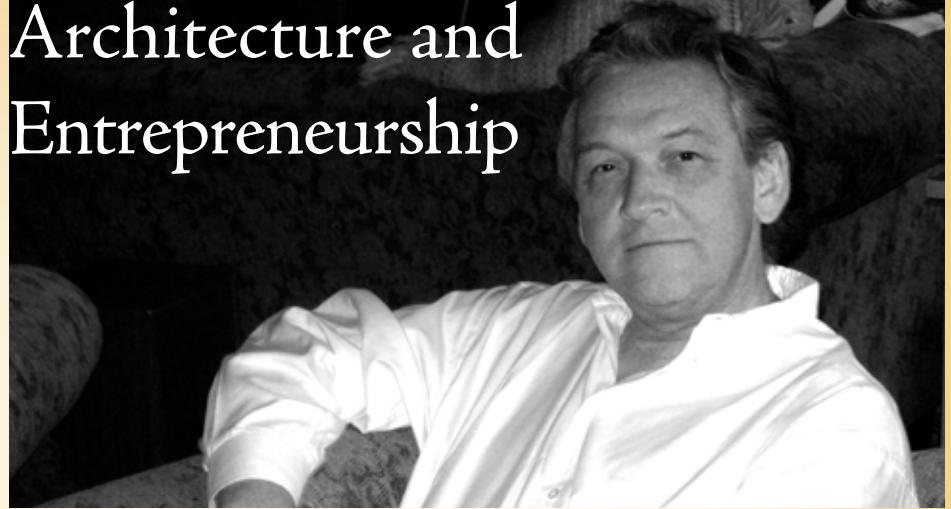


Feature

# The John Gillis Interview:

## Architecture and Entrepreneurship

John Gillis has been a practicing architect in New York City for over two decades. He has designed hundreds of residential, commercial, educational, and institutional projects throughout the United States. Gillis has also written widely on architecture and art for publications such as *Economic Affairs* (London), *Interiors*, *Aristos*, *The Freeman*, and *Reason*. In this issue, we offer excerpts from our interview with Gillis in his New York City home. Our full interview will soon be posted on the Center's website.



**Kaizen:** Why did you decide to become an architect?

**Gillis:** Well, I really was interested in buildings from the time I was a small kid. By the time I decided to become an architect, at about age 12, I had already been focused on things that I didn't quite know were architecture, but *were* architecture. I just loved building things when I was a little kid, like various specialized toys and making up things out of materials. I was interested in building as such. My earliest memories were of buildings like the church that was visible from my window when I was three years old—it was a big, prominent structure. When I got bored in school as a young child, I used to sit and draw plans from memory of buildings that I was in. .... And then, when I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, going into 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I realized I wanted to build—that was what I wanted to do. It appealed to me because it was almost everything in life rolled up in one—it was artistic; it was business; it was engineering; and it was practicalities. It was, from that point on, totally clear that architecture was my career, and I never changed.

**Kaizen:** Who were your architectural inspirations?



Gardiner Country House

**Gillis:** Well, the first one was definitely Frank Lloyd Wright. This was partly luck, because when I was looking for books on architecture at age 13, I went to my favorite local book store, and I picked up his *The Natural House*. I was interested in Wright's buildings initially because of what he was saying in the book about the integration of everything, that there shouldn't be a separation of form and function, and that there should be an integrity about the design process. I also lived in Chicago, which is a very big Wright location, so I was able to go actually visit some of these places and experience them in the flesh, which cemented my love for some of his buildings. ...

**Kaizen:** Why did you decide to start your own architectural firm rather than working for an established firm?

**Gillis:** I started my own firm because I knew that I would be very unlikely to find an existing firm where their interests and aesthetics would match what I wanted to go after. So it just worked better for me to be in charge of my own work as opposed to having to discuss it or to fight with partners about it. There is enough difficulty in doing good architecture just from the standpoint of the effort you have to put forth to make sure that contractors can accomplish what you want. Having partners in a firm is not impossible—and there certainly have been cases where architects have had partners and they created great stuff—but it is just another step and it is harder. ...

**Kaizen:** Starting your own business is a gutsy move—leaping into the unknown and dealing with the fear of failure are challenges for most entrepreneurs. How did you

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

SEPTEMBER 2007  
ISSUE 1  
KAIZEN

THIS ISSUE: LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
CENTER EVENTS  
CENTER NEWS

FOR AN  
EXPLANATION  
OF "KAIZEN,"  
SEE PAGE 8.

