



Architect: Hornbein, Victor
Birth/Death Dates: 1914-1995
Practice Dates: 1940-1992
Firms: Victor Hornbein, Architect
Hornbein and White
Victor Hornbein and Associates
Hornbein and James

Biographical Information

The 1964 Denver Botanic Gardens Conservatory designed by Victor Hornbein and his partner, Edward D. White, Jr., quickly achieved iconic status on the Denver architecture scene. The concrete structure forms a lattice-like pattern in harmony with the botanic nature of the site and its function, providing ample glazed openings to admit the light necessary to support tropical plant growth within. In 1996 the building won the “25-Year Award” from the Colorado Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. The award recognizes buildings having withstood the “test of time” while remaining in their original capacity.

While a favorite project for Hornbein, in a 1995 interview he actually rated the conservatory second to his 1951 Frederick R. Ross Branch of the Denver Public Library. Over his career (alone or in partnership) he designed some 36 houses and 80 public or private buildings, mostly in Colorado. Among his other favorites were the Kent Denver School (1964-65), the CU School of Medicine Day Care Center (1962), the Porter Library of Colorado Women’s College (1963), the John J. Cory Elementary School and Graland Country Day School. He also called attention to his Denver Public Welfare Building (1952), Aurora Public Library (1954), Aurora City Hall (1955), and Denver Fire Station No. 27 (1968).



*Denver Botanic Gardens Conservatory by
Hornbein and White.
Source: Denver Botanic Gardens.*

A native of Denver, Hornbein graduated from East High School in 1930 before attending the Beaux Arts Institute of Design, Atelier Denver, from which he graduated in 1934. The Atelier Denver, a member of the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design in New York City, held its classes in the basement of Chappell House, owned and operated by the Denver Art Museum. Traveling to Chicago in the early 1930s, he visited Oak Park to see the many buildings designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

Hornbein’s interest in architecture started at an early age, and by 1929, he held his first job in an architect’s office. He began working part time that summer for Montana S. Fallis and Son Architects who were working on the Denver Mayan Theater. When funds ran out, he spent four months with G. Charles Jaka as he worked on the “Cruise Room” in the Oxford Hotel. Hornbein moved on to the office of G. Meredith “Mark” Musick, who maintained his practice in the Musick-designed Republic Building. Hornbein labored for Musick for two years along with Stanley



Morse. Hornbein also took short-term jobs with the Bird Roofing Company and the federal Works Progress Administration (WPA).

The federal government's Historic American Building Survey hired Hornbein in 1934 as a key draftsman in recording important historic properties in New Mexico, including the Governor's Palace in Santa Fe, the church at Chimayo, and the Acoma Pueblo projects. The following year Hornbein accepted a position on a project developed through the Public Buildings Act that included the architects Walter DeMordount, Burnham Hoyt, William E. and Arthur A. Fisher, G. Meredith Musick, Frank Frewen, Stanley Morris and W. Gordon Jamieson. The partnership, named The Associated Architects for the State Hospital in Pueblo, developed the buildings for the medical complex largely built with WPA workers. The team worked in the Cooper Building at 17th and Curtis in Denver. Hornbein worked along side of Dudley Smith, Karl Kloverstrom and Bill Cabot.

The hospital project concluded in January 1936. Hornbein immediately joined Gordon Jamieson and R. Ewing Stiffler who operated the Small House Service Bureau, an American Institute of Architects project providing construction drawings for architect-designed small houses. Frank Frewen soon lured him away to work for the firm of Frewen and Morris. Here he worked on the Boulder High School and the J.C. Penney department store building on 16th and Champa in Denver. Hornbein assumed greater responsibility with assignments in design work and the entire production of construction drawings. The bronze hoistway doors at the State Capitol Building constituted such a project. He designed eight panels per door with stylized symbols of Colorado history and industry.

At this time Hornbein wanted to work at Taliesin West with Frank Lloyd Wright but instead went to California and worked for Paul Frankel, a furniture and interior designer. While working at his office, Hornbein received a job offer from Tom Moore in Denver. At Moore's office Hornbein undertook his first commission, the Touff residence. In 1940, Hornbein passed the architects' examination, became licensed in Colorado, and soon undertook the design of the Holden residence. During the summer of 1940 with the Holden residence in construction, Hornbein worked for Burnham Hoyt on the Las Casitas Housing Project. He then joined Gordon White on the Montclair Elementary School and later spent a couple of months working for Mark Musick on the Denver Arena Building.

In 1941, the Remington Arms Company hired the Chicago firm of Schmidt, Garden, Erikson Architects to design a Denver munitions plant financed by the War Department. Hornbein worked on the project with Jared Morse and afterwards the Public Buildings Administration hired him to design a school addition. Hornbein headed back to New Mexico in 1941 where he spent nine months as a civilian employee of the Army Corps of Engineers. Projects for the Corps included administration buildings, post exchanges, army barracks, base hospitals and a warehouse.

