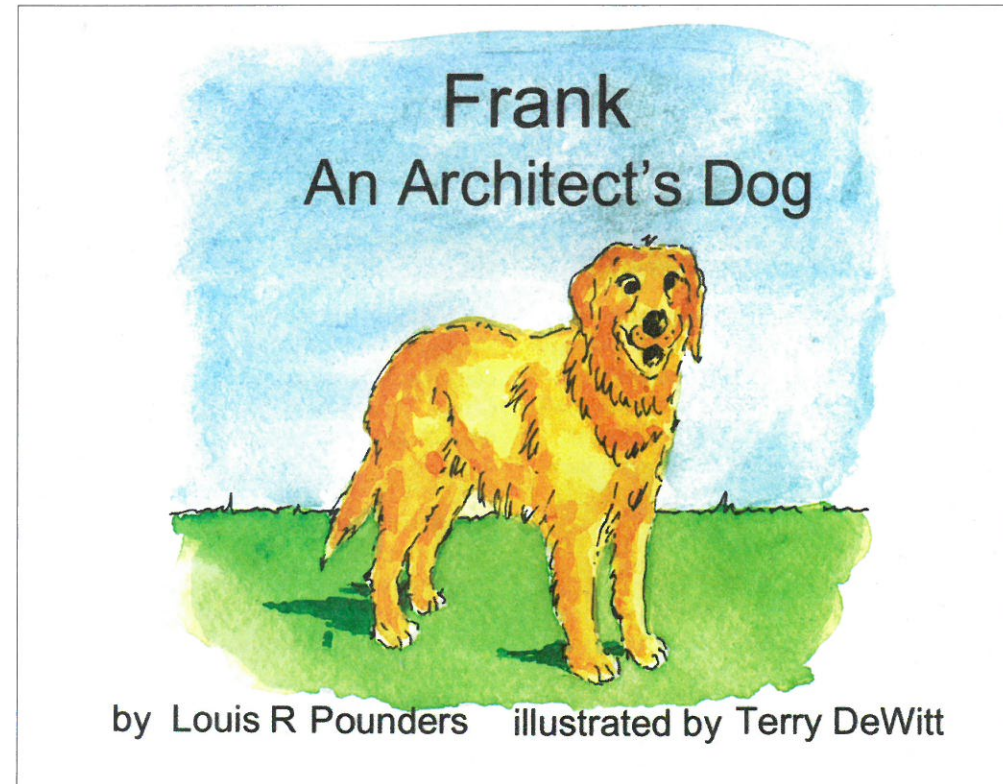


Louis Ruffin Ponders, FAIA



... WITH EMILY ADAMS KEPLINGER

With over 40 years spent as an architect designing buildings in Memphis, Louis Ponders has found another way to apply his professional design talent — in a book about architecture, for children. The book is titled *Frank, An Architect's Dog*, and was illustrated with hand-drawn, watercolor images by retired Memphis architect Terry DeWitt.



What made you decide to write a children's book?

As an architect, you have to respond to issues via design, and you have a responsibility to the client and to a larger audience to make the building contextual. Buildings are more than just separate individual units, they create environments. I had been thinking about related activities that I could contribute to as an architect and a book was one of them. I thought writing a children's book related to architecture would be a way to introduce people to architecture at a very fundamental level.

How did you go about the actual formation of your book?

I followed a very similar approach to the way I approach designing buildings. Although

this book was self-initiated rather than a response to a client, the process was very similar. First, I approached the story by considering what I wanted the end result to be, in this case a basic introduction to the field of architecture. Then, much as I would divide a three-dimensional building into space, I divided the form of the book into what it would take to complete it — creating a team of editors, artists, and a printing company. It took about a year to put my book together and I self-published it in June (2015) through Print Ninja.

What was your role in developing the form of the book?

As ideas began to flow, I mocked up the whole book myself, page by page, in terms of its preliminary design. The

resultant storyboard was akin to a sketch I would have done for a building.

Why did you choose to make a "board book?"

