

Building a Better Way to Build

Peter Gluck and Partners, Architects reprises its role as a pioneer as it blurs the line between architect and builder

A lot happened in the progressive movement of the 1960s. John F. Kennedy was elected president. Martin Luther King Jr. made his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. Astronauts landed on the moon. And nearly half a million people descended on Woodstock, New York, for the nation’s most famous rock concert. Also, Peter Gluck discovered architecture.

“I graduated from the Yale School of Architecture in 1965—it was a very optimistic period,” says Gluck, whose firm, New York-based Peter Gluck and Partners, Architects, is known for its design-build approach. Inspired by the ethos of his time—peace, love, and community—Gluck spent his weekends during school building houses on Long Island with his classmates. This on-the-job tradition was institutionalized by the Yale School of Architecture in 1967, when it established the mandatory First Year Building Project requiring all first-year architecture students to both design and build a structure.

It was that experience that inspired Gluck to start his firm in 1972. “One of the things that helped to form my practice was the fact that in the 1960s there was a culture of getting

Peter Gluck and Partners’ Pool Pavilion project is built directly into a preexisting hill.



Peter Gluck helped initiate the design-build culture with his classmate David Sellers in the 1960s, which later inspired the Yale School of Architecture’s First Year Building Project, which requires all incoming architecture students to design and build their own projects.

things done,” Gluck says. “We were young and enthusiastic, and we felt we would learn more by doing things than we would by working in an office.”

His hands-on approach to architecture evolved further in 1973 and 1974, when Gluck spent two years designing for a large construction firm in Japan, where the common practice is for builders to handle virtually every aspect of their projects. “Japanese construction firms both design and build,” Gluck says. “Here, the process has become completely Balkanized. There are silos of people who take care of different parts of the project, and the construction process has become a gigantic mess because of it.”

Gluck wasn’t interested in messes. A modernist, he was interested in efficiency, and in 1986 he had an epiphany. Since 1972, his firm had

designed a wealth of diverse projects, including private residences, hotels, and corporate headquarters. Its latest project, however, was an addition on a Connecticut home that was originally designed by famed German architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.

“We drew the designs, and the client bid it out to a contractor, but it was clear the contractor simply couldn’t build it,” Gluck says. “In order to protect myself, I actually had my people on the site doing all the construction work. Not the physical work but all the supervising. I spent all the time a contractor would spend without getting any of the rewards a contractor was paid. So I thought to myself, ‘Something’s wrong here.’”

On his next project, Gluck presented his client with an unusual proposition. “I went to the owner and said, ‘Listen, I can build this