



## **Allen R. Bushnell**

May 17, 1927 – April 4, 2023

Emeritus Professor Allen R. Bushnell was a consummate teacher of design. With his booming voice and gregarious presence, he shepherded students in the many design studios he taught from freshman through senior level. When asked what constitutes good teaching he responded immediately and directly, “good teaching [in the design studio model] simply involves rolling up your sleeves, diving in and working with the students.” And that he did, with great enthusiasm and an eye toward excellence. “What must be added is mention of the underlying sense of humor and fun he slipped into his teaching; as in the time he turned up the music, laid on his back on the studio floor, and attempted break dancing. His students broke freely into laughter, not at him but with him—his message being after all, design must include responsibility for injecting joy into the lives being served.” Professor Paul Eshelman

Allen Bushnell was born May 17, 1927, to Mary E. (Gasser) Bushnell and Alfred Bushnell in Madison, Wisconsin. In his youth he developed a love for skiing, ski jumping and sailing. At the age of 18 he joined the U.S. Navy and was stationed at Pearl Harbor with the Pacific Fleet. Upon honorable discharge from service after the war he attended the University of Wisconsin where he earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Art Education. He went on to attend the renowned Cranbrook Academy of Art, where he graduated with a Master of Fine Arts Degree in Industrial Design. Following his studies at Cranbrook he worked as an industrial designer in the automotive industry with Chrysler and Ford, followed by a position in city planning for Detroit, and eventually as a designer of interiors and furniture in the office of iconic architect and furniture designer Charles Eames. In 1953, Allen married the gracious and equally talented love of his life, Ruth Ann Dauterman. Together they moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where Allen taught design at Layton School of Art and formed Bushnell and Hay Design Associates, a firm that spanned industrial design, architecture, interiors design, and city planning. Design of the interior for a residential elder-care facility was one of Allen’s favorite projects and one that received acclaim. In this design, his insightful definition of space and creative use of color were

applied to enhance residents' spatial orientation, sense of belonging and feeling of engagement. While living in Milwaukee, Allen and Ruth became parents to three boys: David, Peter, and Paul. Recruited by Professor and Department Chair Joseph Carreiro, in 1966 Allen and his family moved to Ithaca, New York, where he joined the Cornell Department of Design and Environmental Analysis in the College of Human Ecology as associate professor.

Alan was a committed design educator who attentively guided graduate level design students through their theses and undergraduate design students through their studio experiences. He approached teaching design studios as a creative process, each semester striving to achieve the perfect course—the ideal educational experience for each student. In preparation for each new semester and with self-critical assessment of the previous studio, he conceived new assignments and essentially structured a fresh studio experience. Allen was passionate about the need to be mindful of architectural details, as they underpinned the beauty in a design. He demanded continuity of elements, alignment of datums, expression of honest materiality and simplified forms. He always sought to inculcate into his students' minds a passion for craftsmanship as they evolved their creative ideas through multiples representations including models, drawings, and three-dimensional mockups. He was a tough critic, with little patience for mediocrity, but he instilled in his students a full commitment to design that was accountable, both to the human condition and the human spirit. It was the latter—along with his often-expressed admiration for the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, another son of Wisconsin—that grounded his design teaching and practice. Allen believed in the power of design to uplift the soul. From his early years at Cornell to his last years of teaching and personal art explorations, he worked to communicate the need for design ideas to go beyond function and fulfill the higher goal of design that enriches daily life.

Allen reveled in the connections across the various fields of design—from industrial design to architecture. For him, the common denominator was quality of the user experience—through quality of details and aesthetic engagement. It was this commonality that defined the conceptual framework he used to guide his teaching and personal work. He spoke fondly about his work as an automotive designer and then architectural designer and regaled students and faculty alike with stories of “practice gone wrong.” Full of passion and anecdotes, his storytelling was insightful, instructive, and a hallmark of his teaching.

Throughout his tenure at Cornell and into his retirement he continuously worked on his own art and design. In his retirement, his passion for creative exploration embraced computers as a new explorative tool for his 3-d artistic creations. Focused on manipulations of color, pattern, and dimensional relief in wood, these bas reliefs are rich vertical landscapes of color and form—and a testament to his ongoing passion for art and design.

“Every time I spoke with Allen Bushnell, a colleague who was my senior by almost two generations, I remember his dogged determination to raise awareness of the highest level of design standards and accomplishments not only in his students, but in our faculty as well. We were a multi-disciplinary group of scholars: artists, designers, social and environmental psychologists, ergonomists, facility managers, and extension outreach specialists. Allen Bushnell

respected that cross-disciplinary perspective pushed each colleague to think beyond the “measurable” impacts of design in daily life and embrace the intangible, even poetic contributions to humankind. As each scholar argued for their specialized view of design process, output and accountability, and how it should be manifested in the curriculum, Allen Bushnell would counter and remind each of us of the college’s unique mission to nurture a design that spoke to “a human ecology,” one that was wholistic, unmeasurable, and forward thinking.”  
Professor Sheila Danko

Allen was an avid skier and sailor throughout his life. His whole family spent winters skiing at Greek Peak and his sons followed his passion for ski racing. Summers were spent sailing at Ithaca Yacht Club and taking family trips to many wonderful places. Allen had a deep respect for the environment and loved the outdoors, both of which he incorporated into his art and design.

Allen is survived by his wife of 69 years, Ruth; his sons, their spouses and children, Peter (Cynthia) Bushnell of Cazenovia, New York and sons Mark and Eric; Paul (Laurie) Bushnell of Kalamzoo, Michigan and daughter Virginia; daughter-in-law Laurence Jaquet of San Francisco, California, and daughters Lea and Lola. Allen was predeceased by his son David (Laurence Jaquet) Bushnell, and granddaughter Julia Sivley, daughter of Paul (Laurie) Bushnell.

Written by Sheila Danko and Paul Eshelman