

# Mack Scogin Merrill Elam wins four Honor awards

By Lee Hall  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Architects tend to have lengthy résumés. They often tout projects for which they competed; but did not win.

Then, there are the résumés of Atlanta architects Mack Scogin and Merrill Elam. The husband-and-wife partners of **Mack Scogin Merrill Elam Architects Inc.** have a lot about which to boast.

The firm won four of the five Honor Awards in Architecture doled out in this year's South Atlantic Region of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), an uncanny harvest in the completely anonymous process.

"What is truly amazing is that the four awards that we gave to them were for four distinct building types," said Brigitte Shim, partner in **Shim-Sutcliffe Architects** in Toronto, Ontario, a juror in the AIA competition. "When they opened the envelopes it was a big surprise to me, and a very pleasant surprise."

The firm's array of work included a mountain home in Dillard, Ga.; a library in Clayton County; a student dormitory at Tulane University in New Orleans; and an industrial plant in Cherokee County done for **Herman Miller Inc.** (Nasdaq: MLHR). (In a strange twist of fate, the Miller plant will close in February. Herman Miller will move its operations to another facility in Michigan.)

## Shape and scale

It is not only the variety of work that impressed jurors, but the wide range in scale.

"The architectural quality remained superb, even while doing larger buildings. It is quite difficult to change scale from small to large, and to have them maintain their integrity and overall fine architectural qualities," said juror Jane Weinzapfel, partner in **Leers Weinzapfel Associates Architects Inc.** in Boston.

Scogin and Elam pride themselves on their versatility. Both earned their stripes early in their respective careers, designing industrial buildings while working at Atlanta's Heery & Heery Architects and Engineers Inc.

"We don't specialize in any particular building type," Elam said. "We enjoy having a combination of project types and sizes because you can concentrate on different issues that way."

Scogin and Elam have worked together for more than 30 years. They founded their firm as Parker and Scogin in 1984, later renaming it Scogin Elam and Bray. When former partner Lloyd Bray left in 2000, the team settled on the firm's present eponym.

## It all started at Tech

Scogin earned his bachelor's degree in architecture from Georgia Tech in 1966. Over the years, he has been a visiting architecture critic at Rice University, Georgia Tech and Harvard University. From 1990 to 1995, Scogin chaired the Department of Architecture at Harvard's Graduate School of Design.

Elam picked up her architecture degree from Georgia Tech in 1971, then earned an MBA from Georgia State University in 1982. She was Ruth Stevenson Chair Visiting Professor of Architectural Design at the University of Texas at Austin in the spring of 2003.

The couple worked together at Heery & Heery for several years, starting in the early 1970s, before forming their own firm.

Peers, colleagues and competitors have praised the work of Scogin and Elam, particularly their incorporation of building and landscape.

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**Signature style:** Jurors were unaware of the designers' identities when they selected four separate projects by husband-and-wife team Mack Scogin and Merrill Elam for four out of five AIA Honor Awards.

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# Tree house embraces nature

Family matters dictated a redesign of a simple garage and potting shed in Dillard into something special.

The Mountain Tree House project, designed by **Mack Scogin Merrill Elam Architects Inc.** of Atlanta, received an Honor Award for Architecture this year from the South Atlantic Region of the American Institute of Architects (AIA).

A new grandchild prompted the building's owners to seek designs on the conversion of the garage into a playroom and bunkhouse. As the project expanded, it came to encompass a new garage, a guest room and a deck to take in mountain vistas.

Jurors hailed the project as drawing a wonderful distinction between materials and their use, a contrast of rough and

smooth surfaces that results in "elegant sculptural play." The jury complimented the firm on a design it described as extending the language of the architecture into the landscape.

"They created some special places to experience nature, including some elegant enclosed spaces," said juror Jane Weinzapfel of **Leers Weinzapfel Associates Architects Inc.** in Boston. "Within a very simple palette, they were able to create the image of moving through a space and having an individual architectural experience."

Much of the material and construction were provided by builders and craftspeople from surrounding communities in the North Georgia mountains.

— By Lee Hall



**Carving spaces:** Jurors acclaimed the Mountain Tree House project in Dillard for "extending the language of architecture into the landscape."

# Scogin and Elam win four awards

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"I don't know that we're doing it all right, but we must be doing something right," Scogin said.

