

James P. Ryan

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— they're getting tired and old. The owners of these malls and open air centers realize that if they're going to keep tenants from bolting to other, newer malls, they have to improve them. Ryan said the lion's share of his business in the '90s will be in the rejuvenation of some of the older centers.

The Taubman-Ryan connection

It's worth noting, however, that even Ryan didn't always give retail architecture its due. Ryan started out designing office buildings, hotels and it wasn't until he began working with Wah Yee Associates, now in Troy, back in the early '70s that he began to see retail architecture as his niche.

"I can remember Wah Yee asking me if I would like to do retail architecture, and of course, I said yes," he said. "Meanwhile, I'm thinking what the heck is retail architecture?"

It was then that Ryan met someone who would become one of the country's most prominent retail developers, Al Taubman.

"Wah Yee introduced me to him as one of the foremost experts on retail architecture," Ryan said, relating his first meeting with Taubman. It wasn't until years later that Taubman was informed of Wah Yee's "fib."

As an associate and later as a partner at Wah Yee, Ryan's designed many of Taubman's ventures until 1978 when he decided to start his own firm in a small office at 10 Mile and Lahser roads — ironically in the same two-story building Wah Yee had originally set up shop in decades earlier. In the 15 years since starting James P. Ryan Associates, the firm has evolved from a small practice meeting the needs of small retailers to a nationally-recognized retail architect.

Retail architecture on rise

Ryan is quick to spread the credit for James Ryan Associates' success. Partner and vice president James R. Grigsby, AIA, (who joined in 1983) and William J. Belter, AIA, (who joined in 1987) are integral parts — as are the other 25 members of the firm — of what the company has been able to accomplish.

Award winning developments like the Plaza of Birmingham, The Gardens of Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, along with projects like the Centre at Salisbury in Maryland and the renovation of the Somerset Collection have demonstrated some of what retail architecture can aspire to.

Retail architecture has always been very cost-conscious, he said. "It's taken a while for (retail architecture) to evolve."

"(Now that it has,) the nature of retail architecture has taken us far beyond the mom and pop store," Ryan said.

Cost does remain important, Ryan said, but it shouldn't be the motivating force behind a project. One of the reasons James P. Ryan Associates has developed from a simple architecture firm to full scale project design, planning and construction management firm is to help control costs, he said.

"We know how to control costs, but our first obligation is to make the best design," he said.

Ryan said he has never believed that architects should have a particular style, Ryan said. "We're more interested in quality of work."

Like all good architecture, retail architecture should reflect the area in which it is built, he said.

An area's geography, history and climate is critical in the design of any structure. "You don't put art deco in Utah. We don't want to insult the shopper or the user of the project."

Selling? Fix up the kitchen, bath

News flash: Home remodeling and addition projects, especially kitchens and baths, can return up to 104 percent on investment.

That's what Remodeling magazine says, anyway. And, naturally, home improvement experts agree.

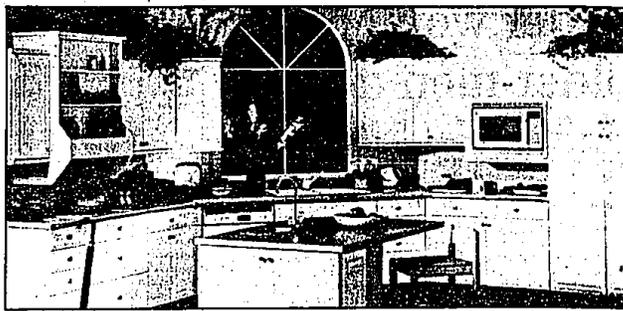
"Being able to enjoy the new comforts and conveniences of the improvements immediately, however, is the best return," said Jim Sutter, vice president and general merchandise manager of Handy Andy Home Improvement Centers, Inc. "If and when it comes time to sell, homeowners can recoup all or most of what they invested."

There are four Handy Andy locations in the Observer & Eccentric area: Livonia, Westland, Troy and Southfield.

Besides the direct return on investment, the added value of kitchen and bath improvements go beyond dollars and cents. For people selling their homes, well-executed improvements can:

- Increase the market appeal of the home;
- Shorten the home's selling time;
- Put the sellers in better position to name their price.

"Current lifestyle trends are leaning toward more informal dining and entertaining and people are spending more time in the kitchen," Sutter said. "Kitchens are becoming the focal point of a



Kitchen magic: Here is one of the many efficient and appealing kitchen designs from Handy Andy. It features wipe-clean vinyl interiors, adjustable shelves, and a variety of door styles in woods and laminates.

home today."

Sutter suggests such projects as new cabinetry, modern, resilient flooring and attractive ceiling treatments. "At sale time, a home with a kitchen that doesn't need a lot of work and blends utility and visual appeal will attract a potential buyer more than one with an outdated kitchen," he said.

Retailers like Handy Andy offer in-house installation experts for

non-do-it-yourselfers. Design experts are also on staff. Using in-store computers and a specialized software package, Handy Andy and other retail professionals can generate blueprints and layout options based on the basic room dimensions supplied by the customer.

As for bathroom remodeling, "Leisure and glamour are two increasingly popular features that homeowners seek — a room to

work out and relax in," Sutter said. "A bright, spacious look is important; skylights in bathrooms are great additions."

Sutter also advises to pay particular attention to storage. Most older homes, he said, aren't equipped with much space.

Remodeling magazine said the addition of a new bathroom to a home with only one or one-and-a-half baths yields a 96 percent return on investment.

Builders

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ing. Cocooning reflects the importance of the house as a place to spend more leisure time.

Time starvation is reflected in a loss of time in which to relax and recharge. The trend toward home-centered activities is seen as having tremendous significance for homebuilders.

Findings are based on research by General Electric, the Home Builders Association, Clark Rector & Associates and William N. Webb Co.

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