

Jimmie Tucker elected into esteemed group of architects

Only 3 percent of AIA architects chosen for College of Fellows

By [Tom Bailey](#)

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Architect Jimmie Tucker of the Self+Tucker Architects firm has been named a fellow by the American Institute of Architects. Only 3 percent of AIA's 90,000 members can join the College of Fellows and write as credentials after their names not just the "AIA," but "FAIA." "Just to be among this elite group of architects is quite an honor," Tucker said. (Jim Weber/Daily Memphian)

Jimmie Tucker not only designs buildings but other things, like ways for people to learn about “authentic” Memphis history and to bring about positive social change.

In recognition of all that he designs, the veteran Memphis architect this month was named a fellow by the American Institute of Architects.

That puts Tucker in select company within his profession. Only 3 percent of AIA’s 90,000 members can join the College of Fellows and write as credentials after their names not just the “AIA,” but “FAIA.”

Tucker is one of just 17 AIA fellows living in the Memphis area.

“Just to be among this elite group of architects is quite an honor,” Tucker said Tuesday. “It really is one of the goals that some of us strive for as architects, to be a fellow. You see that ‘F’ behind your peers’ names.”

Tucker is a Memphis native who grew up in South Memphis, received his undergraduate degree from Princeton University and his Master’s of Architecture from Washington University in St. Louis.

After working in St. Louis and New York City, he returned home to Memphis and became a founding principal, with Juan Self, of Self+Tucker Architects.

He’s had a hand in creating a number of high-profile buildings in Memphis, including FedExForum, Stax Museum of American Soul Music and Stax Academy, and four Hope VI housing communities.

Among its current projects, Self+Tucker Architects is designing the renovation of historic Clayborn Temple, which played a prominent role for those in the struggle for civil rights.

But of all the projects, the one dearest to Tucker is the renovation of the historic Universal Life Insurance Building at 480 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Ave., at Danny Thomas.

Self+Tucker not only designed the renovation for the building that housed one of the nation's largest African-American-owned life insurance companies, it had bought the vacant building years ago and developed the project.

“We had to have a certain level of commitment to make this project happen,” Tucker said.

That commitment paid off, he said. “I’m a native Memphian; I had no idea the impact that Universal Life Insurance Company had during the years they existed from 1923 to the late 1990s.”

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Jimmie Tucker, FAIA

Development work takes “architecture into a whole new level,” Tucker said of the project that was completed last spring.

It’s one thing to design a project you feel good about, but the feeling is extra special “when the building is completed and people are still coming up and saying we are really glad you were able to save this building and put it to a new use,” he said.

An AIA jury elects College of Fellows members for his or her accomplishments in one of five areas: design, education, leadership, public

service or alternative-career public service. Tucker was elected in the education category.

He has taught architecture as an adjunct professor at the University of Memphis for 10 years. But Tucker educates outside the classroom as well.

Self+Tucker Architects developed the master plan for Memphis Heritage Trail, which tells the stories of 50 African-American individuals, businesses and historic sites just south of Downtown with maps, a website, markers and a mobile app.

The firm also developed a master plan for Knowledge Quest, the nonprofit, South Memphis organization headquartered “directly behind the house my mother still lives in,” Tucker said.

The organization provides after-school academic support, parenting resources, a micro-farm for educational and nutritional purposes, and a culinary academy.

“And there’s a 10-unit apartment building being developed and (Knowledge Quest) is also using agri-tourism and agri-tainment to bring people into the neighborhood and provide added resources to that community,” Tucker said.

Tucker serves as Memphis chapter president of the National Organization of Minority Architects and has served as president of AIA Memphis.

The most recent three Memphis architects to be elected into the AIA College of Fellows are Josh Flowers (HBG Design) in 2018, Reb Haizlip (Haizlip Studio) 2017 and Frank Ricks (LRK) in 2016.

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