“A GULF SEPARATES THE MAN WHO GOES FIRST FROM EVERYONE WHO COMES AFTER. THE PATHFINDER IS DENIED”

“THE COMFORT OF KNOWING THAT WHAT HE IS ATTEMPTING HAS ALREADY BEEN PROVED POSSIBLE.” (ROLAND HUNTFORD)

JOHN GILLIS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

deal with them?

**Gillis:** Well, I never really thought much about it because I was focused on being an architect. When you're young, just getting started, you haven't yet done any fully independent commissions, or you have just a couple of small ones. As you do more of them and as they grow in size and complexity and responsibility, even though you've had experience working for another firm, when you do it all yourself, there is always this "push" to accomplish more and more. There was an issue of whether or not I could do it because I didn't have someone to back me up on certain things, etc. So the only sense of psychological difficulty I found in those early times was saying, "Okay, I'm now doing this large building that I've never done before. Can I actually come up with a solution, an integrated design that satisfies where I want to go? Or, was I a one-trick pony?" ... There is that aspect where I will be sitting there with a blank paper before I have the theme and idea sorted out and what I want to do to make it all work with the functions I have to accomplish, wondering, "Can I really succeed at this?" And, after a few of those cases, and always coming up with a good solution that I was happy with, I don't have that problem anymore. So that was always a question of uncertainty and anxiety from a creative standpoint. It wasn't really from a business standpoint, although there was always in the background: "Am I going to have enough money from the work I'm doing? Will I have more clients?" When you finish a project there has to be another client behind it, and it isn't in an orderly way. So there are plenty of feelings of financial insecurity at times. It is also highly dependent on the economy, because architecture is, to a large extent, dependent on the real estate industry and whether people are building or not. ... There are tight times, but you just have to stick them out.

**Kaizen:** How did you get started—how did your first significant commission arise?

**Gillis:** I was working for one firm as a consultant and they did a lot of apartment buildings. One of their clients, who they were doing a big 200 unit apartment building for, wanted to build a house for his daughter and son-in-law. He was a contractor also. So he bought a piece of land in upstate New York and went to the firm I was working with and said, "I want to do a house." They didn't want to do it, because that isn't what they do—they are specialists. He knew me because I had been working on one of his apartment buildings, and he knew that I had some residential background. I guess he talked with the principals of the firm and said, "I want to talk to John about this because you are not interested." They said that it was no problem. So, I took the commission to do this fairly large house on this really lovely piece of property upstate. That was the first time I was actually able to open an office, rent some space, hire some people.

**Kaizen:** Many people feel awkward about selling themselves and their products or services. How do you get past the awkwardness of marketing yourself?

**Gillis:** I never felt awkward about it. I certainly felt a certain amount of shyness, just because I was never schooled in being a speaker or a good rhetorician. I had to learn those skills along the way. Looking back, my shyness made me not a great presenter sometimes. But I was enthusiastic about what I wanted to do, and I think that showed



Boerum Hill House rooftop, Brooklyn

through most of the time and succeeded most of the time. ...

**Kaizen:** In your experience, have clients sought you because of your architectural vision, or has it been word-of-mouth recommendations, or has it been that you have sought clients by marketing yourself and convincing them that your architecture is what they want?

**Gillis:** The interesting thing about architecture is that it is a melding of more than one category: it is artistic and it is engineering, it is functional and it is business. Different clients over the years have come to me for different reasons. That has helped to sustain me because there certainly have been dry spells where there weren't any clients, or very few who wanted me specifically for the design and architectural vision that I have. But people would come through some other source, some word-of-mouth thing, where they were really interested in construction expertise, and I would perform services like that. ... There were other times where there were

**“Architecture is artistic and it is engineering, it is functional and it is business.”**

developers, who came to me almost completely for my design abilities, because they already had an architect who was doing standard, cookie-cutter buildings for them (apartment buildings or some other category). But they realized that they wanted something unique—they were now in a new location, and they couldn't likely sell their apartments as well if they didn't have some new, special quality. They realized that they couldn't just do a bland, boring box; they had to have something that had character. So they would hire me to design the overall building and shape, but they would have someone else, who was their house architect, do the mechanics of dealing with the building department, dealing with the contractors, handling engineering details, etc.

