

John Armes

Architect John Armes died suddenly two weeks ago whilst completing his family home at Bingie on the NSW South Coast. John remains in the minds of all who knew and worked with him a force of unassuming capability in architecture, conservation, the performing arts and the art of friendship.

From Sydney's upper North Shore the soft spoken lofty John Armes in 1969 commenced Architecture at the University of Sydney. John immediately drew attention his heroic stance dominating Artist Christo's wrapping of Sydney's Little Bay, roaring into the faculty on a green and white ex police Triumph motorbike or shattering the faculty stairway with renditions of kookaburra calls. John's self-effacing nature was equally comfortable performing stage rolls from lost native bearer to party frocked Bobbsey Twin captured by Chicago gangsters, a third of his height.

One of the first to complete the elongated double degree course in Architecture at the University of Sydney John graduated in 1975. Leaving thespian distractions John relocated to the Murrumbateman- Yass area north of Canberra, where he quickly established a reputation in domestic architecture and heritage works. John's practise attracted a strong rural client following concentrated in the South West slopes, the ACT and eastern Riverina, bringing him to the attention of architect Peter Freeman who saw advantage in melding John's talent with his own practise extending over the Riverina and including ecclesiastical commissions built up during Peter's former partnership with Architect Bryan Dowling.

Peter Freeman speaks admirably of John's time in his practise emphasising his ability to converse and relate to tradesmen and his affinity with the process of design and construction. By January 1987 John returned to his own practise, an undertaking that would continue for the next 20 years. Consolidating his interest in heritage conservation, John became heritage adviser to Goulburn City. Doctor Linda Young of Deakin University fondly recalls John's Goulburn building history walks and contribution to the conservation of Lanyon Homestead when later a project manager for the ACT Government from 2008 -2014. Participation in heritage networks, the National Trust and ICOMS made John a familiar figure in the heritage community.

John readily shared his skills whether at the University of Canberra Summer Schools, encouraging owners of heritage properties or simply enchanting students with the layers of built history at Goulburn and towns beyond the former limits of settlement.

Whilst stating interests in book collecting, traditional trade skills, regional planning, landscape and heritage, John's greatest passion remained his family and friends whether professional acquaintances, lifelong student fellows or simply the recipients of a chat or an email. John's observations on life were measured and sound. His dedication to all around him will rarely be equalled. His was the life of a gentle man.



John Armes, Sydney, March 26 2016



John Armes and Christo, Little Bay, 1969

By Colin Brady, 3 June 2016