

## **Hugh Kaptur**

### Early years

Hugh Kaptur was born in 1931 in Detroit, then a burgeoning center of Modernism thanks to the auto industry and its innovations in technology and design. Kaptur's father Vincent was a car designer and engineer, working first at Packard and then at General Motors under the legendary Harley Earl. Young Kaptur followed his father to GM where he worked in the Styling Division, during the design of the company's new state-of-the-art Technical Center by Eero Saarinen.

As a child, Kaptur was always building things and his mother told him he would be the architect in the family. He especially enjoyed building model airplanes, a hobby he continued as an adult. Kaptur attributes this fascination to sparking his interest in architecture and how things are put together to function well. A longstanding interest in Frank Lloyd Wright led him to take drafting classes in high school and eventually to pursue studies in architectural engineering at Lawrence Technological University in Southfield, Michigan.

In 1952, with the Korean War underway, Kaptur decided to enlist in the Air Force after just two years at Lawrence Tech. With his interest in model planes, he thought the Air Force would be a good fit, but he ultimately joined the Marine Corps. After boot camp, Kaptur traveled to California for the first time, and while at Camp Pendleton, he met Rosemarie Hutton who would become his first wife. In 1953 he designed his first building, a real estate office for his in-laws, and it was constructed while he was overseas.

As a Marine, Kaptur was stationed first in Hawaii and then in Japan. The vernacular architecture he saw in these faraway exotic locales would leave an indelible mark on him. He also visited Wright's Imperial Palace Hotel while in Tokyo. In 1954, with the war over, Kaptur returned to California. He soon realized that he wanted to continue studying architecture and returned to Detroit where he worked in GM's Product and Exhibit Design department while attending night

school at Lawrence Tech. Before he could complete his degree, Kaptur and his wife decided to follow her parents to Palm Springs.

### Professional Practice

After arriving in Palm Springs in 1956, Kaptur got a job as a draftsman in the architecture office of Donald Wexler and Richard Harrison. Because of his artistic flair, he drew many of the firm's early renderings as well as engaging in some design work. Unfortunately a recession hit in 1957 and Kaptur was laid off. He found freelance work as a renderer for architectural designer Howard Lapham and others, including Wexler & Harrison, while he worked out of his garage on his own projects. With the completion of Impala Lodge in 1958, people started to take notice of the young designer. He opened his own office at 417 Industrial Place in 1958 and joined the American Institute of Building Design (AIBD).

By 1961, Kaptur was so busy that he hired Lapham's son Larry to work for him as a draftsman. Over the years, both before and after he became a licensed architect in 1967, Kaptur partnered with a number of local architects and designers including Robert Ricciardi (from 1963–67), Larry Lapham (1968–1975), and James Cioffi (1982–1992). Kaptur's professional affiliation for each project is provided on the exhibition labels and, unless otherwise indicated, all drawings are by Kaptur and all projects are in California. Kaptur continues to pursue architecture projects and to push himself creatively, with an addition to Fire Station No. 4 currently under construction and a guesthouse on Palisades Drive in the design phase.