Foremost, I wanted a book that could be read by (and to) young children that showed examples of architecture. For that audience, I wanted a book that was easy to read, straightforward, with compelling and simple imagery.

How did you select the artist for the book's illustrations?

Terry DeWitt and I have been friends for many years. He was an early partner in Hnedak Bobo, back in the days before computer-generated design. He found that he liked doing renderings more than actual architecture, so he developed a career of doing renderings for other architects. I thought he would be perfect for this project — and he was!

How did you choose your story's narrator?

The book is narrated by a golden retriever named Frank. Golden retrievers are known to be a friendly, popular breed and I thought having a dog as the guide for the book would make it easier for children to connect with the story.

Frank — that's an interesting choice for the dog's name. Any significance there?

Yes, the book is dedicated to renowned Memphis architect Francis P. Gassner, FAIA, who was a mentor to me in the early 1970s and had a large influence on my professional work. I had already written two books about Mid-Century Modern design when I had the idea for a children's book, using Gassner as the inspirational source. Gassner died in 1977 at age 50. Many of the structures depicted in the book, including the State Office Building, the Shelby County Administrative Building, the C&I Bank Building (now Visible Music College), and Gassner's own Midtown home, are buildings he designed in Memphis; even his 1964 Porsche is included.

Where did you grow up?

I'm a native Memphian.

And where did you go to school?

Grahamwood Elementary, followed by White Station Middle and White Station High School (class of 1964). College consisted of a BA from Rhodes College (Class of 1968), then a Master of Architecture degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Design.

Tell us about your family.

My wife, Dorothy, and I have a son, Brad, who lives in Memphis, and a daughter, Elizabeth, who also lives here, but will soon to move to Oxford, Mississippi.

Any favorite pastimes?

I enjoy traveling and, as a member of the national AIA Committee on Design, I have the opportunity to travel twice a year for conferences to some interesting places, both domestic and international.

Do you have a favorite travel destination?

