

AIA St. Louis Opines on The Shanley Building.....  
March 8, 2019

Last week The American Institute of Architects St. Louis Chapter appealed to developer Fred Kummer and the City of Clayton to not demolish the Harris Armstrong-designed Shanley Building poised for demolition for a large development. In our pleas, we noted that their talented architecture firm could find a way to preserve and integrate the distinct mid-century Armstrong building into the design scheme if so directed. These fine architects could find a way; that is what architects do... they solve problems through design.

Some people may ask: So, what's the big deal about the Shanley Building? It's kind of old, it's kind of in bad shape and it's in the way of progress.

To which we reply: it is a big deal. It's a big damned deal. It's an iconic building in our region.

Please consider that it is not just a fine example of American mid-century modern architecture by a noted architect at stake, but consider that perhaps it is **us** at stake.

It is us at stake because there is a bigger issue at hand....It is our heritage at stake.

Saving our architectural heritage is an exhausting issue, because we have to fight for it over and over and over and over. We can't keep losing our building "individuality".

As background, AIA St. Louis operates a storefront bookstore in downtown St. Louis at our Chapter office. We are across the street from the convention center ballroom so we meet people who are in town for business, conventions, ball games, volleyball tournaments, weddings, field trips and folks trying to figure out which Route 66 signs they should follow. On any given day, we greet visitors from all over; all over the country and all over the world.

We are here to sell Iggy Peck, Architect, Rosie Revere, Engineer and Ada Twist, Scientist and books on why design matters.

And, while they are here, we get to brag about St. Louis. We can rattle off the cultural district attractions quicker than anyone else, I think. And we talk about our neighborhoods, our restaurants and of course, that zany City Museum. Tourists ask what they need to see... and our answer is always about architecture, because really, what isn't?

The Zoo's bird cage was a gift from the Smithsonian Museum for our world's fair; the Art Museum was designed by Architect Cass Gilbert who designed the US Supreme Court Building, with its addition by Sir David Chipperfield; the Arch by Eero Saarinen perfectly captured the bold spirit of walking to a new fortune. Grant's Farm has the original home of General Grant.... The new cathedral has the largest collection of mosaics in our hemisphere. Don't miss anything. See it all. It's what makes us... well, us.

And now, we are meeting a new generation asking about Mid Century modern architecture in St. Louis... we tell them about the Planetarium by Gyo Obata, FAIA; the St Louis Abbey at Priory by Gyo Obata, FAIA reviewed by Pier Luigi Nervi; COCA (former B'nai Amoona Synagogue) by Eric Mendelsohn; the Climatron by Murphy & Mackey; Terminal 1 at the airport by Hellmuth, Yamaski and Leinweber and the successor firm, HOK; The Ethical Society by Harris Armstrong; American Zinc Building by HOK; Resurrection Church by Murphy & Mackey; Plaza Square by HOK & Harris Armstrong; Steinberg Ice Skating rink in Forest Park by Frederick Dunn, Clayton Famous Barr Dept. Store (saved by Washington University) by Samuel Marx; the "flying saucer" on Grand Avenue by Richard Henmi building; the AAA Building on Lindell by W.A. Sarmiento, and of course, the Shanley Building in Clayton by Harris Armstrong.

We again ask the developer to preserve the Shanley Building and integrate it into the proposed development. We also ask the City of Clayton to ensure that is done. And we ask the greater St. Louis community to also share this request to the City of Clayton to preserve the Shanley Building; to value our architectural heritage.

