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DESIGN THEORY | ROB WHITTEN

PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY BY TRENT BELL

Strength in Numbers



Architect
Rob Whitten

ON THE BENEFITS OF DESIGNING AS A TEAM

“New team members have brought new skills and interests—they’ve added depth to what we do and how we do it.”



PHOTO: WHITTEN ARCHITECTS

MH+D ASKS WHITTEN TO TELL US MORE.

Q. What is an important lesson you’ve learned practicing architecture in Maine over the past 45 years?

A. I’ve learned that the best results come from a collaborative design process with a common set of goals. Whitten Architects works together as a team. Over the years, I’ve benefited from and found personal fulfillment as my role has evolved from sole practitioner to team mentor.

Q. The team at Whitten Architects has grown over the past five years. Can you tell us why?

A. We have seen an increased demand for homes that respond to the site and have a deep connection with nature. The challenges of the pandemic and opportunities of remote work have changed the way we think of home in new and unexpected ways. By carefully adding team members, we have been able to address these needs and opportunities for our clients.

Q. What have you learned about designing homes as a team?

A. It is important for each participant to be a valued member of the team. Team members bring more diversity and complementary skills to each design. When they have input and own the design, they will be fulfilled and care more about the result. I’ve learned that everyone brings unique skills and design strengths to a project.

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PHOTOS: WHITTEN ARCHITECTS

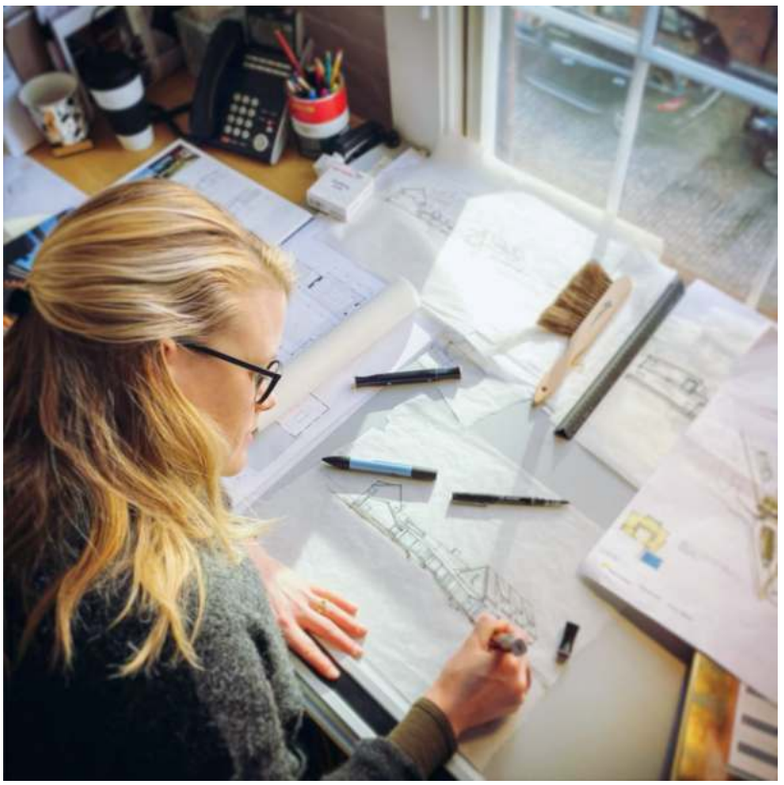










PHOTO: WHITTEN ARCHITECTS

Q. Outside of the Whitten Architects studio, who else is on the design team?

A. Every home starts with our clients and their family, who establish the project goals. Our job is to listen and be a guide toward a cohesive site-specific design. We include a surveyor and landscape designer at the start for their expertise about the land and ecology. The home's architectural design is a collaboration with the interior designer, consulting engineers, and the builder. We work with local skilled craftspeople, and we value their contribution and guidance throughout design and construction.

Q. How do you feed your individual creative energy working on a team?

A. I really enjoy the energy, discussion, and a design process that's shared with others. The studio provides for dialogue and discussion from everyone in the office, from principals to interns. Every design goes through an open studio crit and presentation. We pin up ideas, concepts, and sketches; everyone in the studio evaluates and critiques the design. I think it results in a meaningful and nuanced design. I get more back than I give.

Q. What is next for Whitten Architects?

A. We will continue working with new clients, sites, and collaborators. Technology and tools will change. Our body of work represents our values, and we will continue to build on it. As a mentor, I enjoy helping people grow and develop. Russ Tyson, Will Fellis, and Tom Lane have become leaders in the studio. Each contributes their skills as an architect and embraces the studio values, including teamwork. I am inspired by the talent and dedication of our team leaders and new members alike. I'm an optimist, and there is always something new and exciting in architecture. MH+D



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