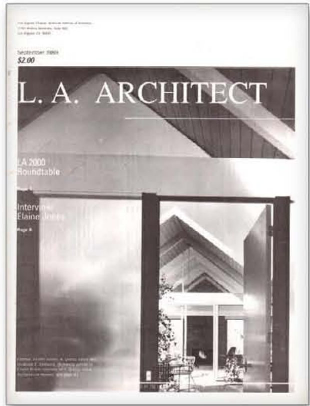
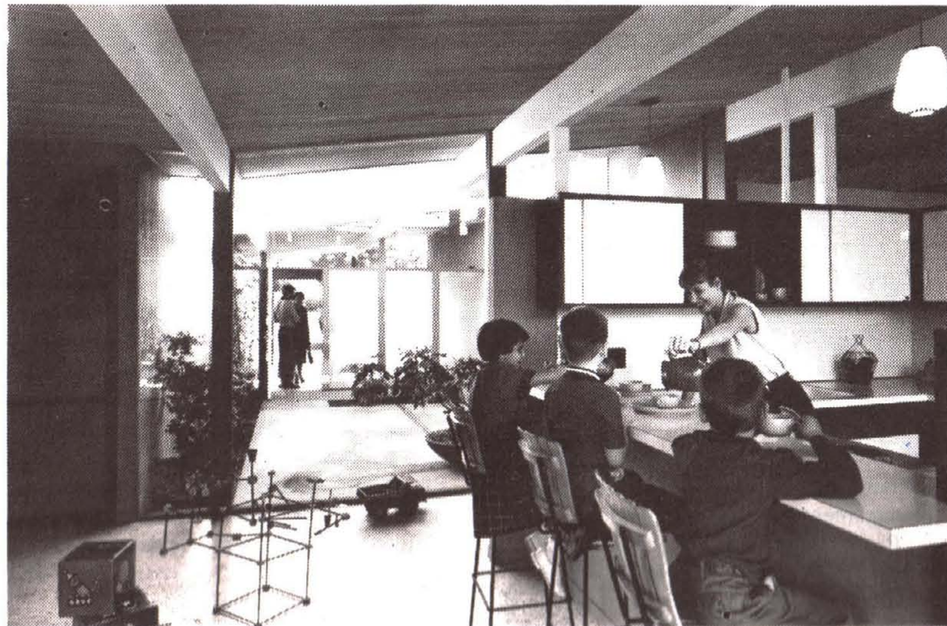


Elaine Jones

A. Quincy Jones, FAIA, died ten years ago on August 3, 1979. Kenneth Caldwell talks with Quincy's widow, Elaine Jones, about some of his inspirations, projects and ideas.

You have written about architecture and design...you had your own public relations firm. Did you have any idea when you moved to Los Angeles in 1948, or shortly after, that this was going to be a rich period in the history of modern architecture?



Eichler Home interior, A. Quincy Jones, AIA, and Frederick E. Emmons, AIA, Architects (by Ernest Braun, photo courtesy of A. Quincy Jones Architectural Archive).

Elaine and Quincy Jones home, 1989 (photo by Toshi Yoshimi, courtesy of *Interior Design*).

Well, I don't think I did. I did take "Arts & Architecture" when I lived in Portland, Oregon. And it always seemed interesting to me later that I had three pre-Los Angeles files which turned out to be significant. I had a file on Charles Eames, I had a file on Alexander Girard, and I had a file on A. Quincy Jones. I can't tell you why I had those files. But those were three of the men that I happened to work with later on.

How did you meet Quincy?

I met Quincy and his partner Fred Emmons at an AIA meeting in 1951, which I attended with one of my clients. I didn't see him much in those early years, but we did call the firm often for photographs and information about building products in relation to architectural usage.

I was wondering about early influences on Quincy.

