

BY DESIGN

Architects Judy Johnson and Jessie Carroll enjoy challenging work and creative problem solving

WRITTEN BY PATRICIA MCCARTHY



As an architect, the longer you refine a project, the more beautiful and better it becomes. Improving upon improvements can become addictive and lead to some very long hours.

The time requirements involved in this profession are part of the reason it hasn't been widely appealing to women who are interested in also having a family.

"Balancing the pressures of family life and client needs can become a real challenge," says Judy Johnson, one woman who has successful-

ly managed those demands for more than 30 years. "It's more of a difficult path than some other careers."

The principal at Harriman in Portland raised three daughters while working and being married to a landscape architect.

"We made it work. I had a great husband," she says. "We don't have any family here at all, but we had a network of people we could call on if we got stuck. It was before the days of being able to work from home, so we relied on great friends and neighbors."

Johnson, 59, made it work because, essen-

tially, there was no way she wasn't going to make it work—she says she knew what she wanted to do for a living at age 10.

"It was all I've ever wanted to do," she says. "As a kid, I used to build with Lincoln Logs and draw all day long, and I remember my father saying that I should be an architect."

An experience with a questionable teacher in eighth grade made her fully determined to make that happen.

"We were required to take a home economics class, and on the first day, Miss Davis asked everybody to stand up and say what they'd like



Architect Judy Johnson, principal at Harriman in Portland, in her office on Middle Street.

"I don't do the same thing two days in a row, and I've been able to exercise the creative side of my brain," says Johnson, 59, who says she knew at age 10 that she wanted to be an architect.

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Architect Jessie Carroll, an associate principal
at Whitten Architects in Portland.

Photo by Christina Wnek Photography



to do when they grew up. I said I want to be an architect, and she made fun of me! Can you imagine? She said, 'Well, girls can't do that!' She also told Barbara Peck that her purple suede bell-bottom pants didn't match her red shirt. So then it was 'I'll Show Her!'"

From that point on, Johnson took art and mechanical drawing classes and learned how to draft. At Virginia Tech, she immediately declared architecture as her major. She met her husband in school, and after working in Atlanta, they moved to Portland in 1987.

With Harriman, she's been involved in a range of corporate, municipal and educational projects—the InterMed Building on Marginal Way in Portland, Hilton Garden Inn on Commercial Street in Portland and Cliff House Maine resort and spa in Cape Neddick in York, to name a few. She also holds leadership positions in state and regional professional architect organizations and feels compelled to mentor newcomers to the profession, especially young women.

With frequent night meetings, her long hours persist—it's still common for Johnson to put in 13- to 16-hour workdays. But that hasn't interfered with her love for what she does for a living.

"I don't do the same thing two days in a row,



Carroll designed an addition and substantial barn renovation at this Freeport home.

Photos by Jonathan Reece Photography

and I've been able to exercise the creative side of my brain. I get a lot of joy from solving problems and providing solutions and making and exceeding expectations."

Johnson says working in a field dominated by men has been a non-issue for her.

"I don't think much about it and never have. I was not intimidated by men. I think it always

came down to feeling comfortable enough with myself. If I'm in a meeting with 12 men, it doesn't take long to have them know I really know what I'm doing."

Like Johnson, Jessie Carroll, an associate principal at Whitten Architects in Portland, says working in a male-dominated world hasn't been daunting for her because of the ap-