**Kaizen:** Clients don't always see eye-to-eye with architects' visions

and sometimes there are differences over details. How do you handle that—on what kinds of issues are changes or compromises possible to you, and what kinds of things are non-negotiable?

**Gillis:** You can put conflicts or differences of view into two categories, roughly. One is details. Two is basic issues—basic choices and approaches to the function and form of the building. The basic issues get resolved at the beginning. When the initial design is done and I present what I want to do and it solves all of their functional interests, they look at it. If there is some functional aspect that should be adjusted, that should be different in some way, then I usually just rework something on the design—not something that is difficult to do. It is not a conflict in any fundamental sense, so I make those changes. Usually the design has enough flexibility and modularity that you can make those kinds of changes. Or, if there is something central to the design connected to something central in their functional needs that they are now changing, I present it to them: "Well, if you want that really changed—that significant, central, functional issue—then it is going to affect the design in this way." Sometimes they will then say, "Well, no, I don't want to affect that, I'm okay with the way it is." So, that is a rational process of sorting those things out, and making sure that they understand the consequences of any changes like that. If, on the other hand, they were to say, "Oh well, I just don't like the whole concept or something important about the concept," then we wouldn't have a deal—it



would be over. Unless I'm selectively misremembering, I don't think I've ever actually had that happen. ...

Regarding the details—the other category of potential conflict, this is important to answer, because there always are little things that come up—whether it is choice of material or color or what happens to a corner or how the furniture lays out in a particular area, etc.—my attitude toward them is that I usually succeed in convincing clients that the way I was approaching it *does* work the best for the situation. Although there are times when there are one or two other alternatives that are just as good and I have no problem with that as a variation. But the other part of that is that when you do a design, an architectural design, that is clear enough and strong enough as an organic entity, then certain little differences or changes in the details don't really have a fundamental impact on what you see. I mean, they all have importance, and as you look around here at my house, there is a continuation of certain kinds of details that keep repeating, and it wouldn't be the same if I hadn't done that. But if one of them had been changed, as long as it was in keeping with the overall theme, the visual ideas being expressed, it would not be a degradation. ...

**Kaizen:** Looking back on the early part of your career, what was the most *difficult* part?

**Gillis:** If I were to characterize anything as "difficult," it is just a combination of getting started with enough background so people will be willing to come to you, and being able to have something to present so that you can say, "This is what I do." Connected to that is finding enough clients in order to have enough money to live. They are just the normal start-up problems that everyone has—do you have enough of a résumé in the form of buildings or designs that have been completed or that aren't completed, but are visually clear enough that you can show people what you do? Or put another way, getting your vision of how buildings can be done spread around so that the one percent or one-tenth percent of people out there who will respond to it will come to you.

**Kaizen:** And what was the most *rewarding* aspect of starting your own business?

**Gillis:** Very simple—getting beautiful buildings and spaces built.

**Kaizen:** Buildings can be utilitarian and functional, but as architecture they can also express values and metaphysical themes—how does architecture do that?

**Gillis:** This question involves one of the most difficult parts of explaining any art, and it could easily fill a good-size book, but I will give a rough outline here. There is the ability to use your normal human capacities, to scan and enjoy the relationships of materials and forms and lines. There are also differences of what you want to accomplish at different places and times. For example, you can create a space which is very calm and soothing

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

## From the Executive Director



The new **Center for Ethics and Entrepreneurship** at Rockford College was launched in January of 2007 by a \$925,000 grant from the BB&T Charitable Foundation.

As our name indicates, CEE's mission is teaching and research in Business Ethics, Entrepreneurship, and related fields. In *Kaizen* we will keep you up to date on CEE's activities—and feature in each issue an exciting and informative interview with a high achiever.

In this issue we interview New York City architect John Gillis. We met with Mr. Gillis in his Boerum Hill home to explore his thoughts on entrepreneurship in the architectural profession, architecture's standing as an art form, the importance of being passionate about one's career, courage and artistic integrity.

We also feature five students who won CEE prizes for excellence in writing about Business Ethics, and two Rockford College professors who received CEE development grants for courses in Ethics and in Capitalism in the Modern World.

Publishing this first issue of our newsletter was a team effort in the best possible way. Kudos especially to Virginia Murr for her hard work on the John Gillis interview—and to Christopher Vaughan for his fine work in designing *Kaizen's* visual theme and layout.

