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creative, talented, and innovative professionals leaving their signature mark in the Great Lakes region.

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By definition, an architect is an individual who designs for the built or natural environment and guides plans to completion—often responsible for some of the most breathtaking structures and soothing spaces. While their specialty and philosophy or approach depend upon the perspective, architects have the ability to leave their signature mark on the world, whether fully realized or not by the observer.

In this continued series, Great Lakes By Design Magazine had an opportunity to learn more about some of the architects practicing in the Great Lakes region—and what drives them to create spaces and places that have the ability to influence and inspire peoples' lives.

Photography by M Buck Studio

PICTURED: (from left to right) first row: Brent Dykstra, LEED AP; Kevin Montgomery, AIA, LEED GA; Kenneth Richmond, AIA; Aimee P.C. Buccellato, LEED AP; second row: Garrick Landsberg, AIA, LEED AP; Sarah Bourgeois, AIA; Eric De Witt, AIA; Kevin Buccellato, AIA, NCARB; top: Nick Liebler, LEED AP.

Kenneth C. Richmond, AIA

ARCHITECT, FOUNDER | KEN RICHMOND, ARCHITECT

Traverse City, Michigan

For Ken Richmond, AIA, founder and partner at Ken Richmond, Architect in Traverse City, Michigan, a day in life will often see him spending a certain amount of time interacting with clients and consultants, office time and field time, and dealing with the process of building—which he pointed out is different than the end result.

“To me the process is 90 percent of what we do and arguably more interesting, more important, and a lot of times more fun than the actual product, the actual end result,” Richmond said.

Ken Richmond, Architect is a full-service architectural firm offering architectural and planning services in greater northern Michigan. Since its establishment in 1999, the firm has worked in urban planning, civic, and commercial markets with a specialty in custom residential work, and historic restoration and renovation.

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**KENNETH C. RICHMOND,
AIA**

For Richmond, it was the attraction to problem solving at all scales that led him to architecture.

“Being driven by problem solving design I think is attractive to architects and it certainly was to me right out of the chute,” Richmond said.

An alum of University of Notre Dame, Richmond not only attended the South Bend, Indiana-based academic institution while pursuing an undergraduate and graduate degree, but also taught architecture and design there as an

adjunct professor from 1988 to 1990. It is in the enthusiastic approach to details, materials, and craft where Richmond sees the delight in architecture coming from, and ultimately translating the problem solving aspect into architecture.

Richmond has since gone on to culminate more than 30 years of experience in residential, commercial, and civic architecture on projects in Traverse City, Michigan; Chicago, Illinois; and Santa Barbara, California.

For more than 25 years, Richmond has worked in Traverse City and its surrounding area with commercial and residential projects in communities, such as Glen Lake, Elk Lake, Leelanau County, Glen Arbor, Torch Lake, Crystal Lake, Walloon Lake, Lake Leelanau, Eastport, Cheboygan, and Boardman Lake, among others. While he is the first to admit he tends to favor the current project in process, each project reflects a dedication to “contextualism” and its specific environment.

“It is a loaded word in the sense that first you have to define the context and it implies everything from the site and the environment to the cultural landscape that went on before. Buildings have to—in order for them to be sustainable as pieces of architecture—belong where they are,” Richmond said. “They are not disposable in that sense and if the design is true to these ideas, it will last.”

Richmond also noted a good day in the office consists of him drawing—which is something he would almost rather do than anything and is a good weekend for him as well—and he finds a real satisfaction in untangling the knot, so to speak, to solve client’s complex needs.

“Needs are not just strictly functional, but they are emotional and aesthetic as well—these are cultural needs—and digging into those questions and answering them are vastly satisfying,” Richmond said. “They are not black-and-white, and every project really is different. It is a cliché, but it is true.”

While collaborating with clients during the design process—and often consultants as well—Richmond said there is a great deal of time spent to translating those needs, tastes, and aspi-

rations into a real home, and at the same time, a major consideration to include historicism and local vernacular architecture. This consideration is not merely a response to its context, but rather has to deal with architectural language and one the clients can understand and embrace.

“I’m always looking for real, local architecture, local patterns of building,” Richmond said. “In terms of trying to define it, it is very hard to do. It’s pretty evasive, but that’s the goal: to try to define it within every project.”

Throughout the years, Richmond has also taken his interest in village, township, historic preservation, and development planning to the local organizational level, becoming involved in a number of committees, such as: Historic Districts Commission in Traverse City, City of Traverse City Planning Commission, and Downtown Development Authority Advisory Committee.

While more interested in a classic approach to design, detail, and materials, Richmond noted even as technology proves challenging for the industry in terms of keeping up with its constant evolutions, good things can come from it—but it is not necessarily a given.

“Embracing ‘new’ is a good challenge for me; it is part of what is enjoyable about what we do. But just because it is a new product or the latest popular product, doesn’t mean it is good and I think it is our job as architects to tease the reality out of that; to see if it is really a good idea in the long run for a 20-, 40-, or 50-year building,” Richmond said.

“I think it is important that the things we do aren’t trendy. In some ways you have to work toward classical solutions that work both practically and sort of spiritually. It is part of authenticity in building; we have to embrace these new ideas if they are valid and it is up to us to test out how valid they are to the architecture,” Richmond added.