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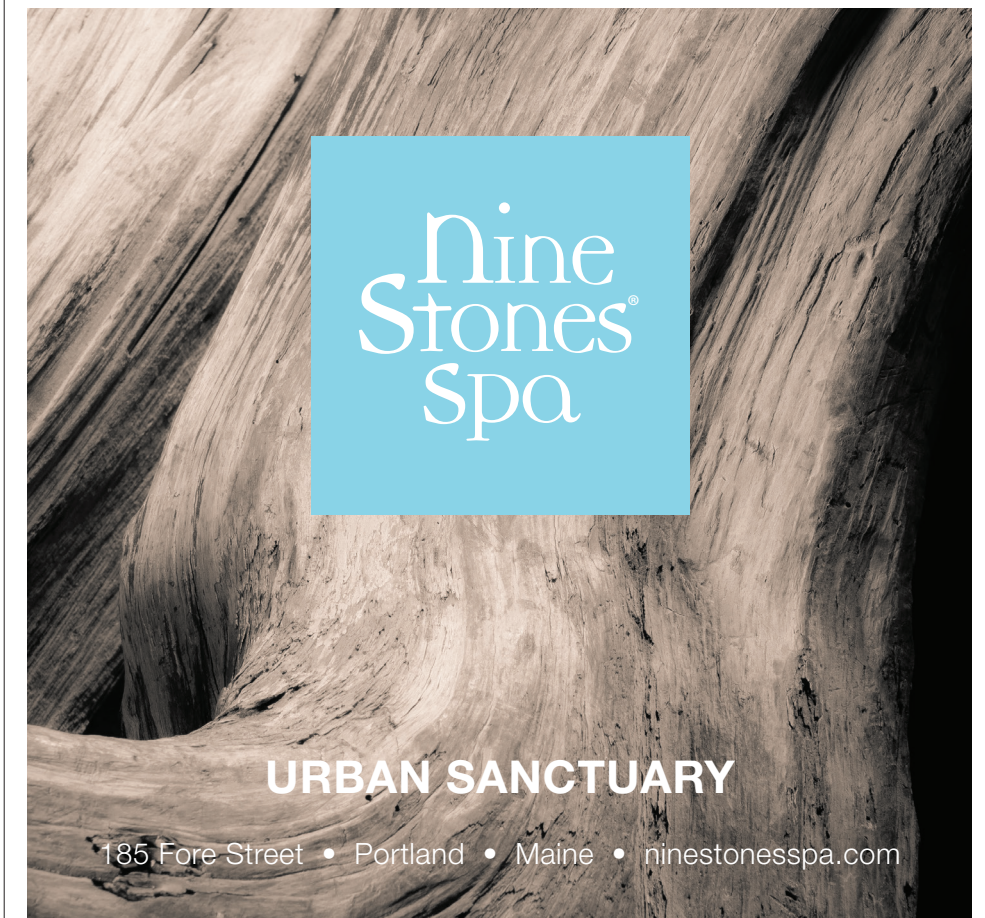
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The Presque Isle Community Center, designed by architect Judy Johnson, is a beacon for community engagement within the city. It includes a 30,000-square-foot recreation center with a gymnasium and indoor walking track, teen center, senior center and art center.

Photo by Siri Blanchette/Blind Dog Photo Associates

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proach she has taken.

"My attitude has always been to do the job, do it well, and let my work speak for itself," she says. "Just like any profession, you have to work hard to earn respect."

Because Whitten's clients are residential customers, Carroll, 32, says being a woman is actually an asset for her now, since many home-building decisions are made by women who appreciate her presence.

But she clearly recalls a time early on when she was encouraged to downplay her femininity.

"When I was in school being trained for interviews, I was told not to wear a skirt to a job site, not to wear jewelry—basically to look more like a man!"

Carroll senses that landscape has changed for the better.

"I hope my students aren't thinking that way now, and they'll just dress according to the situation, with practicality in mind."

Carroll spent the past three years teaching architecture classes part-time at the University of Maine at Augusta because mentoring a new generation of architects is important to her.

"I've had so many great mentors along the

way—yes, all men! And they're why I wanted to teach," she says. "Architecture is a field where you can't mail it in. I had a lot of people who encouraged me to stick with it when it was tough. I was very lucky."

Many people don't realize that becoming an architect "is the long game. It takes about 12 years," Carroll says. "I had undergrad and graduate school, three years of internships and then a series of exams and five years before you're licensed."

And this long process happens in people's 20s to early 30s, at the same time many are hoping to start families.

Carroll, who has a boyfriend, says she sees the time commitment to become an architect, along with the long hours of an architect's work day, as deterrents still keeping women from the field. Things like maternity and family leave "would have to look pretty different" for motherhood to be accommodated better and work for her, she says.

She encourages anyone considering a career in architecture to job-shadow and talk with people about what it takes and pursue hands-on internships. Internships through college gave her practical experience that helped her land a great job in Boston early on,

and her first internship—after graduating from high school early—shaped her whole career path.

Carroll intended to become a nurse and geared her high school studies toward that. But a pre-college internship at Children's Hospital in Boston put an abrupt end to that plan. "I very quickly realized that while I had compassion for others, I did not have the stomach for the medical field," she says.

So she pursued Northeastern's course catalog to see what else might pique her interest. She loved her first architecture classes and found her new pursuit immediately fulfilling.

"I was always a strong student, but I found the courses to be incredibly challenging. I loved it right off the bat. And I still do."

Patricia McCarthy is a longtime writer and editor. She has three daughters, lives in Portland, and also has a photography business (patriciamccarthy.com).



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