

Creative Living

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Architects:
Building
an identityBy Corinne Abett
special writer

ARCHITECTS SHARON TIMKO and James K. Rundquist, who formed their own firm, JSI Design Inc. in 1986, are still waiting for their first big break. Meanwhile these two young people — she's 26 and he's 28 — are surviving in a profession where it is far more common to work for several decades for someone else's firm before opening your own. But, to paraphrase a song Frank Sinatra made famous, they're doing it their way.

Rundquist wrote in a letter to introduce their firm, "When we formed the company, we had no clients lined up. Not a single commission. We did everything that all the 'how to' books tell you not to do when forming a new company — we were undercapitalized; we took no loans; we had no commitments for work; we literally had only raw enthusiasm for our chosen profession and a strong desire to succeed."

They met while they were architecture students at Lawrence Institute of Technology of Southfield. He has worked for Pazzi Inc. of Birmingham and Louis Redstone Associates of Livonia. She worked for Richardson Associates and later Harley Ellington Pierce Yee Associates.

JSI DESIGN STARTED out in the spare bedroom of his apartment, went from there to the basement of

her townhouse and finally to the pleasant 25-by-15-foot studio at 77 E. Long Lake, Bloomfield Hills, where it is now. A third principal dropped out early on.

Their first commission was for a second home on Lake Michigan, their second was a carport in Bloomfield Hills.

Since then they've designed several additions and renovations, a motel and convention center for a Michigan college (still on hold), five houses (two have been built and the others will probably be under construction this summer), and a 16-unit apartment complex in Farmington Hills, which is up and occupied. Two of the houses and the apartments are close to signature-type designs — something an architect likes to be identified with, that shows her direction, creativity and approach.

Rundquist remembers the client told them he wanted the same type of apartments that were already around the site in Farmington Hills. "We can't do that. We won't do that," Rundquist said.

WHAT TIMKO AND RUNDQUIST did agree to do was present their own design, which they felt was attractive and compatible with the area. It was readily accepted. In fact, one of the apartment residents recommended JSI Design Inc. to an acquaintance.

One of the houses, yet to be built, had to undergo major design changes before it was approved by



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

JSI Design Inc. principals and sole owners, James Rundquist and Sharon Timko, were the architects for the 16-unit, two-story apartment complex, behind them, on Rollicrest Road, just

across 12 Mile from Harrison High School in Farmington Hills. It is their first major commission to be built.

the local planning board. It will be on a large lot in a Brighton subdivision. It faces a golf course and beyond that a lake.

The client said he wanted a very contemporary house, and they were delighted to comply with what they deemed to be an exciting design. But the planning board felt the house with its flat roof and gracious S curve along the golf course side didn't fit into the subdivision of contemporary colonials. Finally after many more hours at the drawing board, a second design with gabled roofs was accepted by all parties.

Another commission the partners accepted enthusiastically is for a "California contemporary" on a steep 24-acre lot with two streams in northern Oakland County.

"It's such a pretty site, and we're fortunate it has so many trees," said Timko, whom Rundquist described as devoted to saving trees.

ONE of their designs on hold, which could provide the higher visibility and identify they feel is a must, is for a residential community in mid-Michigan.

Recently Rundquist was working

on the renovation of a law office in Munising in a 100-year-old house. When they went up to look at it, he found it had hand-tooled leather walls, something that will definitely be saved in the renovation.

When they're not working on residential or commercial designs, Timko and Rundquist are designing a line of light fixtures or working on their own art work. He paints in watercolor, and she uses air brush skillfully.

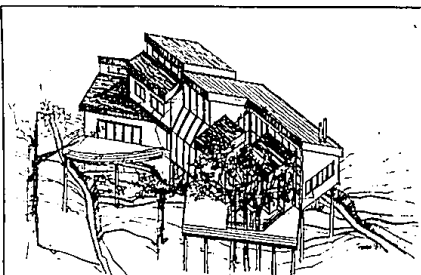
One of their problems is that most architects get lots of referrals from their peers. But Timko and Rund-

quist have few if any peers who are in a position to do that.

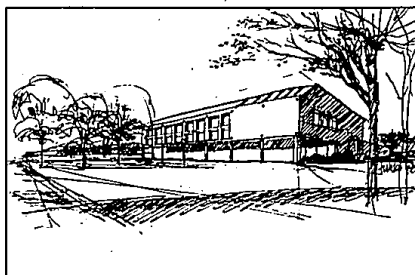
Still, they smile a lot. Rundquist said, "Without exception our clients have become friends. And that's kind of nice."

Timko said, "It has been a struggle. It hasn't been easy by any means, but we're optimistic — or we wouldn't be here."