Stephen Hicks, Ph.D.



Rockford College

JOHN GILLIS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3



Boerum Hill Townhouse

by what you do with the materials and shapes you use. So if you were trying to accomplish that—if you were trying to create a little world, a metaphysical effect, an emotional effect that would say to people as they came into the space, “Okay this is a place where you can be in repose, a place where you can relax from uncertainties or things that were bothering you,” you would not do it by having the architectural world have all kinds of random streaks of shapes that would be troubling and disorienting to you. You would instead have shapes and materials that have a simplicity, an orderliness, to them. ... Or, another kind of category would be that you want something, when you walk into a space, to give you a sense of uplift and excitement and the thrill of life. Therefore, you make the walls have a certain geometric undulation, like the Baroque architects do so well, with shapes and spaces curving out and curving in—in a way that isn't just random, bogus movement, but has a geometric orderliness to it. There might be a use of light in that case because you want to create a sense of uplift and excitement, where you'll have light from the outside, from the sun, coming in certain areas to highlight these walls or arches or ceilings, to keep your head up. They tend to force you, as you walk in the room, to rise up and look to a higher place.

**“Architecture, in its best form, is about creating buildings that combine the ideal and the real.”**

You can control or affect the way people react to a space by having light coming in certain areas or having different dark and light materials placed in a way so that they tend to want to move forward, rather than being static in one place. Or, people want to scan with their eyes, feeling better about the environment that they are in. Those are ways that you can affect their mental state, and that is what architecture, in its best form, is about—creating a space, creating buildings that combine the ideal and the real. ...

**Kaizen:** One of your heroes, Louis Sullivan, is famous for saying “Form follows function.” What does that mean in your work?

**Gillis:** What he meant, and what it properly does mean is that the designs of a building should satisfy the functions, the practicalities, and why it is being built. What he was reacting to was the 19<sup>th</sup> century world around him in architecture—and the earlier 18<sup>th</sup> century

stuff as well—where architects were focused on simply creating a certain classical form in buildings. So they would say, “Okay, this school, or financial institution should have a Pantheon front on it. It should look like the Greek temples. Then they would just fit the windows, doors, and floors into that straight-jacket from their preconceived notion of what it should look like. Instead, Sullivan said that you think about the function, then you create the form—the outside of the building, the inside spaces—that work with those functions. The best result is that those forms express, or make clear, those functions. So, for example, if you are doing an office building that is, let's say, a multiple story building with a bunch of floors. Functionally, it has a bunch of floors, and a lot of offices. So what you would tend to go towards is something that would show this pattern of many floors, many different sections of space within it. So, on the outside of the building, you'd see a lot of windows, you'd see floor levels, you'd see the columns that support it, you'd see, especially, the structure, which is a very important part of the function—that is what holds it up! By contrast, let's say that you were doing an auditorium or a theatre where you have one giant space and a lobby, and it doesn't have windows. So you wouldn't create a building which

has a bunch of fake windows. Instead, you would create a large, closed-form, somehow shaped in a way that matched the auditorium: sloped seats, a stage, and, above the stage, there is a fly loft where all of the scenery goes. In modern architecture, architects following the approach of form follows function have tended to express that shape—that there really is this big stage with a big structure above it for scenery storage, and not try to hide it in a big, rectangular box. That is form follows function.

Wright came up with a variation on that which was a better answer than his mentor's, Louis Sullivan. ...

**“Deconstructionists say that architecture should reflect the supposed chaos of life.”**

**Kaizen:** New York is one of the art and architectural centers of the world, with many competing styles and philosophies. What are the current leading trends?

**Gillis:** In the 80s and early 90s the trend was what was considered postmodern, but as a strict type and name that has been supplanted by a deconstructionist style. There are examples in New York City and all over the world. The postmodern approach was simply to be a rebellion against modernism and the archetypical modern Mies Van Der Rohe flat office buildings and stark, bland (in my view) buildings. Postmodernist architecture was a reaction to that, but the reaction was totally unfocused, because they simply said, “Well, we don't want that line, so we will start doing more interesting shapes or colors or spaces.” But all that amounts to is simply looking back over styles, the old classical Gothic, Renaissance, or Baroque—taking pieces of them, and pasting them on, saying, “Okay, we're going to be making references to these old styles, so we are really in the 'know.' We are really cutting edge because we are not doing the standard, modern stuff. We're doing *ironic* architecture,” as they often called it. Then they would say, “For those who are in the elite, knowledgeable group, they will recognize that our inclusion of this particular element—like a particular column—is referencing 17<sup>th</sup> century architecture of some sort.” But it is completely un-integrated; it is just things plastered on. That didn't last very long because it was an incoherent, non-philosophical approach to design and architecture.

