

## *Architecture for the People*

BY LISA CRAWFORD WATSON



It was a college aptitude test that told Jeanne C. Byrne she was well-suited for architecture, but it was her interest in people that confirmed it.

"Architecture," says Byrne, "is really about people. We have no need for architecture without the people who will inhabit its spaces. I always begin with new clients by getting to know

them; how they live and how they would like to live."

Raised in Napa and trained at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, Byrne became licensed in the field in 1982. That same year, she established her firm in Pacific Grove, which is populated by some 1,300 historic houses, many of them legacies of the Methodist Retreat of the late 1800s and early 1900s.

"I live in the family house that was originally my great grandfather's," Byrne says. "He was among the Methodists who came to get out of the Sacramento heat. It was in a sad state of disrepair, so we restored it. It is just one of many Victorian projects we have undertaken in Pacific Grove."

Admittedly, Byrne's preference and influence is the Arts & Crafts style of architecture credited to Pasadena-based brothers Charles and Henry Greene of the early 20th century. Yet she also is moved by Spanish-Mediterranean-Italian influences resulting from a year of graduate study in Florence, Italy.

"Unlike Rome," she says, "where buildings are big and almost out of scale, Florence has 'people spaces.' Although the architecture is weighty and durable, the scale of the city is walkable and its buildings livable. It fits the lifestyle of its people, which has greatly influenced what I do."

A decade after she opened her business, Byrne was elected Mayor of Pacific Grove. Less a pursuit of politics, her mayoral mission lay in architecture and the issues that arise in trying to achieve a balance between, she says, "keeping this area beautiful and working to provide a good economic base for the community."

In 2000, Byrne became a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects (FAIA), one of the highest honors an American architect can receive.

Today, her architecture continues to focus on clients, while also taking a sustainable, earth-first approach to architecture that, she says, has always informed her work.

"Ironically," says Byrne, "most of what defines 'green architecture' these days—natural, sustainable, efficient—is what has always meant, quite simply, 'good architecture.'"

To reach Jeanne C. Byrne, FAIA Architects, call 831/372-6585.