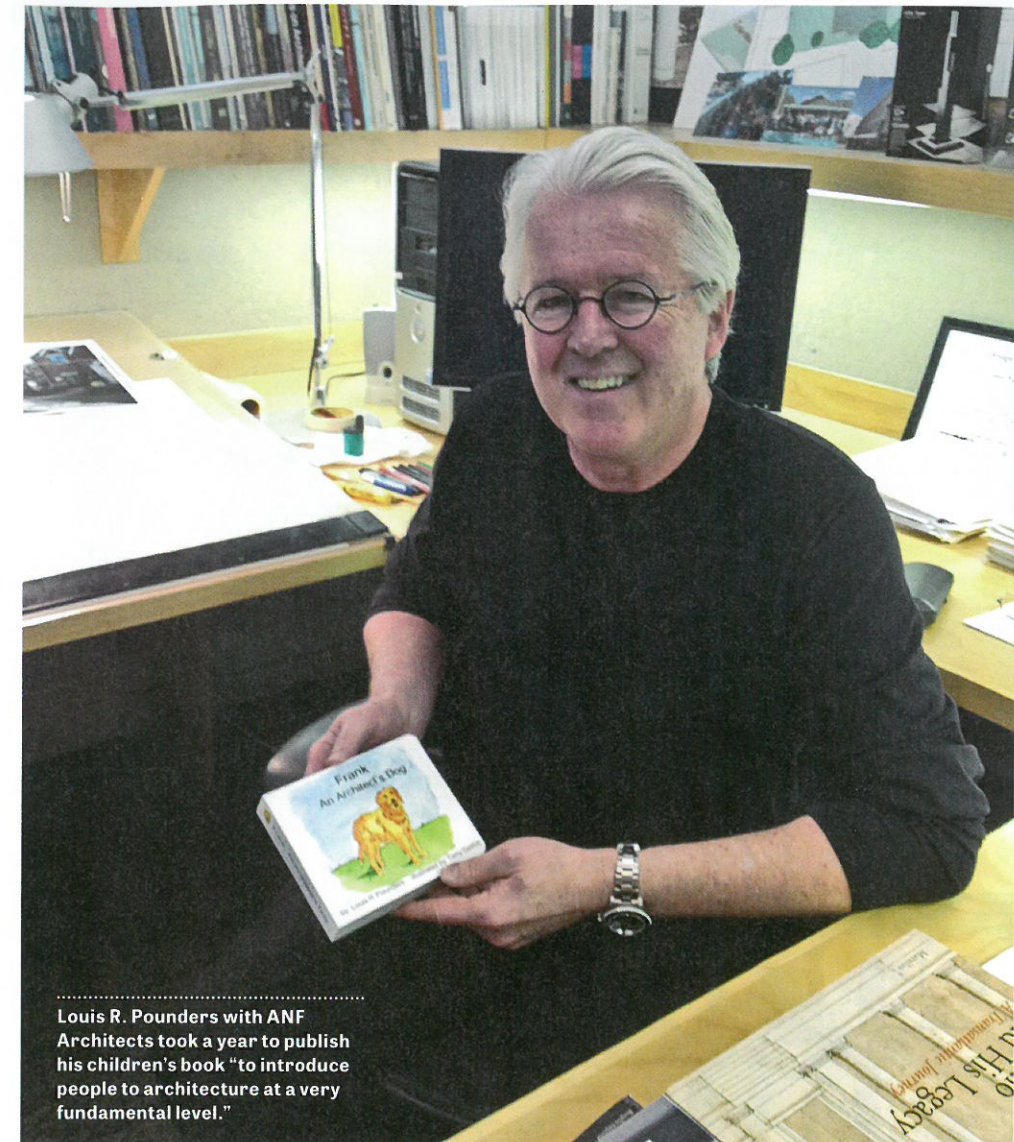
Actually I have two favorite places: New Orleans and Italy. I love the food, the ambience, the history, and the architecture of both places. I usually travel to New Orleans at least once a year. And I'm fascinated with Italy. I spent six weeks in Rome several years ago and that gave me a wonderful opportunity to get to know that city. My wife and I went back to Rome just last year.

What books have you read lately?

I prefer historical, non-fiction, and biographies. Recently I've read *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* by Stephen Greenblatt, Ph.D.; and, *Operation Mincemeat, Double Cross* and *A Spy Among Friends* by Ben MacIntyre, all true stories about the British Secret Service. And, I've always loved *The Right Stuff* by Tom Wolfe.

Most memorable advice you've ever received?

"It takes two people to do a rendering — one to draw it and one to stand behind you and tell you when to stop."



Louis R. Ponders with ANF Architects took a year to publish his children's book "to introduce people to architecture at a very fundamental level."

Do you have a favorite quote?

"We shape our buildings and ever after they shape us." Winston Churchill.

What quality do you appreciate in others?

My cousin, James Ruffin, was very influential in my life. He taught me about the ability to extend yourself graciously, and I appreciate that ability in others. He also taught me to appreciate design and learn from the world around you. I'm certain that he influenced my own design sensibilities and desire to travel.

What has been the most personal building you've designed?

I designed a house for my cousin James when he retired and wanted to build a house in Monteagle, near Chattanooga. We did this house project together and designed it for entertaining. The project was great fun and it actually won an award.

Where is your book available?

Locally, you can find it at Burke's Book Store in Midtown, the Booksellers at Laurelwood, Bookstop Plus in Bartlett, and at our office, ANF, at 1500 Union Avenue. You can also purchase it at the local AIA (American Institute of Architects) Memphis office at 511 South Main, as well as the national AIA bookstore and the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C. The Library of Congress has a copy, too, as does the Benjamin L. Hooks Central Library, here in Memphis. 📖

In 2014, Louis Ponders was honored with the William Strickland Lifetime Achievement Award by the Tennessee chapter of the American Institute of Architects, the organization's highest honor. The award is named for the architect who designed the Tennessee State Capitol Building in 1859.