The firm also wins kudos from customers. Because it handles a lot of government projects, the company has learned to make best use of available efficiencies.

"They are quite gifted in their ability to get the most out of the dollar," said Carol Stewart, director of the Clayton County Library System. Mack Scogin Merrill Elam has designed three libraries for the Clayton system, the most recent being the 12,000-square-foot, \$1.8 million Riverdale branch, for which the firm won one of its AIA Honor Awards.

Scogin and Elam has picked up its share of national recognition. The firm has won five national AIA Awards for Excellence, an Academy Award in Architecture in 1995 from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the 1996 Chrysler Award for Innovation in Design.

## Local projects

Other projects of note include a pedestrian bridge over U.S. 41 in Marietta, renovation of the Trevor Arnett Hall at Clark Atlanta University and a radio station and corporate headquarters for WQXI-AM/WSTR-FM. The firm was recently awarded the design of a new federal courthouse in Austin, Texas.

Elam is quick to defend Atlanta's architectural reputation, which is often impugned by outsiders as a wasteland of office parks and strip malls.

"Atlanta is a different kind of city than those that had their initial roots in pedestrian activity," she said. "We have no natural boundaries, so we just expand."

There are many fine architectural examples in the city, Elam said. She named Atlanta's Central Library at Margaret Mitchell Square (designed by Marcel Breuer) and the High Museum of Art (designed by Richard Meier) as among her favorites.

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SPECIAL

**Illuminating:** The Philmon Branch Library won kudos for Mack Scogin Merrill Elam Architects because the windows are designed to give lots of reflected light.

## Light defines Philmon library

The old Riverdale branch of the Clayton County Library System was shrinking. Located next door to a Krispy Kreme on busy Georgia 85, the library lost a little of its parking lot every time the road got wider.

The county delayed the building of a replacement during the 1996 Olympics in hopes of keeping a handle on construction costs. By 1998, it could wait no longer.

The library system called on the Atlanta firm of **Mack Scogin Merrill Elam Architects Inc.** to design a new branch on the corner of Lamar Hutcheson Parkway and Valley Hill Road. The Lee B. Philmon Branch Library, a 12,000-square-foot, \$1.8 million project, has won kudos for the architects, and was named an Honor Award winner for Architecture this year from the South Atlantic Region of the American Institute of Architects (AIA).



"We wanted to have something that presented a haven, a place that would project calm in an intensively developed area," said library system Director Carol Stewart. The project is the third the firm has done for Clayton County.

The architectural jurors commended what they called a building that "makes a subtle transition with the site and continues with it throughout the structure."

The design includes an opposing truss concept that creates an undulated ceiling, bound by triangular windows. Jurors commented that the "window glazing gives spaces within the building amazing reflected light."

Stewart said the library system returned to Mack Scogin Merrill Elam because of its ability to work within the confines of a government pocketbook.

"They are very gifted in getting the most out of the dollar," she said.

— By Lee Hall



SPECIAL

**Prize:** Jurors said Mack Scogin Merrill Elam Architects' site design for a 330,000-square-foot Herman Miller furniture factory was very interesting.

## Award winner is up for sale

Good looks and innovative design do not always guarantee economic success.

A 330,000-square-foot furniture factory, designed by the Atlanta firm of **Mack Scogin Merrill Elam Architects Inc.** for the Cherokee County operations of **Herman Miller Inc.** (Nasdaq: MLHR) received an Honor Award for Architecture this year from the South Atlantic Region of the American Institute of Architects (AIA).

By early 2004, the plant will stand vacant. Herman Miller decided last summer to close the Canton site, and move its functions to an existing facility in Michigan.

"Our understanding is that all of the people will be gone by the end of February," said Pamela Carnes, executive director of the Cherokee County Chamber of Commerce.

Still, AIA jurors praised the project, calling it "an elegant and sophisticated plan that relates efficiently to the manufacturing function of the structure."

"The architectural qualities of a very large building, extending into a courtyard and a kind of 'heroic' truck court made for a very interesting site design," said juror Jane Weinzapfel of **Leers Weinzapfel Associates Architects Inc.** in Boston.

Jurors said they "loved the way it continues architectural treatment into landscape."

The company intends to sell the building.

"The property has been appraised and listed, and we have seen some initial interest, but nothing beyond that at this early point," Joe Nowicki, the company's vice president of investor relations, told analysts in a conference call last month.

— By Lee Hall



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