

Ryan Walsh '91: Winning a Green Architecture award for design from 'found' materials

BY KRISTEN HINMAN '94

Ryan Walsh '91 was on a job site, working as an architect-intern, when he spied an accumulating pile of discarded wood and started carting the scraps off to his backyard. Next thing he knew, he was dumpster-diving in the dark of night, and before long, friends in the construction trade were direct-delivering leftover building materials to him.

It was 2000, and Walsh had just moved to Portland, Oregon. He'd bought an 800-square-foot 1925 bungalow that had been hideously remodeled and captured light in all the wrong corners at the wrong times of day. Depending how you looked at it, an architect's nightmare – or dream.

A cash-strapped bachelor who was happiest on a wind-surf, Walsh decided to gut the place and start anew. The wind at his back, he would take an unorthodox tack, allowing his collection of construction scraps to inform the design as he went.

"I would run home from work and work on the house all night," Walsh recalls. "I'd go to bed whenever I was done – it was like a big Lego set for a kid! In some ways, it's not quite done."

Walsh may still be tweaking here and there, but the American Institute of Architects and *Dwell* magazine consider the eight-year project a masterpiece of innovation and sustainability. Last year they made Walsh the grand-prize winner of their "How



Above: Ryan Walsh with wife Holly and daughter Eliote

Green Are You?" competition. His primary act of ingenuity: designing and building the house from a variety of recycled materials he had collected, thus creating an inherently sustainable result.

"It was a challenge because of the financial restraints, but it was also really rewarding, because it forced me to use things I probably

never would have used otherwise," says Walsh, who entered the contest at the 11th hour. He adds: "It shouldn't be legal to throw out a piece of wood at the dump!"

Walsh, 37, originally hails from Larchmont, NY, and entered Hotchkiss as a lower mid. He says art teacher Brad Faus fostered and encouraged his interest in architecture. But things did not exactly go according to plan.

Walsh studied architecture for a year at Syracuse University before transferring to the University of Oregon. During his course of study, he took several years off from school, working in the construction industry in various forms. He worked with an architect, residential and commercial builders, and apprenticed with a cabinet maker. After this experiential aspect of his education, he graduated with his B.A. Unlike the majority of architects, Walsh left school able to build what he designs.

"Ryan needed to make all of his success for himself," observes Faus. "Hard work while



facing many challenges has prepared him in a way in which few architects are today.”

Still, licensure required a three-year apprenticeship. Plying the proverbial shoe leather in Portland, Walsh dropped off his résumé at Green Gables Design and Restoration, owned by designer-builder Lindley Morton.

“He called me on a Sunday night and said, ‘I saw you went to the Hotchkiss School in Lakeville, Connecticut,’” recalls Walsh with a laugh. “I said, ‘Yeah, it’s a little boarding school in the woods,’ and he said, ‘I know. I went there, as did my father and both of my daughters!’

“It was pretty funny,” adds Walsh, “because it was the first time Hotchkiss had opened any doors for me.” (Morton is Class of 1966.)

Walsh became an intern to architect Hans Kretschmer at Morton’s firm, bought the 1925 bungalow for about \$120,000 and began his scrap collection.

Working nights and weekends, Walsh gutted the house and began to reorient all the



rooms in order to better capture natural heat and light. “There came a point in time where every stage of the house was in a different stage of completion, so what I did depended on my mood when I came home from work,” he says. “If I was depressed or angry, I could do demolition. If I was feeling really creative or inspired, I’d design, or do woodworking and finishing.”



TOP AND ABOVE: The materials on hand dictated the design.

ABOVE LEFT: The windows were fabricated from 100-year-old doors rescued from a church.

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FAR RIGHT: In the loft space, a screen made from closet rod “outs” (imperfect rods)

RIGHT: In the bedroom, a wall created from strips of orphaned wood

BELOW RIGHT: A gleaming kitchen

That’s where things got really interesting. Walsh fabricated all the windows from 100-year-old doors rescued from a nearby church. He crafted a stairwell wall treatment out of kitchen cabinet doors meant for mobile homes. The wall in his master bedroom is composed of scads of thin, multicolored strips of orphaned wood that he nailed down in an undulating pattern. In each case, Walsh let the constraints of the material dictate the process and the design.

Walsh says that when his girlfriend, Holly, moved to town halfway through the project, he forced himself to part with the lone set of silverware and Goodwill plates he’d been using for years, finally trading up for some more presentable kitchen wares. The couple married in 2006 and had a daughter not long afterward.

Says Faus: “Every day I try to make my studio teaching experience one of consequence. I feel myself responding with heartfelt pleasure to Ryan’s personal and professional success. He has pursued his passion while building a viable practice and raising a lovely family.”

Now a licensed architect, Walsh continues to work for Green Gables. He also has his own firm, drw design build. The hope is to acquire contracts for small, creative buildings into which he can unload no shortage of thoughtful detail – if not the leftovers from his own home renovation.

“I still have some piles of wood, from various sources,” he admits. “I go to the dump, drop stuff off, and a lot of times I end up taking things back out.”



Joseph Standart III '69: The beauty and dignity of ordinary people

BY ROBERTA JENCKES



This spring, people in Connecticut came to know more about a large-scale photography project on which Joe Standart '69 has been working for several years. And sometimes they even saw one of their neighbors in his portraits.

The Tremaine Gallery at Hotchkiss showed Standart's amazing, human-scale portraits in a multimedia exhibition that opened in March. The photographs in "The Connecticut Project," part of his larger *Portrait of America* initiative, gave visitors a feeling of immediate kinship with the show's subjects, who were photographed in three locations – Litchfield County, Hartford, and New London. The Tremaine exhibit featured montage, video, and print forms of the portraits.

