



Fil Hearn

August 18, 1938 - October 31, 2024

Fil Hearn

Fil Hearn, renowned scholar, beloved professor of art history, and devoted family man, died of Parkinson's disease on October 31 in Pittsburgh. He was 86.

Hearn was best known for his investigations into architectural theory and history. He wrote four books and numerous articles on the subjects. His most celebrated book, *Ideas that Shaped Buildings*, traces Western thought about architecture from Ancient Rome into the digital future. First published in 2003, it was later translated into three languages. This work was the culmination of four decades of scholarly writing, which explored the formal qualities of Romanesque sculpture (1981), the way Gothic architecture arrived in England (1983), and how the Gothic style became a surprising forerunner to modern architecture (1990).

Alongside his scholarship, Hearn was a dedicated teacher and advisor to many generations of students at the University of Pittsburgh, where he was a professor for thirty-nine years. Some students went on to pursue successful careers as architects; all of them were introduced to a new way of seeing the built environment around them.

Hearn was briefly Chair of the Fine Arts Department and, for twenty-five years, was Director of Architectural Studies. He circled the globe several times, first as a faculty member and then three times as Academic Dean, for Semester at Sea.

Millard Fillmore Hearn, Jr. was born on August 18, 1938 in Lincoln, Alabama, a rural hamlet with a population of 420. His father, Millard Fillmore Hearn, Sr., operated a general store. His mother, Olivia Richey Hearn, was an elementary school teacher. His maternal grandfather was among the founders of the town. He would construct cathedrals out of sticks and moss along the Blue Eye Creek, and design street plans for imaginary cities. On Sundays, he would join his grandmother in listening to the radio broadcast of the Metropolitan Opera.

He earned bachelor's degrees in History and English at Auburn University, and then served as an active-duty officer in the U.S. Navy aboard the newly-commissioned aircraft carrier, U.S.S Kitty Hawk. There he managed the first-ever shipboard television station, was named the Poet Laureate of the Atlantic Fleet, and achieved the rank of Lieutenant Junior Grade.

Hearn earned two M.A. degrees, in European History and Art History, and a Ph.D. in Art History at Indiana University. It was there that he met his future wife, Jana Srba, who was also pursuing a Doctorate. He pursued two years of further study at the University of California, Berkeley and the Courtauld Institute of Art in London.

Among the last generation of professors to teach in coat and tie, Hearn also had a playful side. He reveled in instructing his children and grandchildren on the finer points of body surfing, downhill sledding, and cannonballs off the diving board. A food lover, he was the restaurant critic at Pittsburgh Magazine for several years. A passionate fan of music, he served on the Board of the

Chamber Music Society of Pittsburgh and was a regular at the Pittsburgh Symphony.

He is survived by his devoted wife of fifty-eight years, Jana; their children, John Hearn (Nicole) and Susannah Kerest (Nikolas); grandchildren Hudson Hearn, Vivian Hearn, Helena Kerest and Lewis Kerest; and sister Mary Emma Bunch (Michael).

The family will be hosting a private memorial. In lieu of flowers, please consider making a contribution to the Hearn Endowed Scholarship for students in the University of Pittsburgh's Architectural History Program at www.giveto.pitt.edu/hearn-fund, or to the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank at https://give.pittsburghfoodbank.org/for/gpcfbtd/info/tribute_page.

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Tribute Wall

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“ Me and my wife Laura met Fil and his lovely wife in 2002 and shared an amazing experience at Semester at Sea years later. I invited Fil to Madrid on 2004, when we all enjoyed some of his attractive conferences. But the most outstanding experience we had was to know such a wonderful person, professor and friend. We will always remember his intelligent sense of humor and his generosity.
Pablo Campos, Laura Luceño. Madrid, Spain

Pablo CAMPOS CALVO-SOTELO - October 21, 2025 at 12:34 PM