

LEADERSHIP FOR A NEW ERA Q & A

After 32 years at the helm of Whitten Architects, Rob Whitten recently announced an official expansion of leadership to include Russ Tyson as principal and Jessie Carroll as associate principal. Tyson, who joined Whitten in 2007, has long held a significant role at the firm. During graduate study at the School of Architecture, Art & Design at Andrews University in Michigan, Tyson first formed his beliefs in “real and lasting” architecture, an approach that centers around creating design that is both meaningful and timeless. Tyson is also a member of the American Institute of Architects and serves on the board of the Portland Society for Architecture. Carroll, a member of the Whitten team

since 2013, is a licensed architect in Maine, an adjunct faculty member at University of Maine, Augusta, and a member of the American Institute of Architects Maine Board of Directors. At Northeastern University, she was formally recognized with the highest Design Achievement Award for her graduate thesis work. Prior to joining Whitten, she worked as a designer at several Boston-based firms, where she became well versed in the world of architecture in an urban context. Carroll was recently awarded the Merit Award for Excellence in Architecture by AIA Maine and nationally recognized with an Integrity Windows & Doors 2017 Red Diamond Achiever Award.

ROB, WHAT DID YOU FIRST SEE IN PORTLAND IN THE EARLY DAYS OF WHITTEN ARCHITECTS?

RW: My wife Robin and I are both from New England, and we love the character and scale of the natural landscape and the well-considered built environment. We found Portland was quiet but had “good bones” and a real sense of place. It was an affordable, manageable-scale city with a great quality of life and a can-do attitude. If you wanted to pursue a professional interest and a career, others would encourage you and provide you with an opportunity. I learned about local craftsmanship and good design that would stand the test of time. By 1986, Portland was beginning to take off. Exchange Street was being renovated, and more people were discovering the area. I liked the immediacy of working for residential design clients and developing relationships with the local builders. I’ve been fortunate for the architects and architects-to-be who have worked at Whitten Architects. I try to choose carefully; I value the ability to draw—if you can draw an idea, then you can communicate it to clients, contractors, and colleagues, and you can share it with others.

RUSS AND JESSIE, WHAT DREW YOU TO THE WHITTEN TEAM?

JC: I was originally introduced to Whitten Architects while I was a project manager for a residential construction company. Rob valued my construction experience. Though I had connections to Maine with family in Lewiston, I had never explored or considered Portland. Rob made it clear he wanted me to love Maine first, then to consider Whitten Architects second. After my first weekend, I fell in love with Portland and had a strong desire to join the team. I appreciated the projects Whitten Architects represented and their respect for the contractors they work with.

RT: Rob’s long-held desire to exclusively focus on the design of homes was the initial draw for me. I’d previously practiced in a firm that had a range of project types. Of the projects I was assigned, I found residential architecture to be simultaneously the most varied and mentally rewarding. We’re passionate about the design of homes, and this passion drives our design methodology, which is strictly inspired by our clients, their specific interests, and their site. Over the years, it has resulted in each home being different than the last and explains our wide-ranging portfolio.

IN ITS 32ND YEAR, WHERE IS WHITTEN ARCHITECTS TODAY?

JC: We are finding our work has expanded beyond homes for retirees to include a younger client wanting to raise a family or work remotely in a custom-designed home in a stunning setting. Our portfolio reflects a wide range of designs, from shingle-style homes to more modern steel-and-glass residences. We prioritize quality regardless of style, and it’s our goal to seek a timeless architecture that honors its place and thrills our clients.

WHAT INFLUENCE WILL YOUR LEADERSHIP HAVE ON THE FIRM?

RT: In our minds, the most sustainable home is one that is first cherished by its owners. We want to continue designing homes that are a direct reflection of our client and their site. We also want to continue to learn and develop new ways of addressing how we live in New England. We think it will result in distinctive homes to be appreciated here and beyond.