



## Came a Tribe from the North

THE TRADITION OF VANDAL ARCHITECTS IN SUN VALLEY

BY Kate Elgee

Over a century ago, under the gloomy skies and rolling wheat fields of the northern Idaho Palouse, the state's first and oldest university was built. In a style reminiscent of leafy East Coast campuses, architects laid sweeping lawns, brick-and-mortar clock towers, busting Gothic structures and stained-glass windows flanked in limestone. With a style that visually referenced tradition and time, they created a pastoral genius loci, or "sense of place," that would shape the state, and its namesake college, for years to come.

Now overgrown with ivy and bustling with students, the University of Idaho has been continuing to grow on this foundation. The College of Art and Architecture program (CAA), established in 1920, has been consistently producing some of Sun Valley's most talented and notable architects.

Local Vandal alumni include Jim McLaughlin of McLaughlin & Associates Architects, Mark Pynn of Mark Pynn Architect LLC, Nick Latham, Buffalo Rixon and Michael Bulls of Ruscitto | Latham |

Blanton Architectura (RLB), Michael Doty of Michael Doty Associates, Architects, and Mark de Reus of de Reus Architects.

Having won national awards and fellowships for their work in Sun Valley, these Idaho graduates are the brains behind many of our landmark buildings. With projects like the Sun Valley Pavilion, the Bald Mountain lodges, Our Lady of the Snows Catholic Church, Whiskey Jacques, Moss Gardens and many award-winning residential homes, they have designed the spaces that have

shaped our community, our identity and our landscape—in other words, our "sense of place"—for the last 40 years.

There are currently over 20 graduates from the University of Idaho's CAA program living and practicing in the Wood River Valley, meaning Vandals comprise almost half of the architects registered with the Mountain Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA).

"There is a strong community of Vandals here," said Mark Pynn (Class of '79), who was an important member of the foundation that rescued the CAA back in 2005 (after it had been absorbed into the College of Science and Letters) and is currently a member of the advisory council for the college.

"It's a great design-oriented school," he said, adding, "a college of art and architecture." Based on the idea of theorists like Walter Benjamin, the program focuses on having no division among artistic disciplines.

CAA Dean Mark Hoversten explained, "We are unique in that we have programs of art and design, architecture, interior design, landscape architecture, virtual technology and design, graphic design, fine arts and information design all under one roof. It's rare to have them as one integrated program,



THIS PAGE Blanket Bay, acclaimed as New Zealand's finest luxury lodge, was designed by Sun Valley architect Jim McLaughlin. OPPOSITE PAGE Cold Springs Crossing, designed by Michael Doty, is the latest example of the University of Idaho's architectural influence in Sun Valley.

but we feel that each of these departments informs, and is informed by, the other."

"It's a great program that produces a lot of fine architects," said Jim McLaughlin (Class of '71). "It provided me with a well-rounded education that really prepared me for the field." When he arrived in Sun Valley in the early '70s, fresh from Moscow, Idaho, he was the first Vandal to start practicing architecture locally. Since then, he has brought in many U of I graduates to work for him, including 25-year employee Bernie Johnson.



### UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO AIA PROGRAM

Founded in 1889, the University of Idaho has long been considered one of the best colleges in the Northwest and nothing exemplifies the school's strengths more than its architecture program. The unique, nationally accredited program combines classroom learning, design studios and hands-on programs, allowing students to develop a solid creative foundation in both art and architecture—something you won't find in most architecture programs.



Left to right: Michael Doty, Jim McLaughlin and Mark Pynn—all are U of I graduates.

Similarly, after Nick Latham (Class of '73), a few years behind McLaughlin, established himself in Sun Valley, he brought up young Vandal bucks like Michael Bulls (Class of '02), Buffalo Rixon (Class of '93), and professional engineer Scott Heiner (Class of '86), now all three are partners and/or principles at the firm.

Both Bulls and Rixon credit Latham as "a huge mentor and influence." And now they are showing the dormer-and-drip-molding ropes to architectural intern Mike Smith (Class of '09). Only a few months from taking his test to become a licensed architect, Smith will complete a three-generation legacy of Vandals working at RLB.

"It was quite a shock stepping out of the academic environment and into the professional world of architecture. Academia and the professional practice are two very different animals," explained John Rowland (Class of '05) who works at de Reus Architects. But having U of I alumni like John McLaughlin and Mark de Reus (Class of '77) to turn to for advice and support made all the difference. As John explained, "Having a close-knit community of peers is invaluable."

There is an important element of mentorship among the Vandals of Sun Valley, between the inexperienced and the established architects, that keeps younger graduates rotating in—an element that is hard to find in larger firms in the city.

As Nicole Ramey (Class of '06) of Michael Doty Associates explained, "I could have gone to work for a corporate firm in Boise. In fact, I did for a while. But I would have been swallowed up by such a huge conglomerate. I wouldn't have had the freedom of experience or the working relationships I have here."

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