

Ten Things You Should Know About Harris Armstrong

1 / Harris Armstrong was born in Edwardsville, Illinois, in 1899, and spent his early childhood in a large farmhouse built by his grandfather. His father, a salesman for the Liggett & Myers Tobacco Co., moved the family to Webster Groves, Missouri, when Armstrong was a teenager.

2 / Armstrong never finished high school. His formal training as an architect was limited to night classes at Washington University, which he took while he was working as a draftsman for the St. Louis architect Louis LeBeaume, and a single year at Ohio State University. He received his architect's license in 1942 at age 43.

3 / During World War I, Armstrong dropped out of high school and joined the Army Air Service. His lack of formal schooling prevented him from becoming a pilot, so he served out the war as a cook on an army base in Texas. He remained an avid cook for the rest of his life.

4 / Armstrong met his wife, Louise McClelland, on a commuter train in 1925. The two had been neighbors as children, but McClelland didn't immediately recognize Armstrong as he chatted excitedly about his architectural work. The couple eloped on New Year's Day, 1926.

5 / Armstrong spent a few months in the early 1930s in the New York offices of the architect Raymond Hood, but otherwise he lived and

worked in the St. Louis suburb of Kirkwood. Most of his projects were built in St. Louis and its suburbs, with a few notable exceptions, among them the U.S. consulate in Basra, Iraq.

6 / In 1937, Armstrong won a silver medal at the Paris World's Fair for an International Style office building in suburban Clayton, Missouri, that he built for orthodontist Leo M. Shanley.

7 / In 1947, Armstrong was among five finalists in the design competition for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial on the St. Louis riverfront. The winner was Eero Saarinen, whose stainless steel Gateway Arch serves as the memorial's centerpiece. Armstrong was the only St. Louis architect to be selected as a finalist.

8 / When hired to design a \$7.5 million engineering campus for McDonnell Douglas near Lambert-St. Louis International Airport, Armstrong parked a rented trailer near his office in Kirkwood to accommodate the temporary help he'd hired.

9 / Armstrong was a prolific writer of letters to the editor on matters ranging from churches to car design. More than 50 of them were published in St. Louis newspapers during his lifetime.

10 / Armstrong, who retired in 1969, passed away in 1973. ■



Andrew Raimist writes of the foppish Harris Armstrong, "He saw himself in the spotlight playing the part of a hero, overtaking the retrograde aspect of Midwest culture to build a new St. Louis as a brave new world." Armstrong's architectural office (below), designed in 1948, and the Ethical Society (bottom), designed in 1962.

