the project, which took six years to complete, was published in the *New York Times*.

Bodron has many notable accomplishments in his career, and there is no argument that his talent is fascinating. However, he continues to hold fond memories of and hopes for the town that first inspired his love of architecture. "My favorite part of Monroe is the enclave with Cooley House, Masur Museum and Layton Castle. All small southern towns have that little part of town that is now 'over there.' But most other towns have embraced it and appreciate it in a way that I would like to see Monroe do that it hasn't yet. Real estate is too expensive to ignore, plus, that's where all the history is. I would hate to see it disappear. So much of the history of Monroe is right there in those blocks – Layton Castle, St. John Street, the Cooley House and the Masur. It really is."

Bodron continues by saying "It's very important that the town raise money to get the Cooley House restored correctly. It is one of the most important structures in Monroe and in the South and a fluke that we have it. If the money can be raised I'd like to be involved in designing the restoration if they want me or if we can. It's very much more important to people outside of Monroe than to the people in. It can and will bring important academic and cultural exposure to Monroe and Monroe needs that badly."

When it comes to his stellar career and the direction he hopes to continue, the same things that fascinated him as a child on his bicycle are still important to him. Although his creative process is endlessly complex and his knowledge and experience vast, his goals remain as pure and clear as the passion for architecture that he first experienced as a boy.

"I like to save buildings of great design," he says with earnest. "I want people to appreciate them, learn from them and use them."

For more information regarding The Cooley House, visit www.cooleyhouse.org

quently, he was more of a one-man firm rather than a freelance designer.

"I thought about it a while, then decided they were right. One day, I got some business cards and stationery printed. That was literally how I started my firm. It was not some great, planned effort."

One of his first large projects as an independent was in his hometown. It would prove to be a defining point in his career.

"I got a big renovation job in Monroe for the now deceased Dr. Burkett's old house on Buie Drive. I really challenged the existing house plan and changed it completely on the inside to a fairly progressive style echoing the classical style, but really pushing it to a more dynamic, new place. It was a really big job and a turning point for me," Bodron recalls.

Part of what made this job so significant in his career is because it was the project that introduced him to his future partner in the firm, Svend Christian Fruit.

"I had hired my old firm to do some of the production work, and one of the people working on it was someone that had come after I left – Svend Fruit. He did all the architecture work on it. That is how we initially met."

Bodron's professional reputation was growing rapidly. The projects he was offered often required work to the shell of the structure, as well as the interior spaces. He began to hire Fruit on a freelance basis to assist him in accomplishing the exterior architectural needs. Eventually, the projects became so large and frequent that the two began an official partnership and formed Bodron + Fruit.

The firm's services were often acquired to renovate or add to existing structures, but also to design and build from the ground up. Fruit takes the lead as the project architect, while Bodron's expertise focused on the internal spaces, finishes and furnishings. Nearly all of the structures that the men collaborate on are residential buildings, although they have worked on progressive corporate structures, ranches and offices mostly in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. However, Bodron has unexpectedly encountered people from his hometown who are familiar with his profes-

sional work and seek out his services for their properties in other cities, like a condo in Houston for the Mintz family most recently.

This project is especially meaningful to Bodron, because it was the extraordinary work of Monroe's resident architect, Saul Mintz, that inspired him to learn about architecture. Even at a young age, Bodron's favorite houses were those that were designed by Mintz, including the one his parents now own and reside in, which Mintz designed for his in-laws, the Strauss family.

Although he did not design the house, he was obnoxiously influential, in his characteristically cheeky way, for its acquisition into the Bodron family.

"No, I did not design or restore it, but I absolutely encouraged my parents into buying it," he says with a laugh. "I pretend I grew up in that house. It's the house my mom always wanted. It just took forty years to get it."

The Bodron home is a captivating example of modern architecture in the International Style located on Bayou DeSiard. Bodron and his family had long admired the home, and it remains one of his favorite properties in Monroe. Although the current family home is most definitely modern, the home he lived in as a child was not so easy to label stylistically.

"I grew up in a ranch style house that had the scale of a modern house, but had columns in the front and crown moulding on the inside. All my life, I was constantly drawing plans of how to fix it!" he says candidly.

"Monroe and Louisiana have influenced me as a young person through the Southern plantation-era houses and the great scale they possessed. I always knew that there was something unusual and special about the scale and design of those houses. Modern houses always caught my eye, as well. I do love modern architecture and modern interiors. That is what my firm has become well known for. Every once in a while, someone will call on us to do a renovation or addition to a classical home. They