I have no idea what Quincy thought about in terms of influence. I do know that when Quincy was interviewed by Ian McCallum for the book *Architecture USA*, McCallum sent him a questionnaire. One of the questions was, "Who was the greatest influence in your life?" Shortly after that, Quincy was talking with Minoru Yamasaki at an AIA convention. Yamasaki was at the University of Washington in the class before Quincy, and he was also in McCallum's book. Quincy said, "You know, Yami, it was strange but when I got this questionnaire from McCallum about who was the greatest influence on my life, I wrote down Spike Pries' name, Lionel H. Pries, before I even realized it." Yamasaki had done the same thing. I have to think that consciously, that mentor was a great influence on Quincy's life and the way he thought about architecture.

One influence as he was growing up was a friendship with the two Japanese children his age who lived across the street. Their father had a wholesale nursery which raised plant materials. He learned to respect the plant materials themselves, but he also learned a lot about being a part of a Japanese family, as a friend of the two children. They were friends throughout Quincy's life, Yoshio Kobata and Joseph Kobata.

Did Quincy ever discuss other architects who might have been influential?

He had tremendous admiration for as many architects as you'd ever want to name. He absolutely loved architecture and he loved architects. It was like a seven-day-a-week, 24 hour-a-day love affair with architecture that didn't exclude anything else in his life. That was just the force that made the engine run.

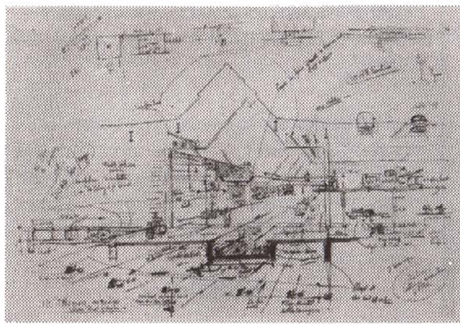
I came to know about Quincy's work through my own interest in Eichler homes. How did Quincy and Joseph Eichler meet?

Quincy's Hvistendahl House was published in *Architectural Forum* (December 1950) as the "sub-division house" of the year in the same issue that one of Eichler's community plans (designed by architects Anshen & Allen) was named "sub-division plan of the year." Joe Eichler telephoned Quincy and said to the effect, "If I had the sub-division plan of the year and you had the sub-division house of the year, why don't we get together?" So Quincy went up to Palo Alto, they met and they both said later that they shook hands that day and said they were going to work together. And that was

the closest they ever came to a written agreement. They worked together to the day Joe Eichler died in 1974.

Do you know where the atrium idea came from?

I don't know if Quincy knew about it from anybody before the early Greeks. In the Eichler houses, I was told by somebody how Mr. Eichler got interested. Quincy did a wonderful atrium when he designed the Sidney Brody house. The Brody's hosted a reception for Adlai Stevenson for one of the



Sketch, Herman Miller Facility, A. Quincy Jones, 1972.

campaigns against Eisenhower, and Quincy asked Joe to come down as his guest. Quincy had suggested the atrium to Eichler several times. After Mr. Eichler went to the Brody House, he said, ''Well, I don't understand it, Quincy. If the Brodys have this wonderful atrium here, why don't you do something like that for our tract houses?'' Once he saw it and felt it, he knew what it could be. One of the reasons that Quincy liked to do custom houses was a response to the fact that the architect doesn't have a laboratory like a chemist or a scientist. A custom house offers opportunities to do things that later trickle down to development or other housing.

How was the firm organized? Was it different than other firms?

There was a commitment to do a variety of work and not specialize. Quincy said that if you've done a house, then you could do a better school. If you've done a school, you could do a better church. If you've done a church, you could do a better factory. Each one of these experiences informs the way you do another.

Another thing that was interesting was the importance of not compartmentalizing the office. I think that there was a thread of unity--you weren't in production, or you weren't in design, you weren't in something special. The persons involved at the beginning in design were continuously involved throughout the job.

Does this sketch of the Herman Miller Facility illustrate a little about how Quincy worked?

