



U.Va. News

- News Releases
- News by Category
- U.Va. Profiles
- Faculty Opinion
- News Videos
- U.Va. Blogs
- UVA Today Radio

Headlines @ U.Va.

Inside U.Va.

- Announcements
- For Faculty/Staff
- Accolades
- Off the Shelf
- In Memoriam

UVA Today Blog

For Journalists

All Publications

About Us

Subscribe To

- Daily Report E-News
- RSS News Feeds
- Podcasts/Vodcasts

Search U.Va. News

Keyword / Name
 2006-11 News

Architecture Alumnus Discusses Sketches Displayed in Dean's Gallery

October 6, 2011 — Michael Vergason carries a sketchbook everywhere he goes.

The University of Virginia architecture alumnus, who has designed landmarks such as the memorial to disabled veterans in Washington, D.C., the Monticello visitors' center and Johns Hopkins University's Homewood Campus since earning a bachelor's degree in 1972 and a master's in 1976, told a group of mostly architecture students and faculty in a Campbell Hall talk Friday that his true passions are drawing and sketching.

Currently, sketches that span the course of his adult life adorn the Dean's Gallery in the [School of Architecture](#). Not only are visitors able to see Vergason's skills improve year to year, Vergason said the exhibit depicts his "place in the world over the course of time."

He believes drawing stimulates his thought process. "I see more clearly the things I imagine when I get them drawn on paper," he said. Just as a writer might piece together fragmented thoughts with words, he sketches his thoughts together. "I don't know what I think until I draw it," he said.

According to Architecture School Dean Kim Tanzer, "Sketching is the most immediate connection between our mind and imagination and the external." She said she hopes students will gain inspiration through hearing Vergason's words and seeing his work because he exemplifies the idea that talent is only nurtured through practice.

When he first entered graduate school, Vergason used drawing mostly as a diversion to his studies. When he taught a course on drawing to undergraduates, he was forced to study various drawing techniques and thus improve his own drawing abilities.

After that, he said he began to integrate drawing into his life and being.

In 1975, while still completing his master's, Vergason sold his car to go on the School of Architecture's inaugural trip to Vincenza, Italy, a summer study-abroad program now in its 37th year. While there, he set out to map every building in the entire city through his drawings. He would sit on the side of the street for hours drawing what he saw. Then he would transfer his sketches to a larger velum piece.

When he was finished, Vergason had compiled a seven-foot-long outline of the entire city. This impressive piece is included in the Dean's Gallery exhibit, which is on display through Dec. 16.

Over the years, Vergason said he has never lost his affection for drawing – or for Italian architecture. He has returned twice to Italy since his time studying abroad and can now compare drawings of the same buildings done at different times. This allows him to analyze how his technique has improved and also see the effects of using different drawing tools.

"Be careful about keeping your stuff," he told the audience, many of whom were students. The sketches may be of little value earlier in life, but will have much meaning later.

Since his first trip to Vincenza, Vergason has carried his sketchbook everywhere. In fact, he even pasted his calendar and important contacts directly into his sketchbook. Now he lives by the principle "Drawing is a privilege."

He said he hoped his talk and exhibit inspire students to draw, just as he was inspired to do after hearing a similar talk by a British architect at U.Va. when he was a student. It's hard when starting out, Vergason said, but the benefits are innumerable.

He was previously a fellow at the American Academy in Rome and professor at U.Va., the University of Maryland, the Catholic University of America and Harvard University.

He founded the Northern Virginia-based architecture firm, Michael Vergason Landscape Architects Ltd. in 1987, seeking to develop a small company focused on maintaining a creative partnership with his clients. Using his dual degrees in architecture and landscape architecture, Vergason focuses on designing seamless transitions between the natural and built worlds for his clients.

Share



U.Va. architecture alumnus Michael Vergason (click for high-res version)

(Photo: Cole Geddy)

[Print this story](#)

[Email this story](#)

Contact:

Jane Ford
 Senior News Officer
 (434) 924-4298
jford@virginia.edu

— By Lisa Littman