

HONONARY DEGREE

DENISE SCOTT BROWN

Denise Scott Brown is an architect, planner and urban designer, as well as a theorist, writer, and educator whose work and ideas have influenced architects and planners worldwide. She participates in the broad range of Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates' projects in architecture and is principal-in-charge for many projects in urban planning, urban design, and campus planning.

Her years of experience in interdisciplinary work and teaching contribute to the firm's unusual breadth and depth in architectural design. Scott Brown's recent projects include campus planning for Brown University and Tsinghua University in Beijing. She directed precinct planning and pre-schematic design of a new Biomedical / Biological Sciences Research Building at the University of Kentucky; she also directed the University of Michigan campus master plan, plans for several of its sub-campuses, and site planning and pre-schematic design of the University's Life Sciences Institute, Undergraduate Science Building, and Palmer Commons complex. She has also directed campus plans for the University of Pennsylvania, Williams College, and the Radcliffe Institute of Advanced Studies at Harvard University. In the last decade, Scott Brown worked on the University of Pennsylvania's Perelman Quadrangle; the Mielparque Nikko Kirifuri resort in Kirifuri National Park near Nikko, Japan; and the French *Département de la Haute-Garonne* provincial capitol building in Toulouse, France. She has written and advised on urban planning issues related to New York's World Trade Center site, Philadelphia's Penn's Landing, and New Orleans. Her other projects include the development of program requirement for the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian; urban plans for South Street, Philadelphia, Miami Beach, Florida, and Memphis, Tennessee; and advising on a regional plan for the Bouregreg Valley in Morocco.

Denise Scott Brown was born in Nkama (Kitwe), Zambia. She grew up in Dunkeld, Johannesburg and studied architecture at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg from 1948 to 1952. During her 'year out' she traveled to London to work in an architect's office. She decided to continue her studies at the Architectural Association in London and she graduated in 1955. While at the University of the Witwatersrand, she met a fellow architectural student Robert Scott Brown. He followed her to London and they were married in 1955. They returned to South Africa in 1957 for a few months and during this time they studied and photographed Cape Dutch architecture, colonial architecture in KwaZulu- Natal and African vernacular architecture. In 1958 they left South Africa for the United States of America to commence with post graduate studies at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

Scott Brown grew up in a house in Dunkeld, Johannesburg that was designed by Hanson, Tomkin and Finkelstein. These were friends of her mother who had abandoned her own architectural studies due to insufficient funds. The house was built in 1943 and was designed by a practice that was closely aligned with and made a major contribution to the International Style and establishment of modernism in Johannesburg. The School of Architecture at Wits received international recognition at the time, due to its promotion of and adherence to the tenets of the International Style. In Scott Brown's own mind this set up a personal relationship with the early ideas of Modernism. The other main theme of her work was also inspired by her experiences in the Johannesburg of the 1940's.

Johannesburg, then and now, was a relatively cosmopolitan and multicultural society. It had a prominent role as a focus economic activity and technical innovation on the African continent as well as being a magnet for job seekers, refugees and émigrés from a large geographical area. Amongst the city's population at the time were many who had to flee Nazi prosecution in Europe. Rosa van Gelderen, a Dutch Jewish refugee who came to Johannesburg in this way was the 10 year old Scott Brown's art teacher. She was the one to encourage her young pupil to look at the ordinary, the everyday life around her for inspiration as well as for subject matter. This suggestion encouraged Scott Brown to look at the informal activities in the public spaces and streets of Johannesburg as well as towards popular culture. This was clearly contradictory in a largely colonial society which still looked towards the core or metropolitan society for its clues to find value or direction. This brought another issue to the fore that she would deal with for the rest of her career of how to find an expression for the local or how to relate the immediate circumstances to broader traditions that might transcend political, cultural or geographical factors.

In 1965 she became co-chair of the Urban Design program of the University of California, Los Angeles after teaching briefly at the Berkeley campus of the same University. She became established as an influential scholar in urban planning. It was during this time that she became interested in cities like Las Vegas (spurred on by her mother's enthusiasm for this city which she visited in the 1950's) and Los Angeles. She invited Venturi to her classes at UCLA and together they visited Las Vegas for research on that city. They married in 1967 and she moved to Philadelphia to join her husband's architectural practice of Venturi and Rauch. This internationally acclaimed firm became Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown in 1980 and has, since 1989, been known as Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates.

Robert Venturi has remarked that 'Denise Scott Brown's work and discoveries in architecture and planning have had a global and historical impact. They have enriched the world intellectually and socially, changing how people learn and how they design, how they nurture great works of art and nurture each other. 'Scott Brown, with Venturi and Steven Izenour (a partner in their architectural and planning practice) came to international prominence with the publication of the book *Learning from Las Vegas : the Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural* in 1972. This book was the result of a research project that she and Venturi undertook with students at the School of Architecture and Planning at Yale University. This book formed part of the argument of a growing body of discontent against the central tenets of modernism, international style and elitism in the architectural profession in general. In their research on Las Vegas they used the latest available analytical tools with which to understand and describe urban complexity.

The place of Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi was now assured in the international arena. In some ways their work coincides with the concepts of the Post-Modern movement. The work of Scott Brown and Venturi is part of the Post-Modernist debate only in that their work sees architecture as a 'language of meaningful signs, in their respect for the ordinary viewer and in their rejection of the so-called master narratives of history'. Their work never wavers from its social purpose and they have always worked hard 'to re-connect architecture on a more humane footing'. Scott Brown and Venturi 'embraced both the authority of history and the vitality of the real and the visible'.

Denise Scott Brown is viewed as someone who has changed the course of contemporary architecture. She is perhaps the most important woman architect to have traversed the world stage in recent years. As her

career and accolades attest, she has received many awards, honorary doctorates and recognition. It is well known that Scott Brown feels she owes her views to her childhood and first architectural training at Wits in the 1940s and early 1950s. It is highly appropriate that this globally influential architect be awarded an honorary doctorate in architecture by the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.