



JAS DESIGN BUILD

For the last decade, Joe Schneider and Kim Clements from JAS Design Build in Seattle, WA, have been visiting, supporting, consulting inspiring cajoling and delighting Rural Studio. They have a practice that is truly design and building. Sometimes their teams are framing timber, sometimes at the table drafting. They are a real life version of what we all aspire to. On top of that, they do it with great humbleness, humility, dignity, and as you can sense below, a little nuttiness and a great sense of humor.

ARE YOU BOTH ORIGINALLY FROM SEATTLE?

KIM: Not originally. Joe is a native of Pittsburgh but spent his "formative years" in New Jersey. I'm from a very small town in central Florida where my great grandfather grew oranges and owned the local farm supply company.

GIVE US SOME DIRT ON WHAT YOU LOVE & HATE ABOUT EACH OTHER.

KIM: I really hate that Joe is quite often seen only as a contractor and a money guy rather than as incredibly talented architect with this ability to create buildings and spaces in a profound and poetic way. Truly talented Designer-Builders are rare birds. They have extraordinarily high (and challenging) expectations for themselves and their work. They care about Truth with the capital T, and I really hate that Joe is sometimes seen as just another general contractor. And he doesn't wash the silverware.

JOE: What I love about Kim is that she makes everything she touches better: buildings, food, gardens, and boys, they all improve when she engages them. She's a force and if you don't want those things to improve then don't ask her to be involved. I hate that she drives too fast and thinks she has diplomatic immunity with regard to parking.

WHERE DID YOU STUDY ARCHITECTURE AND CONSTRUCTION?

KIM: We both studied architecture at NC State in Raleigh. Joe has been building things since cleaning sites and learning to frame at the age of 15. My education building things was pretty free form and very unorthodox. Mostly tree houses and anything else I could make with the fewest tools and whatever materials I could find. I have learned on the job mostly.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR FRIENDSHIP WITH FRANK HARMON.

KIM: Frank was my very first architecture professor, the reason I always have a tape measure, pencil, and notebook on hand. They are in my glove box, my purse, my backpack, at my desk, in our conference rooms... everywhere! Frank said, "If you walk up a set of stairs and they feel good, stop, measure them, and make note." Perhaps I have taken it a bit far, but what I think he was really teaching us was to pay attention and listen to the little whispers that whirr by and tell you about the subtle and often overlooked important moments in the world around you, especially the built one.

WE LOVE THAT YOU DESIGN AND BUILD YOUR PROJECTS. NOT MANY ARCHITECTURE FIRMS DO BOTH. WHAT LESSONS CAN YOU OFFER OUR STUDENTS WHO MAY WANT TO START THEIR OWN PRACTICES DESIGNING AND BUILDING PROJECTS?

KIM: Just do it, and remember that you still have a lot to learn from others. I regularly say to carpenters in the field, "Educate me, what would you do in this case?"

JOE: Learn how to build. It is hard to find the right time in life to stop your architectural pursuits, but if you can find a two- to three-year window to go actually be a carpenter, mason, or welder, do it. I see too many folks passionate about design-build that don't understand the build part at the level they should, and it will always hold them back.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR WORK IN NEW ORLEANS.

KIM: After Katrina hit, a dear friend and former client of

consider New Orleans the start of our commitment to philanthropy and pitching in.

WHY DO YOU SUPPORT RURAL STUDIO?

KIM: RS gets it. There is nothing like it out there in the world. It is wrought with the kind of accomplishments and challenges that exemplify Design Build as a practice and way of living.

JOE: I love how honest the place is and the level of community engagement and commitment to design is extraordinary. From what I have seen on my travels to RS, it is the most interesting architectural education going on today, a rare blend of doing, thinking, and experimenting all in one place. Hats off to Andrew and the team for always pressing.

HOW HAS IT BEEN HIRING RURAL STUDIO GRADUATES? WHAT ARE THEIR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES? BE HONEST!

KIM: Honestly, we've had fantastic hires of RS grads at JAS. Like everybody coming out, they do have a lot to learn still, but generally we find that they arrive with a combination of fearlessness, a sense of community, a work ethic, good people skills, and a charming ability to find a place for themselves and contribute to the company culture of our firm. Maybe it comes from spending extended periods of time out in the stix, RS folks, at least our hires, know how to work hard and play hard. Keep sending them our way.