Then some of the worst elements of architectural theory reared its head against postmodernism and pushed forward this deconstructionist approach, which is to say that architecture should reflect the supposed chaos of life, the

incoherent nature of the human condition, and the insanity of life. The result is that the leading proponents of that kind of architecture (such as Daniel Liebeskind or Frank Gehry), who have many of the great commissions of today, are doing buildings which, very deliberately, look like they are going to fall down. They go through great effort to create structures which are unbalanced visually or that, formally, on the outside, the walls are sloped in random ways so that there is no regularity to them. They are very deliberately anti-regular, anti-orderly, and anti-geometric. So what you are experiencing is chaos—visual chaos. ...

**Kaizen:** New York City is also one of the most intensely regulated building markets in the world—has the zoning

regulatory system impacted artistic freedom in architecture?

**Gillis:** It definitely has a strong impact. Most of my new building commissions, as opposed to reworking existing buildings, which is a common event in New York City because it is so built up already, have been outside of New York City. And, when I've done them, the zoning is quite restrictive in a lot of cases. The visual envelope with which you can work is very constrained by the zoning. But still, within that, if you take that as a given—just as in all architectural problems—you have to look at your limitations imposed by site conditions, or functional issues, or regulatory controls as the given, as the reality you are operating in. By limitations of



Boerum Hill Townhouse, interior

## CEE Guest Speakers:

### Robert Bradley, Jr.

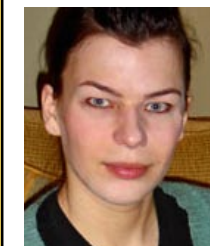


Robert Bradley, Ph.D. was a longtime employee of Enron, the collapsed corporate giant. During the company's last years he served as

speechwriter and regulatory advisor for Ken Lay, Enron's CEO, who was convicted in May 2006 on multiple counts of fraud and conspiracy. Bradley is now president of the Institute for Energy Research (IER) in Houston, Texas, and is completing his sixth book, *Political Capitalism: Insull, Enron, and Beyond*. His previous books have been on energy history and policy.

Dr. Bradley visited the CEE and Rockford College on March 28th, 2007 and gave his presentation to an audience of about 115 students, professors, and interested members of the greater Rockford community. The theme of Dr. Bradley's talk was how philosophy—not only business economics and political economy—is key to unraveling the Ken Lay Paradox to understand the rise and fall of Enron.

### Anja Hartleb-Parson



Anja Hartleb-Parson is a graduate student in political theory at Northern Illinois University and working toward her Ph.D. She was born in East Berlin,

has lived in Russia and Canada, and emigrated to the U.S. in 2001. She is a 2005 graduate of Rockford College, and on February 21st, 2007, she returned to the college to give a lecture to students in Business and Economic Ethics (PHIL 325).

Hartleb-Parson's lecture focused on the 2005 Supreme Court decision in the eminent domain case *Kelo et al. v. the City of New London*. Her lecture covered the Fifth Amendment's “Takings” clause, the Supreme Court's definition of “public use,” and key issues coming out of the *Kelo* decision, such as balancing powers between judiciary and legislature, the role of government in economic matters, and resolving conflicts between individual rights and societal needs.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

**Student Essay Prize Winners**

In April 2007, **The Center for Ethics and Entrepreneurship** held an essay contest on the topic: *Resolved: The Love of Money is the Root of All Evil*. Contestants were judged on the basis of the thoroughness, cohesiveness, and originality of their arguments. The First Prize winner received \$500, and four Runners-up received prizes of \$100 each.

The contest winners are:



**Lindsey Johnson**  
First Prize



**Paul Lindsay**  
Runner-up



**Sean Pekarsky**  
Runner-up



**Carla Wiesend**  
Runner-up

**Robert Zeek**  
Runner-up [Picture not available]

Congratulations to our five prize winners!

