

Kevin Wilkes, AIA

Education & Formative Years

Trinity School (Manhattan) | 1963–1975

During his twelve years at Trinity School, Wilkes developed a lifelong passion for social activism, intellectual debate, and theater. In his senior year, he successfully pitched a proposal to the Parents' Organization to secure \$40,000 in funding to redesign an unused basement rifle range into a 74-seat black box theater. In May 1975, he supervised the renovation and designed the sets and lighting for its opening production of *Twelfth Night*.

Princeton University | A.B. in Architecture, 1983

Wilkes juggled his academic studies with extensive extracurricular theater work, designing sets and costumes for two dozen campus shows.

- **Professional Interlude:** He took a three-year hiatus between his sophomore and junior years to work full-time in theater. He served as a scenic artist and assistant technical director at the McCarter Theatre under designers Michael Yeargan and John Lee Beatty. In Manhattan, he designed a new lobby for the Circle Rep on Sheridan Square and a second stage for Playwrights Horizons on Theater Row.
- **Undergraduate Thesis:** Under the mentorship of his most influential architecture critic, Alan Colquhoun, Wilkes designed "*Collective Survival in the Manhattan Grid: A Plan for the Future of Off-Broadway Theater*." The project proposed a shared-facility model on the 42nd Street Redevelopment Site to house the Circle Repertory Company, Playwrights Horizons, and the Negro Ensemble Company under one roof.

Yale University | Master of Architecture, 1991

At Yale, Wilkes studied under the important Spanish Architect Juan Navarro Baldeweg.

- **Terminal Studio:** He designed the *Wooster Guild*, a New Haven-based teaching and research facility for heavy construction along Interstate 91. The proposal merged traditionally opposed blue-collar and white-collar disciplines to train a new generation of "Master Builder/Architects."
- **Master's Thesis:** He completed his final thesis work under the supervision of Professor Kent Bloomer and Dean Tom Beeby in the fall of 1990.

Professional Career & The Princeton Design Guild

Early Career & Apprenticeship (1983–1985)

Following his undergraduate studies, Wilkes apprenticed with architect Doug Kelbaugh, FAIA, and landscape architect Alan Goodheart, ASLA. In 1984, the trio won Third Place in the Cultural Arts Pavilion Competition for Newport News, Virginia. That same year, Wilkes earned an Honorable Mention in the Young Architects Competition at the Architectural League of New York City.

Founding the Princeton Design Guild (1985–Present)

In 1985, Wilkes founded the **Princeton Design Guild (PDG)**, a design/build practice focused on residential architecture. Guided by a craft-based philosophy, PDG utilizes interior daylighting, fine materials, axial arrangements, and Mannerist elevation strategies to elevate compact residential plans.

- **Early Acclaim:** PDG's debut house, designed for Nicholas Ulanov, gutted and expanded a dilapidated 1,000-square-foot pre-fab home. The project was featured in Donald Prowler's 1986 book *Modest Mansions* and in *Architectural Digest* (April 1989).
- **Scale of Operations:** Over the past 42 years, PDG has completed more than 500 residential and commercial projects stretching from Kissimmee, Florida, to Manhattan.

- **The Collaborative Model:** Operating out of a 25,000-square-foot commercial facility in Belle Mead, NJ, PDG is unique for executing projects entirely with its own full-time staff of sixteen professionals—including architects, designers, craftsmen, cabinetmakers, carpenters, masons, and metal fabricators. Wilkes oversees both corporate divisions: Wilkes Architects and PDG Construction.

Academic Appointments & Public Service (1986–1996)

- **NJIT School of Architecture:** Wilkes began teaching as an adjunct studio critic in 1986. In 1994, he was promoted to full-time Special Lecturer and Coordinator of Second Year Studios, reshaping the curriculum sequence until his resignation in 1996 to focus on PDG.
- **Municipal Building Inspector:** From 1992 to 1994, Wilkes served as the municipal Building Inspector for Princeton Township. He inspected six major peripheral subdivisions, including Calton Homes' 300-unit *Washington Oaks* development.
- **Professional Licensure:** Wilkes holds four distinct New Jersey state licenses: Registered Architect, RCS Building Inspector, Subcode Official, and Construction Official.

Public Architecture & Community Installations

In addition to residential architecture, PDG manages specialty municipal projects requiring deep creative originality:

- **Princeton Township Municipal Building Charrette (1997):** PDG designed and managed an open, anonymous design competition that attracted 30 professional entries. The winning design was selected by a jury of town officials and independent architects and fully constructed over the following five years.
- **The Remembrance Fountain (2005):** Serving as Architect of Record and builder, PDG executed Amado Batour's winning competition design for South Brunswick Township's 9/11 memorial, completing the project on time and on budget.
- **Writers Block (2004) & Quark Park (2006):** Partnering with landscape artist Peter Soderman and landscape architect Alan Goodheart ASLA, Wilkes created highly acclaimed public event gardens in downtown Princeton. These installations transformed an underutilized, fenced-off urban space into a vibrant park blending science, art, and architecture. Quark Park specifically bridged the "town and gown" divide by bringing together residents and Princeton University academics and Institute for Advanced Study scholars.

Awards, Recognition & Publications

Design & Planning Awards

- **AIA New Jersey Chapter:** Honor Award for Built Projects (*Writers Block*) 2004
- **AIA New Jersey Chapter:** Merit Award for Built Projects (*Quark Park*) 2006
- **New Jersey State Council on the Arts:** Architecture Fellowship Grant (1988)
- **NJ Office of Smart Growth:** Smart Growth Architecture Award for Creative Initiative (*Writers Block*) 2004
- **American Planning Association (NJ Chapter):** Outstanding Implementation Award (*Quark Park*) 2006
- **Downtown New Jersey:** Award for Excellence in Redevelopment (*Quark Park*) 2006
- **Downtown New Jersey:** "Best of The Best" Excellence Award (*The Frog and the Peach* restaurant in New Brunswick) 1996

Featured Media

Wilkes' architectural work has been published in *Architectural Digest*, *Architectural Record*, *Landscape Architecture*, *Planning Magazine*, *Fine Homebuilding*, and *Design NJ*. His project for A Grand Veranda was featured in the Taunton Press book, *The Best of Fine Homebuilding* (2003).

Civic Leadership & Politics

Princeton Future (2004–2020)

Wilkes served as a long-time Director of the Council of Princeton Future, a volunteer civic engagement and planning group. He rotated through roles as Chair of the Program and Project Committee and Chair of the Development and Fundraising Committee, ultimately serving as **President from 2016 to 2020**.

- **Witherspoon Street Corridor Study (2004–2005):** He was part of the core architectural team that conducted this comprehensive community study, gathering public input to develop streetscape improvements and preserve community identity.

Municipal Government (2008–2012)

Wilkes was elected to the Princeton Borough Council in November 2008, serving through the historic consolidation of Princeton Borough and Princeton Township at the end of 2012. He subsequently ran for Mayor of the unified Princeton municipality but only placed second in the primary election.

Chronology of Residence

- **1957–1960:** Atlanta, GA (Birthplace)
- **1960–1973:** Manhattan, NY
- **1973–1975:** Westfield, NJ
- **1975–1987:** Princeton Borough & Princeton Township, NJ
- **1987–1998:** Franklin Township, NJ
- **1998–2003:** West Windsor, NJ
- **2003–2005:** Princeton Borough & Montgomery Township, NJ
- **2005–2017:** Princeton Borough, NJ
- **2017–Present:** Sourland Mountain in Hopewell, NJ
 - (Resides with his wife, Caroline Franklin, and their English Bulldog, Sandie)