



POINT OF VIEW | BRUCE HERRINGTON, Herrington Architects

Everyone benefits from sound design

Design matters. Every day, the design of the buildings, parks, streets, highways, even our homes influences all of us.

All too often, we unknowingly subordinate our thoughts, feelings, and movements to conform to the built environment rather than considering how our environments could be, or should be, reshaped.

The result is that our environment shapes us, even to the degree that we expect less of our surroundings, and settle for less in our surroundings — with the ultimate result being *mediocrity*.

As architects, we ask ourselves what separates a building that is a place to work, from a place that inspires achievement? A place to live, from a home that breathes life into everyday moments? A space for church services into a place of praise?

Architects are trained to identify the required functions and spatial relationships in the design of a building or outdoor spaces. We understand how to coordinate the various consultants required for a comprehensive building design.



We are trained in scale, proportion, and how to create a particular image for a building. But ultimately we begin the design of each building or development by asking one simple question: How will we create the power of place?

As part of its 150th anniversary, The American Institute of Architects has identified “The Ten Principles of Livable Communities.” These address how design has the power to create local identity, strong communities, even the momentum for positive social change. They can be seen at work in many current trends, such as creating vibrant public places, renovating urban centers to counteract urban sprawl, providing a wide variety of activities and transportation choices within walking distance, and conserving the natural

landscape. And they can be experienced first-hand in Birmingham’s most magnetic and successful areas and structures.

From my perspective, the city’s best example of these principles is Five Points South. Within walking distance of three sizable apartment buildings you find streets alive with entertainment choices, restaurants offering everything from pancakes to seafood to rare wines, coffee shops, boutiques, theaters and centers of worship. I find it exciting that this same lively mixed use model is coming to life in the downtown development of the loft district, especially from Morris Avenue to Second Avenue, where restaurants and boutiques are being planned and opened among the art galleries, historic living spaces, and office buildings of these vibrant city streets.

We were excited to be able to take part in this movement, with our architectural design that transformed a downtown institution, Levy’s Fine Jewelry, into a modern space that still reflected the retailer’s roots and created an environment that both new clients and clients from the 1940s love.

This model of city living inspired our design of the 1900 Building, which shares both the Art Deco charm of this charismatic district, and the proximity to striking public green spaces, a children’s museum, and proposed railroad preservation park.

However, these same principles compel us when designing living spaces far from the city center, on college campuses, in suburban multi-family structures, even when designing a battered women’s shelter. They influence the design of space that enables the resident to learn, to grow their family, and even to heal.

I’m always amazed how holistic design following these principles affects almost every aspect of our lives. Buildings are more than shelter. Creating space that draws the best out of those who enter is what makes my work as an architect rewarding.

Bruce Herrington is founder and principal of Herrington Architects.