DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
HAROLD (HAL) BOX

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Harold (Hal) Box, dean emeritus, architecture, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
General Faculty and Faculty Council

IN MEMORIAM
HAROLD (HAL) BOX

John Harold “Hal” Box, dean emeritus of the School of Architecture, died on May 8, 2011, at the age of eighty-one. He led the School of Architecture from 1976 to 1992 and was bestowed the title of dean emeritus and honored for his hard work and dedication to the School of Architecture on April 8, 2011, at a reception renaming the Goldsmith Courtyard to “Eden & Hal Box Courtyard.”

Born in Commerce, Texas, on August 18, 1929, Box received his early training at The University of Texas at Austin, where he graduated at the age of twenty with a five-year degree in architecture. As a student, he was an apprentice to O’Neil Ford, one of the most respected Texan architects of his generation. Following graduation, Box served in the United States Navy Civil Engineer Corps in aircraft structural design. He subsequently became the project architect for Broad and Nelson Architects of Dallas.

In 1958, he formed the architectural and design firm Pratt and Box Architects (later Pratt, Box & Henderson) in Dallas. In addition to designing an assortment of national and local award-winning buildings, the firm made a significant contribution to the development of the city with its “Study of Downtown Dallas,” which was exhibited at the Dallas Museum of Art and widely discussed in the Dallas Morning News in the late 1950s.

Hal left full-time practice in 1970 to be dean at the University of Texas at Arlington, starting a whole new architecture program there. He hired the initial faculty (many of whom are still there), established the first four-year degree program, oversaw the design and construction of a new building, added a master’s degree program, and achieved accreditation from the National Architectural Accrediting Board—all in only five years.

In 1976, he was recruited by UT Austin’s president at the time, Lorene Rogers. Hal took over an architecture school that was good but riven by internal tensions among the established faculty and five new hires. In characteristic fashion, Hal made plans: he would lead by ideals and he would lead by ideas. He would grow the school physically, giving it an architectural setting that befit and symbolized the ideal that architectural works confer dignity upon all who live within their walls. The new facilities also said that the work of making architecture, in design and in construction, was to be undertaken with a profound understanding of the responsibilities that come with protecting and enhancing human dignity. The school’s facilities were to be second to none.

For years after the addition to Goldsmith Hall and the upgrading of Sutton Hall, Hal would visit the studios and hallways like a captain inspecting his ship, demanding that views be kept open, walls and floors be kept clean, elevators ran smoothly, and hinges were oiled. Hal created more than a building; he created the architecture campus as it stands today.

Lorene Rogers was soon replaced by Peter Flawn, by which time and under whose presidency Hal flourished. He established a lasting and strong relationship with the central administration. Hal engendered not only a respect for architecture as a discipline and for the School of Architecture as one to be reckoned with at The University of Texas at Austin, but also a continuing respect for the architecture deans who followed him:
Lawrence Speck and Frederick Steiner. Hal would stride up to the “hill” several times a week, and nine times out of ten come back down West Mall, smiling and picking up the flute in his office to play some Bach. Maybe that was his way of giving thanks. Or maybe it was Bach’s music, flowing through his breath and into the flute that gave Hal his uncanny sense of symmetry and form and persistence, his sense of where and how one finds true quality.

Hal was as ethical a person as one can imagine, relying, like a good ship’s captain, on his associate deans, including Richard Dodge, Larry Speck, and Larry Doll. He was forthright, determined, and kept his destination in sight. Like a captain, he would set the course and reset it every few years or so behind words like “professionalism” or “excellence.” He was constantly imagining a stronger, better future and setting goals for how to get there. Ten years into his deanship at UT Austin, he gathered his leadership team for a retreat at his second home in Cuernavaca and challenged the members to envision new directions and inspiration. Then he convened a well-funded Goals Conference back in Austin. He brought in architecture deans from Harvard University, MIT, Cornell University, Arizona State University, the University of Oregon, and the University of Virginia to blaze an even more ambitious path than he had been traveling in his first decade as dean.

Hal understood what it means to serve. He served us all, and none more than the people who taught with him and under him, through his first retirement to his second, to his unending efforts on behalf of the school since, to his dying day.

Hal was a man who appreciated beauty and quality wherever he found it, and where he didn’t, when it was within his power, he took action. If Hal’s mode of operation as a practitioner and teacher could be represented by a word, it would be generosity. His houses were big, but they never felt big in a wasteful way. Rather, they felt generous; they felt right. Hal knew the dimensions of everything: every room, every piece of furniture—actual dimensions, correct dimensions. He would say that a good living room is 21’ by 33’, not 24’ by 36’ or 20’ by 30’. He would use a laser pointer in reviews and ask students: “What’s that dimension?” He often required students to carry a scale rule, and he gave them out as gifts. His sense of scale was the equivalent of perfect pitch in music.

Hal seemed to know how many years of life were enough, too. He often said he thought eighty or so was about right and certainly quite enough for him, a generous dimension, indeed, just right.

Hal lived a good life, a good architect’s life, a leader’s life, a long and complete life. He taught, he researched, he wrote, he inspired, he corrected, and he made a thousand genuine friends. He took his alma mater, the School of Architecture at The University of Texas at Austin, from middling status to one of the top schools of architecture in the country, if not the world.

Hal was inducted into the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architects in 1971, and he received the Llewellyn W. Pitts Award from the Texas Society of Architects in 1998. The Hal Box Endowed Chair in Urbanism was established at the University in 1999, and the Texas Exes Alumni Association bestowed on Box its highest honor, the Distinguished Alumnus Award, in 2003.

Survived by the love of his life and wife of thirty-five years, Eden, Hal was a loving father, grandfather, brother, and uncle. His four surviving sons and their families include Richard Box and wife, Laura, with their daughters, Amelia and Elena, of New York; Kenneth Box of Austin; Gregory Box of Dallas; William Johnson and wife, Maria Vittoria, with their sons, Thomas and Oliver, of Siracusa, Italy. He is also survived by his one daughter, Kate Youman, and husband, Rick, with daughters, Haley and Hannah, as well as his older brother, E.O. Box and wife, Ginger, with daughter, Diane, and son, Elgene.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Larry Doll (chair), Michael Benedikt, Sinclair Black, and Larry Speck.

Distributed to the dean of the School of Architecture on March 6, 2012, and posted under “Memorials” at: http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/.