**New Philosophy Professor: Shawn Klein**



Professor Klein received his Bachelor's degree from Tufts University in Massachusetts in 1995, and his Master's

in Philosophy from Arizona State University in 2001, where he is currently completing his Ph.D. Professor Klein's specialty is normative ethics. In addition to his various publications, he is the coeditor of *Harry Potter and Philosophy: If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts*, published by Open Court in 2004. This Fall Semester he is teaching courses in Introduction to Philosophy, Ethical Theory, and Business Ethics.

JOHN GILLIS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

the clients wants a house of a certain kind, with so many bedrooms, a certain kind of kitchen, or they want an office building of a certain size, all on one floor, or multi-floor, or you are doing a hospital,



Stamford, CT House

and it has to have enough rooms for patients and surgeries, etc. Those are all limitations on what you are doing because they are the functions you are trying to accomplish. And, within that, there's also a limitation of a plot of land you are working with: what shape it is, what limitations are in the law on how high it can go, how far you can be from other properties around you. There are also limitations of the environment, like where the direction of the sun is, of whether there are other things that affect the light and air that your building might have. So all of these things constrain how you are going to approach your design solution. You have to look at those as the normal constraints of reality. Just like, if you want to walk down a set of steps, you can't choose to just leap down 20 steps, you have to take them one, two, or three at a time. That's the nature of humans and their ability to navigate things. So, in the same way, architecture has limitations. The legal limitations add on to that and sometimes they are onerous. But, sometimes, if they aren't too bad, they are simply a part of that package of limitations and they are key to coming up with solutions. ...

The place where that is a central problem is when you're doing a building that is in a landmark district in New York or other cities. ... For example, when I first did the building we're sitting in, this house, it is in a landmark district—and although it is a brand new building, it was an empty lot, and the landmarks commission has control over what to build. So I talked with them and they made clear, fortunately in this case, that their current *modus operandi*, their current philosophy, was that they didn't want mimicry of the adjacent, historic buildings when a new building was being done.

They weren't looking for what they call "the Disney Effect," of simply making something that was a fake, 19<sup>th</sup> century building. They had this vague idea that they wanted something modern, but that was in keeping with what was around already. So they had this subjectivist approach that was totally uncodified. You never can know exactly what they are going to go for, what they will accept. But at least they weren't saying, "You've got to literally match the forms and details of these old buildings around here." That is why I was willing to proceed and to work on doing a new house for myself in this place, on this location, since the property was available for me to buy. I did a building that I wanted, and it looked the way I wanted it to, with all modern details. But, in its final form, it used a brick that was similar to the brick that was commonly used in the area. So it was perfectly modern, my kind of building, but it had a certain material relationship to some of the other buildings around here.

Fortunately, in this case, the landmarks commission had a political agenda of wanting to promote the idea of having new buildings, in-fills, as they called them, worked into the existing fabric of the historic district to make people realize the value of living in the city and being an urban place. All of this was a political agenda. They looked upon my project as a great political asset. So they didn't give me much grief, although it was completely happenstance because I didn't know that at the time. I knew lots of other projects, for example, one before mine, where a developer was building a house for himself in the historic district. They ran him around for a



Gardiner Country House

year and a half, with multiple designs and multiple architects, but they kept rejecting everything. They kept saying, "Okay, you can do a modern building," but because it was such a high-profile location and because it was a nasty developer, perhaps, they really put him through the wringer. It wasn't really an in-fill; it was at the end of a block, so it was a very special location. They just had this whole different philosophical, political take on it.

So, in my own case, going back to dealing with these people and controls by politicians, the answer is that either you get lucky and they have their own agendas, so they won't give you a lot of grief and they will give you what you want, or you just don't go forward—you just don't even do it, because it isn't going to work out. In my case, with this building, when they saw the design for it, they basically accepted it. I was in this big hearing room in a formal hearing, with all of the commissioners around, and the public was there. I made the presentation and they made their commentary: "Oh, yeah, we basically like it. It is a good approach, a good solution." Then several of the commissioners started to nit-pick. They started to say things like, "Oh, well I would like the details on the top of the building to be a little smaller, and maybe the door to the entrance needs to be massaged and changed in some way," and so on. So they concluded by saying, "We're not finally approving your project, but we want you to get back with the landmark