This 30x40 trace drawing is the first time that his idea for this particular drawing was on paper. It would be very hard to talk to someone who was going to do a drawing and just tell him verbally how to do it. A sketch note was an easy way for Quincy to work. The two persons who made drawings from this blockout had to know a lot about architecture, they had to know a lot about Quincy and they had to know a lot about how things were done in the office. Many times the greatest joy that I have in working on these archives is to find some of these sketch notes. It wasn't just a one way communication, it went back and forth. I've found drawings that Kaz Nomura would leave on Quincy's desk, saying something like, ''How am I doing?'' or ''Is this what you have in mind?'' But it wasn't talking like you and I are doing. That would have killed them.

If I had no other reason to get these drawings into a repository, it would be for that one person, in the next hundred years, who would see the connection between the original trace drawings. Not that these are great art in themselves, but they are evidence of so much real, honest thinking. Different people do it different ways.

You have been working on these archives since the Process book came out in 1983. What has kept you going all these years?

It's important for students and scholars to have access to this kind of material. If we respect the person who did the work, in this case the architect, I think we also have to feel it's not too important that it was that particular person who did the work. It's not important that Quincy's firm did this work, or that Quincy and Fred as partners did the work. I don't think that is the great tribute to Quincy. I think the great tribute to Quincy would be that this work exists and at some time it will be of importance to a student or scholar downstream.

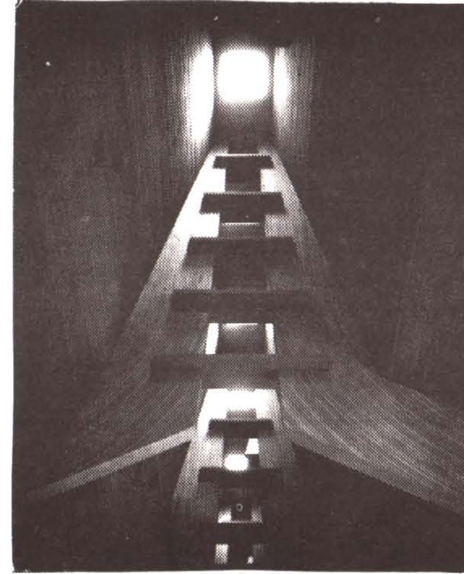
Where are the archives going?

I'm really pleased to say that they are going to the Department of Special Collections at University Library at UCLA. The Department of Special Collections has a significant reputation in the United States for its dedication to scholarship.

Quincy designed some churches. My favorite is St. Michael and All Angels in Studio City. Was he a religious man?

Quincy was a very religious individual in the same sense as somebody who loves and respects nature and people. I don't know how Quincy came to some of his insights, but he always knew how to cut through the mush and the dogma. In a religious structure, the important thing for him was how the individual would feel in that space.

Whatever building it was, whether it was a church or not, there was always an idea about it. The idea which usually ended up in the kind of structural system you would have to translate your idea, came from the plan and whatever else was outside as well as inside. In this case (St. Michael's), the structure is very interesting because the roof structure is two separate structures. Only the ties between the two laminated beams tie those two structures together as one. The light comes down between because he wanted that light to come down between. And he wanted no columns inside the nave. To have the idea to do those two separate structures, each with its own integrity, and



Looking into steeple, St. Michael and all Angels, Studio City, (photo by Larry Frost).

then just tied together as they were, I thought it was an absolutely beautiful statement of mathematics.

Looking through the texts of Quincy's lectures, I came across the eulogy he gave for Kaz Nomura. He ended it with this statement: ''...for the great man is he who never lost his child's heart.''

Well, he loved Kaz so much. Kaz was his student at USC. And there were times that the student was the teacher. Quincy was never the same after Kaz died. I mean, it was a part of him that left. That wonderful quality that Kaz had, always seeing things through with a child's eye...it was a language he had. And it has something to do with your light. That's something that comes from the tradition of architecture, too, about the light. We read about it in all their writings, we hear about the light in architecture. And when the light goes away from the experience of architecture, part of the architecture leaves. And he was talking about that man leaving.

Kenneth Caldwell
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