"The photographs create their own community," Joe says. "In this exhibition, I play with perception. 'What do you see when you look at somebody? Do you really *see* them? Do you see a perception of them? Or, do you see through them?' I like the idea that the image actually changes as other people in the gallery walk in back of the photograph." (Some of the portraits in the Tremaine show were printed on a mesh material, and moving or still shapes could be seen in back of the portrait as people moved throughout the gallery.)

In a process that will take place over many months, these startling and yet intimate portraits soon will transcend gallery space to become public art. This year 240 nine-foot enlargements of the portraits can be seen lining the streets of downtown Hartford. Murals as large as 75 feet by 65 feet will wrap various



buildings in the capital city, attracting visitors from near and far. And an on-the-ground exhibit will lead visitors from the riverfront past the Wadsworth Atheneum and into the city. Most photographs will offer an audio guide by cell phone featuring the person pictured, talking about his or her life in Hartford. The Litchfield County portraits are likely to stand 16 feet tall in cornfields around Kent and Litchfield and Lakeville. Standart knows some of the sites

already. One site, familiar to all alumni, is the crest of the hill overlooking Mudge Pond on Route 41 between Lakeville and Sharon.

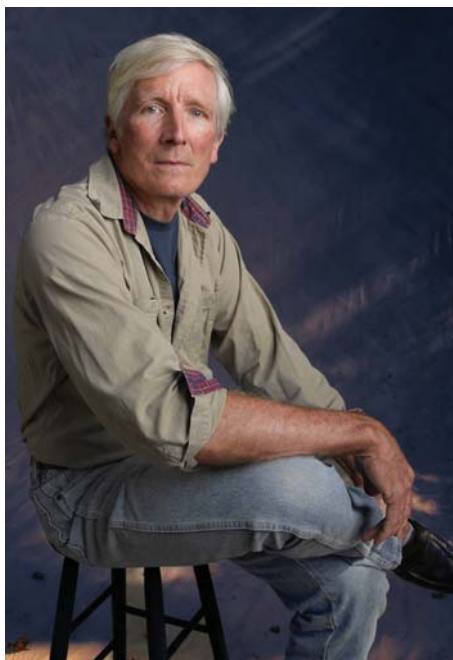
Standart first tried out his dynamic new approach to public art in New London, Connecticut three years ago, when huge portraits of residents were installed throughout the city. "After New London," he says, "the state saw the huge impact of the exhibit and encouraged me to apply for a Strategic Initiative Grant through the Connecticut

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LEFT: *Portrait* titles: John Morosani, Erin Moore, and Katie Enzell; (below) Allen Blagden '57 and Raymond Hopkins



Commission on Culture and Tourism. They saw that the exhibition builds community, and it's an economic stimulus for communities. It brings tourists, who come to the city, park and buy lunch, and enjoy the exhibition. It has many components to it, in terms of building awareness and pride in communities. It changes people's perceptions of a community."

Following the state's encouragement, Standart applied for the grant and received the largest amount awarded in the State of Connecticut history to create his second Monumental Public Art work in the *Portrait of America* series.

Connecting with the community has been a mantra for him since Hotchkiss. A Michigan native, Joe came to the School in 1965 as a prep. He followed in the footsteps of his father, who graduated in the Class of 1932, and his uncle. (Joe and his wife, Clinton, are also parents of Kelly, Class of 2009, and James, Class of 2011). At Hotchkiss he showed an early interest in community involvement, serving as president of the St. Luke's Society and winning the Ely Prize as an upper mid and the Treadway Prize as a senior.

"Hotchkiss instilled in me a sense of challenging myself, of persevering, whether on Baker Field, playing football under Nels Corey, or in the classroom," he says. "Writing the daily theme was a great exercise – fabulous – something that I really enjoyed. All those exercises gave a sense of purpose and discipline."

A feeling for his future vocation came during his studies at Williams College. As an assignment in a political science course, students lived and worked in several very different communities around the country: with a

coal miner's family in Blackey, KY; with the family of an auto worker in Detroit; and at a hog farm in Scranton, IA. In these disparate locales he documented the lives of the citizens through photography in the style of Walker Evans.

After a summer job photographing landscapes for the National Park Service in Alaska, he began his career in photography. His corporate clients have included Sony, General Electric, Viking Range Corporation, Zyrtek, and Victoria's Secret, and he has worked for *Architectural Digest* and *Home and Garden*. He has published three books and worked for most of the major advertising agencies. His work is exhibited widely across the country and is seen in the collections of many museums and collectors.

The Portrait of America series brought him back full-circle, to his documentary roots. The work of installing the portraits has him logging miles around the state and attempting to raise money for the remaining work. The Connecticut grant covered the expense of his photographic shoots, but not the exhibits or installations. As the state makes budget cuts, the arts are often targeted, even though his New London experience showed that public art can promote tourism.

For the artist, the work brings its own rewards. "I'm very passionate about exploring this new vehicle of expression, embedding people within their environment," Standart says. "Environments, whether city or land or sea or whatever, impact and shape people's attitudes about themselves and the world, and vice versa: people make a big impact on their environment. So that's what I am trying to do with these photographs."

FOR A LOOK AT MORE OF JOE STANDART'S PORTRAITS AND A VIDEO OF THE TREMAINE GALLERY SHOW, WHICH IS SEEN ON HIS BLOG, GO TO WWW.PORTRAITOFAMERICA.ORG.