

G. Cory Millican

August 28, 1920 — July 19, 2003

G. Cory Millican, Professor Emeritus of Design and Environmental Analysis (DEA), died on July 19, 2003, at Robert Packer Hospital in Sayre, Pennsylvania. He was 82 years old. He had been a faculty member of the College of Human Ecology from 1956 until his retirement in 1990. From 1949-55, he taught in the College of Architecture and Allied Arts at the University of Florida. He was a Veteran of World War II.

Cory had a strong passion for design history that took him around the world to gather first hand information and slides on historic architecture and interiors. He visited, photographed, and conducted research on the cultural and technological context of major sites in virtually every country. In addition to the major sites, he was always careful to include views of vernacular buildings and interiors of each of these locations and periods. He developed an extensive collection of slides and books with which he enriched his courses. Upon his retirement, he donated this collection to DEA. To this day, alumni from a wide variety of age groups remark on the wonderful classes they had from Professor Millican and of the effect he had on their careers and lives. Rhonda Gilmore, who received her Master's degree from DEA and is now a Lecturer in the department, said:

"When I first walked into Professor Millican's office many years ago, I was immediately impressed with the quantity of books in his collection. I had never seen so many in one person's office in my entire life. His gracious demeanor and witty comments made me feel welcome here at Cornell. Cory represented a generation of professors who lived an existence characterized by what they taught. He lived design history. He was both absorbed by and saturated with it. In so many of the discussions we had over the years, he related what we were talking about to design history. He leaves a legacy of cherished friends and a passion for his field that had an impact on many people."

Thresa Gibian, a New York Certified Interior Designer and a graduate of DEA (B.S., 1984) had this to say about Cory:

"The most important aspect of Cory's teaching that I remember was his enthusiasm. He really enjoyed the details of design. He was a passionate teacher who by his excitement could easily infect you to 'feel' the same love of details in art, architecture and furniture -- the design details that are repeated in many elements within a space or out in the landscape. He had a great sense of humor and quick wit. He was careful in his thoughts and encouraging of his students. I now practice interior design and see the value of tending to the details on my projects or within the spaces I have created for my clients."

Cory's colleagues also developed an appreciation of his strong sense of the lasting quality of design. Many now concede that he was right in his assessment of the sterility of the modern movement long before it became fashionable to be critical of it.

Cory made important contributions to the countries he visited. He was especially willing and fascinated to work in the developing world. During a sabbatical leave in 1976 and 1977, he and his wife Virginia (Ginny) moved to Dammam, Saudi Arabia, where Cory served as Acting Head of the Department of Architecture and Acting Dean of the College of Architecture and Urban Planning at King Faisal University. Cory was responsible for the development of a five-year program leading to the Bachelor of Architecture degree and the planning for a Master's program in this area. He also developed an undergraduate and graduate program in Interior Design. This leave had a lasting impact on Cory and Ginny. As Cory wrote in his Sabbatical Leave report:

"I am sincere in stating that this sabbatical leave was everything I expected and much, much more. I have long been intrigued with the Middle East, Islam, and the Arab world in general. I have previously visited Morocco, Turkey, Lebanon, and Egypt, and managed during this leave to visit Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, and Israel. This leave provided the opportunity for us to photograph Paris (4 days enroute) and to record many sites – Jerash, Medaba, Persepolis, Isfahan, Kerak, Cerbak, Petra, Amman, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Mt. Nebo, Shiraz, Dammam, Al Kobar, the Jordan Valley, and Jerico to name a few. All of this photography enriches the course material for my history courses and provides slides which are unattainable elsewhere... when it came time to leave we left reluctantly and were a bit sad. We made many close friends and shall always remember this place and time with great fondness."

Cory spent another sabbatical leave teaching at the Macdonald Institute of the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada. He was assigned to develop new courses and assist with long range planning for two evolving departments there. He designed a new course, Man and Shelter, with the expectation that he would be teaching 35 students. When the course was announced, however, he learned that he would have to accommodate over 100, which he did happily. He knew little of Canada before this experience, but enmeshed himself in this situation. At the end of his leave, he wrote that he had never been received by such genuinely hospitable, tolerant people—not just in the academic community but in all cross sections of his experience there. He stated: "There's a sincere, gentle acceptance of the individual which has endeared this place and peoples to me." The University of Guelph wanted Cory to stay and offered him a permanent position on its faculty. To Cornell's benefit, he decided to return to Ithaca.

For 34 years, Cory lived with his family in the historic Nineteenth Century Reemer House on Hudson Street in Ithaca. He loved keeping the house in excellent condition and did many repairs himself. His collection of masks, many of them from Africa, were displayed in prominent places throughout the residence. He enjoyed collecting antiques and restoring them in the old carriage house behind the home.

Cory will be missed by many – by generations of students to whom he was truly dedicated, by colleagues who appreciated his sense of humor and friendly demeanor, and by faculty members he willingly mentored in the early years of their tenure. All who were fortunate enough to know Cory understand what it means to be influenced by a gifted, caring, and gentle spirit.

William R. Sims, Joseph Laquatra