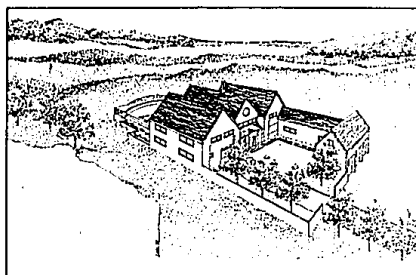
The big break is still out there somewhere waiting to happen. Meanwhile the small breaks keep showing up and with them Rundquist and Timko are beginning to build that needed identity.



The house to be built this year north of Rochester by JSI Design Inc. is designed to take advantage of the steep slope and two meandering streams. It is a California contemporary with shed roofs.



This original design for a private residence in a Brighton subdivision was rejected by the planning board for being too different from neighboring structures. It is 5,200 square feet.



The final design scheme for the house in the Brighton subdivision, with gabled roofs, met with approval from all those concerned. It is 4,850 square feet and slated for construction sometime this year.

Like spring fashions, Matthaei keen on green



BILL DRESLER/staff photographer

Max Nemazi is an outdoor docent at the Matthaei Botanical Gardens in Ann Arbor where he leads tours pointing out early signs of spring despite all the white stuff in the background.

By Arlene Funke
special writer

CALL IT flower power. Max Nemazi, a 62-year-old Livonia resident, worries about flowers and trees being plowed away to make room for concrete parking lots.

Nemazi, a retired mechanical engineer, does his part by volunteering some of his spare time at the University of Michigan Matthaei Botanical Gardens on the outskirts of Ann Arbor.

"I think of what it's going to be for the next generation," Nemazi said. "I'm interested in conservation, what we have to do to keep this going on for future generations, without disturbing it."

Wild flowers — rather than cultivated ones — are Nemazi's fascination. At Matthaei, he has helped plant and cultivate outdoor plots with wild flowers, and he is an outdoor docent, conducting group tours in the gardens both in winter and summer.

Nemazi's interest in the outdoors has many facets. He belongs to the Audubon Society and the Nature Conservancy, a group that acquires land to hold in its natural state.

HE IS A FITNESS buff who has hiked, bicycled and camped in Australia and New Zealand, where he photographed koala bears, exotic birds and bright, colorful wildflowers. Nemazi has duplicated many of his slides for use by U-M students and staff.

"There is a fair amount of satia-

faction in sharing your knowledge with other people, especially children," Nemazi said.

The Matthaei Botanical Gardens, a U-M research facility, dates back to 1907. It was organized by George P. Burns, a botany professor. Over the years it has grown and occupied several locations.

The present location, on Diabolo Road, was made possible by gifts from Mr. and Mrs. Frederick C. Matthaei Sr. The site throbs with activity year-round.

The indoor conservatory, with its tropical desert plant exhibits, attracts 40,000 visitors annually. There are outdoor gardens, specially plots with medicinal herbs, rock gardens and lush spreads of roses, peonies, bulbs and perennials.

The site also includes natural trails, ponds and wooded floodplains, a reconstructed prairie, meadows and wildflower garden. Adult education classes, lectures and special events are regularly scheduled.

Nemazi's interest in wildflowers began during his boyhood.

"I was born in Iran," Nemazi said. "As a boy, I like to pick wildflowers. There were lots of mountains. I would hike and pick flowers."

Nemazi came to the U.S. as a young man. He and his wife, Mary, have lived in Livonia for more than 30 years.

A jump-start on spring comes with the Observer's Eccentric's special Spring Fashion Section appearing in all 12 editions today with the emphasis on greenery — not only in the scenery but in the fashion forecast that the color green will be enormously popular. The scenery was courtesy of nearby Matthaei Botanical Gardens in Ann Arbor. Fashions in all hues came from area shops as noted in the section.

tify trees, plants and wildflowers.

"I really learned through books," Nemazi said.

When Nemazi retired from Detroit Diesel Division of General Motors two years ago, he immediately signed up for training to become a docent at Matthaei.

IN BOTANY, ALL is seasonal, and the volunteers give plenty of pampering and TLC to the plants.

For example, seeds are planted in the greenhouse and the shoots are later transferred to the outdoors, where they are weeded and mulched. In the fall, plants are harvested. The flowers are dried by hanging upside down in a room with a dehumidifier and later fashioned into wreaths.

Tours give visitors a chance to observe the natural growing process.

Around 200 hardy people showed up to take an outdoor winter survival natural walk in January. Now Nemazi and 20 other volunteers in the wildflower group are gearing up for a series of tours to find and identify such vividly named flowers as skunk cabbage, trillium, blood root, spring beauty and jack-in-the-pulpit.

The tours are held at 2 p.m. on four consecutive Sundays, beginning April 10. There is no charge.

The Matthaei Botanical Gardens, is located at 1800 N. Diabolo, Ann Arbor. Guided tours are available for groups of eight or more. For information, call 763-7000, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.