



## Jim Kirkpatrick

**Kirkpatrick Architecture Studio**

Nestled among the historic brick buildings in downtown Denton is a small oasis of pastel stucco, a bank drive-through renovated by architect **Jim Kirkpatrick**, founder and president of **Kirkpatrick Architecture Studio**, where he has officed for the past 12 years. The walls, each a different unexpected hue, are like Kirkpatrick himself: always surprising, but never apologetic for being unique.

After his work in Mexico for the Universidad de Celaya, Kirkpatrick worked to make it easier for American architects to practice in other countries, thus increasing their employment opportunities. For his efforts, Kirkpatrick was the first architect in the Denton area to be named to the American Institute of Architects' (AIA) College of Fellows.

### As a child, did you have a knack for designing things?

I think I learned visually. I think by the time I was in the fifth grade, I knew what I wanted to do, or be. My mother was a teacher and my father was a civil engineer, and he probably wanted me to be a doctor, but it was that first cut I never could get past!

### Did you know any architects growing up?

No. Not any. I probably received my first book on architecture when I was in the sixth or seventh grade.

### Was that your main interest at that age?

No, I played basketball and baseball. My position? Bench. At 139 pounds and 6'1", I was the slowest, lightest end the Denton High Broncos had at the time!

### So no sports scholarship for college, then?

I left Denton and swore I would nev-

er come back. I went to Texas A&M, and I crammed five years of college into six years and graduated in 1969.

I worked about six months in Dallas before going into the military. I went into the army, went to an engineering officers school. I was stationed in Fort Sill – and volunteered to get out of there! They shipped me off to Southeast Asia, and I did my tour of duty there. I worked for the Corps of Engineers, building roads.

### What happened after your tour of duty?

When I came out, I became more serious about architecture. I landed in Corpus Christi for about six months and then in Bryan, TX, and worked there for two or three years. By that time I had become licensed.

I wanted to open an office, but didn't want to compete with the guy I was working for. I didn't want to be in that position. So I moved back this way and got a job in Fort Worth.

After about six weeks, I knew that it wasn't right. It was a big office, and I knew I wasn't cut out for that. But my first wife, in the interim, had become pregnant, and we had to make it to full term. So on the day my second daughter was born, I quit to open the business in 1978, with no work or anything, just a wing and a prayer.

### What were the initial challenges?

One, obviously, was getting the work, which came pretty early on, but then sustaining it after that first bit of success. I had good mentors I could rely on, but what I didn't know is that I could seek opinions.

Also, I started the business to practice architecture, but you quickly find when you get into the business you get into other things, like the selling side of it.

### Do you remember your first real solo job?

My first job was trying to enclose an area at Denton High School where there was a transformer: kids were going out there and urinating on it! But it cost too much, and so they didn't do it.

### What projects did you learn the most from personally and professionally?

On every job, I have learned something, but when we started doing work on a university in Mexico, all of a sudden, everything kind of changed.

We came from the Bauhaus education here in the States, which is very restricted, but in Mexico, it is less restricted, more emotional. I think the work in Mexico was extremely fulfilling and enjoyable,



Jim Kirkpatrick in front of his Denton studio, a bank drive-through he renovated

simply because there was a change in directions.

Instead of trying to be very precise, everything in Mexico is about the imperfection. We learned the culture and the language, and so it was a comprehensive educational process.

### How did you meet your wife Glenna?

I had an office in the bank building over here and she showed up to interview for a job at an attorney's office right across the hall. She was sitting there in her gray suit with her stiff back waiting for the interview, and I was eyeing her when I came back after lunch, and she kind of eyeballed me I think. After a quick nine-year courtship ... well, I thought it was quick. I was coming out of a marriage and she was coming out of a marriage...

### What is it like working with your spouse?

Hey, Glenna, what is it like working with my family? You know when you're married, you're going to be with someone a long time. Why would I want to be married to someone I couldn't work with? I want her here, with us.

### Your daughter Katie works with you also?

It's good to have Katie here. The downside is you could fire them, but you've still got to pay for them! So you might as well hire them! No, it's been good.

### In what direction is your firm going?

We have an eclectic portfolio. We've always done public work, but we're getting more into municipal work, particularly in first responders and fire stations. That's an area where we want to create one specialty. To that end, Katie and Glenna will help with the marketing, since, for 30 years, I just relied on word of mouth, which is not a good plan. We're doing a lot of trade shows now, getting out and promoting.

We have about nine employees, and we have a couple coming in this summer I hope we can put to work. Ten to 11 employees are about ideal for us.

### Tell me about working in Denton as opposed to working in other cities in the Metroplex?

I made a commitment to Denton. Working here is not like working in Dallas or Fort Worth, in my opinion, in that you

can't go across the street and get a job with another firm. There aren't too many other places to go. You could go to Dallas/Fort Worth, but that's a whole different life change.

I'm here because I like the smaller town atmosphere, with two stoplights on my way home. Rather than commute three hours a day, I can stay here and work three hours a day, with much less stress.

### What do you like to do when you aren't working?

We like to travel when we can. I would like to learn how to speak Spanish better, and I would like to learn how to play the guitar, but until I retire I won't have time to do that.

### Is there anything you wish you could build?

Performance halls are fun. We did a theater for a university in Mexico, where money was no object. I never knew what the cost was! Plus, you had to think backward, you had to maximize labor and minimize everything else. I've enjoyed the ones that we've done.

### If you weren't Jim Kirkpatrick, architect, who would you be?

I would be Burned Out Bob singing with the Bellamy Brothers at Billy Bob's. But the closest I've ever come to performing is karaoke with my daughters at the bar.

### You were recently the first architect in the Denton area to be named to the AIA's College of Fellows, an honor only 2,765 out of 86,000 AIA architects have received. How did it feel to be honored?

I'm elated, not in the boastful sense, but I'm proud. For some people, the award may be validating, but while I'm proud of the accomplishment I haven't let it define me.

### Will you work the rest of your life, or have you thought about retiring?

I have to work another 10 years or so just to get my last child out of college. I'd like to work another 15, but I don't know if I can do that. If I had an office where I could come and do my mail every morning that would be fine. But it gets to a point where you need to get out of the way and let other folks come on and do it. –mjm



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