



Johnny "John" Eugene Zemanek, FAIA, architect, planner and professor, 94, died Monday, April 18, of kidney failure while undergoing evaluation for cancer. The youngest of twelve children of Bohemian political refugees Jan (John) and Františka (Frances) Macháček Zemánek of Moravia, John was born in Guy, Texas near the banks of the Brazos River. In Fort Bend County, he attended Big Creek, Guy, and Damon rural schools, before attending

Texas A & M University graduating with a degree in architecture and as a member of the Corp of Cadets. In 1942, he enlisted in the Army Air Corp Reserves as an aviation cadet and was called to active duty in January 1943. Upon completion of training and promotion to second lieutenant, he served as a bombardier on B-24 Liberator bombers flying allied missions out of Foggia, in southern Italy. During his last mission on the last day of the European war, his plane was disabled by anti-aircraft fire and forced to make an emergency landing at an unmarked airfield behind enemy lines. All crew members were recovered.

Upon returning to Texas in 1945, he continued his education at The University of Texas in Austin where he received the Bachelor of Architecture and Master of Architecture degrees before moving to Cambridge, Massachusetts to earn the Master of City Planning degree from the Harvard University Graduate School of Design, under the chairmanship of Walter Gropius. After Harvard, John returned to Houston to practice with Kenneth Franzheim then relocated to Japan to work for Czech American modernist architect Antonin Raymond in Tokyo, where he planned 17 airbases in the Far East. He practiced also for the U. S. Department of State in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) planning village housing and institutes for the indigenous communities.

Upon returning once again to Houston, before establishing his solo practice he worked with many of Houston's eminent firms, including Wilson, Morris, and Crain where he contributed to the development of the Harris County Domed Stadium, now known as the Astrodome.

Invited to teach at the University of Houston College of Architecture first as a visitor, then full time in 1964, he earned tenure in 1969. His independent architecture reflected a profound influence of his Texas rural heritage and its landscape as well as his respect for and deep knowledge of the diverse Asian cultures that engaged him so fully throughout his life. His work has been published in local, national and international magazines, journals and television media and he has won design awards at the local, state, and national level. In 1978 he earned the coveted national AIA Honor Award, for his Three H Services Center, a social services complex for the Bordersville community that had been established by former slaves. He is

remembered especially for a series of three Montrose houses, each designed as his personal residence, dating from 1969, 2000 and 2011. He would later refer to these as Gaia 1, 2 and 3 to express his life-long reverence for and understanding of nature. While each is an unassuming essay on modest materials carefully combined for great spatial effect, a comparison reveals the evolution of his thinking from ephemeral delicacy toward distinct rootedness.

Often one to incite passions, early in his teaching career at the University of Houston John was the focus of a school-wide student led protest against his pending dismissal, which earned national attention and ultimately led to the dean's resignation. Over the 48 years that he continuously taught at the University of Houston he never failed to challenge students to think critically and to engage them in an "architecture that begins with our social structure." One former student wrote that "I was always impressed by what a scholar John was, he was so thorough and present; the way he painted landscapes and wrote down his experiences during the war in letters, which he would mail to himself as an accurate record of the experience. He was a participant *and* a reporter."

His latest creative efforts include his memoir *Being••Becoming* (2016) published just before his death, and a design consultation for Morningstar Coffee, opening in Houston next month.

John is preceded in death by his parents, 5 brothers and 6 sisters. He is survived by his sister-in-law, Mary Sue Zemanek, as well as numerous nieces and nephews and extended family and also survived by a multitude of friends and devoted caregivers.

Details of future memorial events will be forthcoming. Donations may be made in his honor to the University of Houston Libraries Special Collections where his personal, academic, and professional papers and architectural drawings will be held.