

Claude Thompson

Claude Thompson earned a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture with a horticulture concentration in 1967. He was the first student to begin the program, which became accredited a semester after he graduated. While fellow classmate, Bill Lutrick, is considered the first official graduate of the accredited program, both Thompson and Lutrick had an identical course load despite their different degrees. Thompson began as a forestry major at MSU but switched to the brand-new landscape architecture department. He led an active campus life, serving as dorm president and editorial cartoonist for the student newspaper. A student during the politically-charged 1960s, one of his cartoons got him hung in effigy on the drill field. After a long career in public and private practice, Thompson now teaches graduate landscape architecture courses at the University of Texas at Arlington.

DISCUSS YOUR CAREER JOURNEY. In our profession, we can divide careers into public, private, and academic sectors and I've done all three. I've been a senior level executive in a private practice; I've worked

for large firms in the Southeastern and Southwestern U.S. I've had my own firm as well. In public practice, I've worked for large agencies like the state of Georgia and the city of Dallas as well as small towns. Now I teach. In addition to my classes at the University of Texas at Arlington, I've traveled to the University of Nairobi to teach.

HOW DID YOUR DEGREE PREPARE YOU?

As an undergraduate, I worked on campus and park planning. I did a lot of the work by myself, dependent on my own research, design, and critique and that helped me tremendously. I learned to depend on myself. I encourage my students to be themselves, pursue their own design, and remember that while collaboration is great, the individual is ultimately responsible for his or her design.

DESCRIBE A TIME YOU TURNED A CHALLENGE INTO AN OPPORTUNITY.

The energy crisis happened just as I graduated. The early part of my career focused on finding ways to make buildings more energy efficient through landscape architecture.

I was also a pioneer in water play areas. Recreational swimming pools during that time were oftentimes lap pools with no shallow end. I started designing shallow water for play areas.

WHAT DO YOU SEE FOR STUDENTS ENTERING THE WORKFORCE?

The opportunities are wherever he or she wants to go. The student and graduate in landscape architecture can write their own ticket and do whatever they want. The opportunity is that broad now.