Hornbein returned to Denver and was inducted into the army, where as a member of the Engineer Section, 20th Air Force, he designed and supervised operational and housing sites and buildings in the Mariannas Islands and Okinawa. Following the end of three years of army service in 1946, Hornbein resumed his Denver practice with the opening of an office in the Tabor Building.

He ran the office of Victor Hornbein, Architect until 1960 when he joined forces with Edward D. White, Jr. The office of Hornbein and White operated from 1960 until 1975. The partnership



dissolved and he formed Victor Hornbein and Associates from 1975 to 1980. In 1980, Hornbein formed a brief partnership with John James. The following year the firm changed back to individual ownership as Victor Hornbein, Architect.



Hornbein in 1966

Hornbein held licenses in Colorado, Kansas and Texas. He was a member of the American Institute of Architects and was elected a Fellow in 1968. Hornbein served on several boards and committees—the Public Advisory Panel on Architectural Services, General Services Administration from 1966-1968; Denver Planning Board from 1965-1968; Colorado Council on Arts and Humanities in 1966; and the Design Review Board at the University of Colorado from 1969-1973. He served as first vice president in 1970 and president in 1971 for the Colorado Chapter of the AIA. At the Wright-Ingram Institute he was a member of the Board of Advisors in 1972, the Board of Trustees in 1974 and was chairman of the Board of Trustees in 1975. Hornbein received the Western Mountain Region AIA Silver Medal in 1981.

Magazines and books publicized many of the projects Hornbein designed. These publications included *Architectural Forum*, *Architectural Record*, *Progressive Architecture* and *Better Homes and Gardens*. Hornbein wrote articles for magazines and was a visiting lecturer at the University of Colorado, School of Architecture in 1957-59, 1968 and 1975.

At his death in 1995, *Denver Post* architecture critic Joanne Ditmer noted that “Hornbein’s work was marked by a love and understanding of Denver and its climate.” A 1995 article in *Historic Denver News* stated that “Throughout his career Hornbein maintained a strict modernist design ethos. He embraced: simplicity of design; limitation of rooms and spaces to that which was necessary; exclusion of unnecessary ornament; the use of natural color and natural finishes; aesthetic exploitation of the inherent nature of the materials used; a well defined relationship of inside spaces to the outside, and the whole site; and the use of an open (free) floor plan.”

Credited Buildings (partial list)

Building Name	Location	Site No.	Date*	Status
Residence	4700 E. 6 th Ave. Denver		1949	Residence
Residence	255 Dexter St. Denver		1949	Denver
Frederick R. Ross Branch, Denver Public Library	33 E. Bayaud Ave. Denver		1951	Library
John J. Cory Elementary School	1550 S. Steele St. Denver		1951	
Denver Public Welfare Building	Denver		1952	
Aurora Public Library	9901 E. 16 th Ave. Aurora		1954	Commercial
Aurora City Hall	16 th and Elmira St. Aurora		1955	



Shattuck Chemical Co. Building 6	1805 S. Bannock St., Denver	5DV.2457.6	1956	Demolished
Residence	47 S. Ash St. Denver		1958	Residence
Residence	4599 E. 6 th Ave. Denver		1959	Residence
CU School of Medicine Day Care Center			1962	
Porter Library, Colorado Women's College	Denver		1963	
Kent Denver School			1964-65	School
Denver Botanic Gardens conservatory and education wing (with Edward White, Jr.)	1005 York St., Denver		1964-66	Denver Botanic Gardens
Shattuck Chemical Co. Building 2	1805 S. Bannock St., Denver	5DV.2457.2	1965	Demolished
Department of Human Services (5 buildings), Fort Logan Mental Health Center	4055 S. Lowell Blvd., Denver	5DV.9392-.9396	1965	Medical facility
Denver Fire Station No. 27	12927 E. Albrook Dr., Denver		1968	Fire Station
Shattuck Chemical Co. Building 1-addition	1805 S. Bannock St., Denver	5DV.2457.1	1969	Demolished
Orchid/ Bromeliad Pavilion, Denver Botanic Gardens	1005 York St. Denver		1981	Denver Botanic Gardens
Residence	499 Emerson St. Denver		1992	Residence
Graland Country Day School	30 Birch St. Denver			School
Zera Abraham Synagogue	1560 Winona Ct. Denver			Synagogue

*Completion date is stated if known. Plan, building permit, or assessor date is shown if completion date is unknown.

Information Sources

Chandler, Mary Voelz, "Architect of Botanic Gardens conservatory dies at 81," Rocky Mountain News, July 20, 1995.

Ditmer, Joanne, "Renowned Denver architect dead at 82," *Denver Post*, July 20, 1995.



Hornbein, Victor, Architectural Records, WH1238, Western History Collection, Denver Public Library.

Site Files Database, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society, Denver.

Schuber and Darden Architects, "Fort Logan Survey," draft, April 2005, State Historical Fund, Colorado Historical Society.

Woodward, John B, III, "Architect Victor Hornbein created modern masterpieces," Historic Denver News, September 1995.

Revised: December 17, 2007