

A Chair for the King of Hearts

“**T**he function of a teacher is to help each student gain his or her rightful potential as a human being. I look at every student and ask how I can help release that life energy, that fulfilling force which is every person’s gift.”

So said George Hasslein (1917-2001), founding dean of Cal Poly’s College of Architecture and Environmental Design (CAED) and a beloved faculty member for more than 50 years. He loved his work and believed “all a teacher ever teaches is his or her own life.”

For Peter Hoyt Berg (ARCE ’56) and his wife, Ida Mae, making a generous gift to the George Hasslein Endowed Chair for Interdisciplinary Studies in Environmental Design is a simple act of gratitude.

“As a student I had no money,” Berg remembers. “On field trips to conferences George let me sleep on the

floor of his hotel room at California Council of the American Institute of Architects and American Institute of Architects conventions so I could meet the accomplished architects of the day. He also got me a job managing first Shasta and then all five Cal Poly master dorms to help me pay for school. He transformed me into someone who could be the best architect I could be.”

Berg was only one among many students who received Hasslein’s guidance and compassion. Hasslein mentored careers, attended weddings, christenings, and bar mitzvahs, and even counseled those going through hard times.

Hasslein was well known for inviting successful CAED alumni and other practitioners, including contemporaries Frank Lloyd Wright and Buckminster Fuller, to share their experience with Cal Poly students. He wanted “the poets I

know to come to this little corner of the earth,” and believed “those who work together should be educated together.”

The Hasslein Chair supports his vision, providing non-tenured teaching positions for prominent practitioners and scholars to mentor and interact with students.

After graduation and two years in the Navy, Berg became the second Cal Poly graduate in his class to receive his architect’s license. The Bergs moved to San Francisco, where Peter Berg worked for SMP (Stone, Marroccini & Patterson). In 1963 he and seven associates founded M. Arthur Gensler & Associates (now Gensler Associates) above a pawnshop on Third and Market streets, and Berg began office planning for the Alcoa Building.

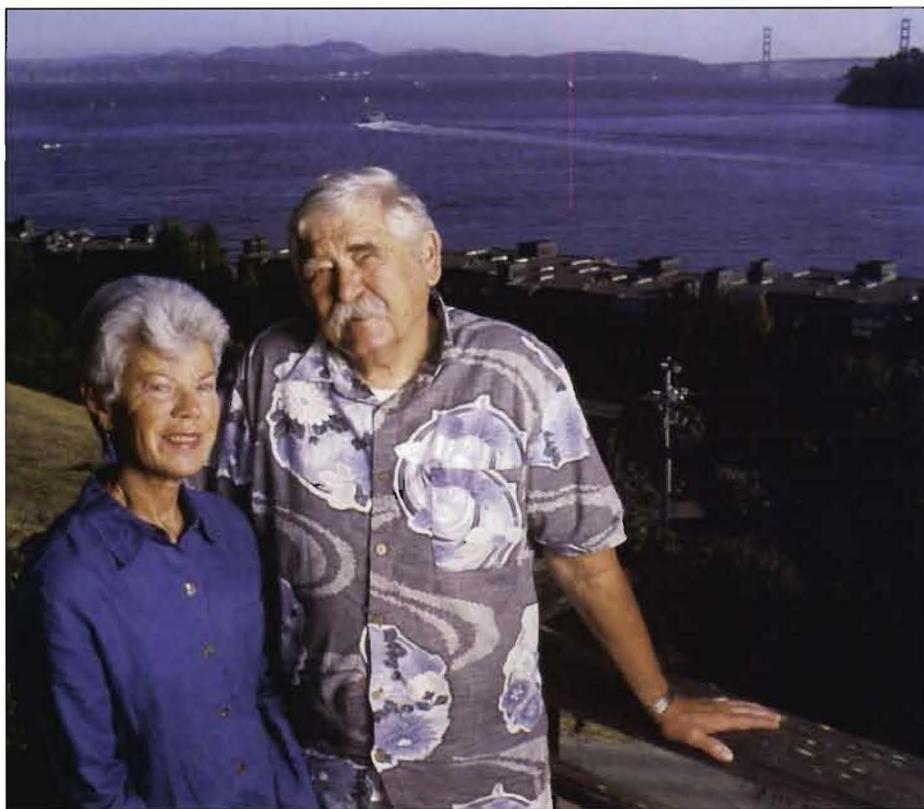
Berg was a member of the California State Board of Architectural Examiners for 30 years and a master commissioner for 15, and in 1978 was named Park and Recreation Commissioner of the Year for California for his work on the Tiburon Park and Recreation Commission.

The Bergs’ \$700,000 contribution toward the \$1.5 million George Hasslein Chair comes from the sale of a lot adjoining a house they built in Tiburon overlooking San Francisco Bay.

The Bergs’ gift not only supports George Hasslein’s dream of a community of students and professionals but has proven a wise financial decision, allowing the couple to avoid capital gains taxes, enjoy substantial tax deductions, and receive an income flow throughout their lifetimes.

“All of us who learned from George will never forget him,” Berg says.

But then who could forget the King of Hearts?



Peter and Ida Mae Berg
Photo by Barbara Ries