

# AIA Central Pennsylvania

A Chapter of The American Institute of Architects



## 2015 Spring Lecture Series Recap

By Daniel R. Godfrey Jr., AIA, LEED AP

On May 28<sup>th</sup> Armstrong World Industries was kind enough to host the AIA Central PA Spring Lecture with Tod Williams and Billie Tsien as the guests of honor. Prior to selecting our speakers, we were encouraged by Frank Harmon to have them speak together if at all possible. That advice was on the mark as Tod and Billie illustrated how their relationship has translated into decades of elegant and thoughtful work.

The lecture entitled “the way we work” told the story of a refined and sensitive approach to the profession. Simply stated beliefs: to be of use, to move slowly, to say no, to belong, connect and to last, set the stage for our evening together. As Todd and Billie discussed the formative years, the evolution of their lives and of their firm, one could easily see that their simplistic approach to daily life has translated directly to their work.



Sketch portrait by James S. Douglas

Tod and Billie brought the presentation close to home by discussing three Pennsylvania based projects. They started with Skirkanich Hall, the Lab at the University of Pennsylvania. The project is as much about the journey from point A to point B (as demonstrated by a unique stair case central to the plan) as it is a celebration of the materials and spaces along the way. The importance of securing the right materials for the right use was evident. Completed in 2006, Skirkanich Hall is a fine example of the harmony between the building, its materials and the campus vernacular.

The Barnes Foundation Museum appeared to be as much a social experiment as an architectural study. Tod and Billie explained how they navigated the pitfalls of recreating the museum originally possessed by the somewhat eccentric collector Albert C. Barnes. Integrating the museum into the Benjamin Franklin Parkway was no small task. It's clear that rigorous effort was devoted to respecting the original building while developing a structure that is sensitive to its context.

The final project that Tod and Billie shared was the Kim and Tritton Residences at Haverford College. These efficient structures have service spaces placed inboard allowing living spaces to reap the benefits of the perimeter. Tod and Billie explained that the buildings were strategically placed in a

# AIA Central Pennsylvania

A Chapter of The American Institute of Architects

manner which allows the residual space to be dynamic and engaging. Gardens and pathways allow users to have a multitude of opportunities for interactions when circulating between buildings.



Sharing in the experience of these unique PA projects was a wonderful opportunity to see how Tod Williams and Billie Tsien bring their passions and talents together to create their unique brand of design. Tod's desire for an experiential journey and Billie's knack for tactile richness of materials combine for truly poetic solutions. We are proud and thankful to have had the opportunity to host this classic duo as they brought a bit of inspiration to the Architects of Central Pennsylvania.