**"You have to look at limitations imposed by site conditions, or functional issues, or regulatory controls as the given."**

commission staff and massage these details, and we'll make recommendations to you to make them better." I stood up and said, "Well, I'm not coming back. As far as I can see, you basically agree that this is a suitable approach, and I'm not going to get involved in a process of nit-picking the overall design." I was able to do that because I, along with my wife, had gotten the property contingently, so we didn't actually own it yet. So, we could walk away from the deal because I knew that the landmarks commission could be a difficult problem, and I was

fortunately, therefore, in a position of telling the landmarks commission that I was out of there if they didn't go along with this. Interestingly, what happened was that the head of the commission then said, "Oh, well we really didn't mean to say that we are trying to control what you're doing and that we want to change anything basic or fundamental, but we just have a few small concerns. We're sure that if you just have one meeting with the staff and talk about the couple of things that we've talked about here, everything will be fine." So they completely backed down and that was great because when I did have my little meeting the next day with the staff, they were very unsure of their position. One of the issues was the top of the building, the details of how the building ended. It was about two feet high, so I simply made it a half inch smaller, which makes no difference perceptually, and they were pleased. This gave them the ability to say that something happened.

**Kaizen:** You now have built up a flourishing architectural practice in New York. Looking back over the years, what has been your biggest entrepreneurial challenge?

**Gillis:** Well, it's basically managing the uncertainties of an architectural practice—the ups and downs, the backlog of work or the non-back log of work. So you have to have, on the business side, enough flexibility so that you are not locked into huge overhead and expenses that go on for years and years, when all of a sudden, due to recession or real estate troubles, you have half the work that you had two years earlier. Therefore, you are not using all of your space; you have to cut down on staff, equipment, etc. You need to manage the practice so you have enough flexibility to get out of commitments. This way you're not stuck with huge money-costs that you can't get out of for a long time. I've seen plenty of architectural firms that grew quickly, going from having 20 people to 200 people working for them, then some local crash occurred, or their particular segment of the market suddenly slowed down, and they lost 75% of their work. You would go to their offices and there would be vast drafting rooms that were dark and empty, and they

Congratulations to Professor Matthew Flamm and Professor Fred Rezazadeh, who are the recipients of this year's course development grants.



Dr. Flamm is Assistant Professor of Philosophy. He has published in *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, *Education and Culture*, and *Overheard in Seville: Bulletin of the*

*Santayana Society*. Dr. Flamm received his B.A. degree from State University of New York at Stony Brook in 1996, his M.A. from Texas A&M University in 1999, and his Ph.D. from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale in 2003. He regularly teaches courses in Ethics and American Philosophy. Professor Flamm's grant was for the development of his course on Ethics (PHIL 122).



Dr. Rezazadeh is Professor of Economics and Business. He is involved with national organizations in the area of economic growth and development,

serves as a local business consultant, and is a published author of books and articles. He teaches Microeconomics, Price Theory, and Capitalism. Professor Rezazadeh's grant was for his development of a course he is teaching this semester with Dr. Hicks on Capitalism in the Modern World (PHIL/ECON 376). This course is concerned with the nature of capitalism, its moral status, and its relationship to social phenomena such as the ending of slavery, the women's rights movement, and globalization.



Rockford College

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

## MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE CENTER AND ROCKFORD COLLEGE

*Kaizen* is published every semester by the **Center for Ethics and Entrepreneurship** at Rockford College. Founded in 1847, Rockford College is a four-year, independent, coeducational institution offering undergraduate and graduate degrees in traditional liberal arts and professional fields. One of 81 colleges nationwide designated as a “College with a Conscience” by the *Princeton Review*, Rockford College also is among 76 U.S. colleges and universities selected by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching for inclusion in a “Community Engagement” college classification. Rockford College is one of 11 colleges in Illinois and 276 in the country with a Phi Beta Kappa chapter, the oldest and most prestigious academic honors society, and in 2007, was named a “College of Distinction.”

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### JOHN GILLIS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

would be paying tens of thousands of dollars a month for empty space. Then they would go bankrupt. I've managed to avoid that by keeping it flexible.

**Kaizen:** What is next for John Gillis Architecture? What are you working on now—if you can tell us without violating confidences?