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TELL US ABOUT YOUR ISLAND DESIGN AND BUILD PROJECTS.

KIM: For roughly 20+ years we have had a relationship with Lopez Island in the San Juan Archipelago. Originally we were building a project for Gordon Walker, who some of you may remember from his visit to RS last fall. Since then we have done almost a dozen homes on the island. We also found ourselves enamored with the place and its landscape. It wasn't long after that we found a very cold-comfort farm of our own out there and called it "Rootball." We let Joe name it, and it stuck. We have been working away on the place for all these years, figuring out how to build this arm of the company in a remote location. The design-build model works really well on the island, and it is our intention to continue to fortify our presence and our reputation there. We are no longer enamored with the place, we are in a fully loving and committed relationship with it! It has taught us a great deal and continues to inspire and charm us, I suspect it always will.

HOW HAS YOUR PRACTICE CHANGED OVER THE YEARS?

KIM: In 27 years JAS has grown from 3 people to just under 100. Lots of collateral change with that aspect

designer can design anything. Especially if she knows how to build it (or get it built) too.

JOE: We get to say "No" more often than we used which is a healthy place to be. I like having a bit of so to the business now as it gives us opportunities to involved in more aspects of the projects, such as interior or hardscape, than I think we would have been able at other times in our history. The people continue to a caring, smart, and funny bunch, which helps.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR THREE BOYS. ARE THEY ALL DESIGN-BUILDERS? IF NOT, WHAT ARE THEY DOING?

KIM: The boys are all design-builders—the three we kept—the other ones just didn't cut the mustard and living with a family of investment bankers in a cor downtown. They are really coming into their own makers and doers. Rootball has been a super fertile pl for that. They all have some welding skills, are v resourceful, don't hesitate to cook things that most o figure are easier to buy in a grocery store (bagels, e., are making knives and furniture and building a sau At 19, 17 & 15 they are strong and interested and hopefully stay that way, otherwise they can go live w their other brothers in the condo downtown.

JOE: I need a break. The last month I have been work with them every weekend at our place on Lopez : they are crushing me. They all get it now and have

hands to make things happen, one of the best summers of my life.

KIM, TELL US ABOUT ROWING ON LAKE PURDY AND HOW A BLEEDING HEART WEST COAST LIBERAL YOU WEREN'T SHOT

KIM: I rowed with some lovely ladies from the Lake Purdy Rowing Association in Birmingham. Crazy true, one of them is a former Olympian who was three seat-in the US women's 8 the first time won were even allowed to row in the 1976 Olympics, if you can believe that!!! Jackie Zoch Major—they won bronze medal. They were so lovely and gracious : absolutely hilarious. Their boat house is a bait shop on Lake Purdy run by a former ballet dancer who : one of Balanchine's lead male ballerinas, you can't miss this stuff up.

JOE, HOW HAVE YOU PUT UP WITH KIM'S FABULOUS LAUGH ALL THESE YEARS?

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KIM: After Katrina hit, a dear friend and former client of ours packed up his SUV and headed for NOLA to help restore the convent house for the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament at Xavier University. We fell madly in love with the place and its people. As a company, JAS had had some financial success at that point, and it felt like the right thing to give something back. We put funds together compiled from our own contribution united with those of many of our subcontractors and clients—enough to pay a week's wages and airfare for a team of skilled carpenters and architects to go and help where & how we were most needed. Working with Catholic Charities and another couple of non-profits, we were able

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JOE, TELL US ABOUT YOUR PERSONAL SOLITARY CONFINEMENT CELL AT THE OFFICE.

JOE: As we were finally recovering from the recession we needed more space and the building we occupy had none to give so we rebuilt a small greenhouse building in the back courtyard of JAS into my "hut." It's very quiet out here. I think we packed close to 25 folks in one afternoon for a meeting.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE TOOL?

KIM: That is an oddly difficult question. My favorite drafting tool is map chart divider tool, favorite kitchen tool is a really nice cork screw, favorite hand tool is pretty much any hammer, but I'm partial to the ball-peen just 'cause it's cute and the name is so darn awesome, favorite power