**Gillis:** I'm doing a wide variety of projects—the way I like it to be. I've got a new house project in upstate New York, which I'm excited about, for a couple who are looking for the kind of work I do. I'm doing a complete renovation of a classic, 19<sup>th</sup> century Brooklyn brownstone for a client where we are opening up the space (a lot of these old houses have very constrained, Victorian spatial relationships and tight rooms and lots of ornamental details that are kind of heavy and sometimes not really aesthetically pleasing). Her building is really nice on the outside, but she wants to open it up on the inside. So we are massively changing, structurally, the inside and making it much more open and bright for her and her children. I'm also doing a small apartment building in Brooklyn, which probably will end up being a group of condominiums. It is on a unique site and the client wants something that is special, with dramatic spaces and views of the city. I'm also doing some new medical offices for a couple of doctors in Manhattan, which is always a special challenge of getting the work-flow right for the doctors and how they see and treat patients, managing the flow of the administration, making a pleasurable space to be taken care of. I've got a client who has an existing house on a big piece of land upstate. We'll be adding on a large chunk to the house. They are really excited about making it more like the kind of building I do. As well, I'm doing some custom apartments in New York City for clients from Israel who want to have some comfortable, special places to live when they come to New York.

**Kaizen:** In closing, what is the most important piece of advice that you would give to those just starting out in creative fields such as architecture?

**Gillis:** What I would say is make sure that you find the kind of work that excites you. Look around. Take the time, even if something doesn't hit you right away, it will come. The kinds of things that start your heart beating faster, your pulse racing, are what you have to pay attention to. Just listen to yourself and say, “Okay, this is it.” This is the kind of thing that, in the long term, will excite you. If it does, pursue it. Make sure that in all respects, even in the parts you may not love, that they are simply part and parcel of what you want to focus on in your life. When you find that passion, that will make all of the other things seem insignificant.

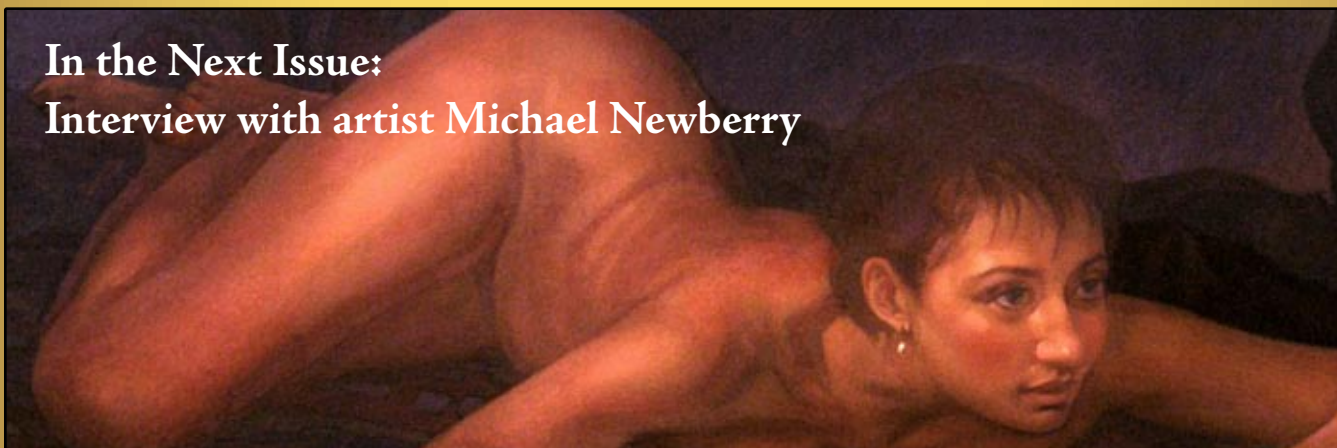
*This interview of John Gillis was conducted for Kaizen by Virginia Murr and Stephen Hicks. To see more of Gillis's architecture, please visit his website at [www.architetto.com](http://www.architetto.com). Kaizen's full interview with Gillis will soon be posted on the Center's website.*

*All photographs of John Gillis' architecture courtesy of Wade Zimmerman. All photographs of John Gillis by Virginia Murr.*



改善

## In the Next Issue: Interview with artist Michael Newberry



**Kaizen** (改善) is a Japanese term meaning “change for the better” or “continuous improvement.” Kaizen has been applied worldwide as a method for continuously improving the efficiency of all aspects of a business through a cyclical process of standardizing operations, measuring their efficacy, evaluating the data, innovating to improve performance, and returning again to standardization. Kaizen is also used to eliminate wasteful effort and to humanize relationships within the workplace.

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