

# CHAPEL HILL

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## SOUTHERN ACCENTS

IT'S THE DELIGHTFULLY DELICATE  
TOUCHES THAT ADD STYLE TO OUR HOMES  
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### ALL IN THE DETAILS

Southern houses can be transformed with just the right touch - a chandelier, a swing, a picket fence, a staircase. Here, the Freeman sisters play in their heated(!) backyard playhouse.

# MASTER OF LIGHT

ARCHITECT JON CONDORET'S LIFE WASN'T WITHOUT DARKNESS, BUT HE ALWAYS LET THE SUNSHINE IN

BY MATT DEES PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRIANA BROUGH

UDIE REMEMBERS THE BASEMENT IN DURHAM, THE WINDOWLESS REFUGE OF HER REFUGEE FAMILY. IN 1962,

her parents, **Jon** and **Joany Condoret**, fled the revolution in Algeria to the subterranean level of Joany's parents' home. Audie – that was her nickname – was 2, and her baby sister, **Brigitte**, was in utero.

“We were poverty-stricken,” says Audie, known to most now as architect **Arielle Schechter**. “I mean, we had nothing. And it was

Betty Warner and Michael Craven nearly purchased an existing Condoret home before they commissioned the architect to create one for them off New Hope Church Road.

very dark down there. To this day, I dislike dark places. Hence the windows..."

She sweeps her hand in a panoramic gesture toward the floor-to-ceiling windows surrounding us in her home off Mount Camel Church Road, which she designed herself, sitting atop the second-highest point in Orange County. You know the expression "bathed in sunlight"? This room is practically drowning in it.

In a way, it's a gift from her father, one of many. A hallmark of his work was bringing as much of the natural world into a home as possible. He employed principles of passive solar, situating his homes to maximize sun exposure in winter and mitigate summer glares. These ideas clearly carried over to Audie, who followed in her father's professional footsteps.

### FULL OF JOY

Of course, abundant light is just one facet of the signature architectural style evident in Condoret homes, which are sprinkled throughout the Triangle.

There's the playful use of different textures and building materials, the blocky, abstract exteriors and whimsical surprises, like stained-glass windows and extra-wide fireplaces.

But Audie says her father's work pales to the man himself: generous to a fault and

**Julia and Andy Burns live in the home that Jon designed for his family in 1967. Jon's daughter fondly remembers the loft above the living room, which Julia now utilizes as an art studio.**





COURTESY OF FEARRINGTON VILLAGE

**Condoret homes – including the Burnses' residence – are known for their blocky, abstract exteriors.**

**Joining the Fearington Village team in the 1970s enabled Jon to focus more on his passion for architecture and less on bookkeeping.**

full of joy. It's why, some two years after his death, Audie can barely hold back the tears.

## GOOD OL' BOY NETWORK

Jon – pronounced “Jean,” with a soft French “j” – was born in Algiers in 1934, the son of accomplished artisan house painters. He attended L'Ecole Speciale d'Architecture in Paris, finishing second in a national contest and, more importantly, meeting Joany, who was studying at the Sorbonne.

Their stay in Algeria lasted only a few years before they had to escape to North Carolina. Joany's father helped get him a job with Durham architect Archie Royal Davis at \$50 a week. His thick French accent – which he kept throughout his life – rook some good ol' boys aback at first.

“People may have been a little leery of him,” Joany says, “but not when they got to know him.”

He worked for Davis, then Sumner Winn and later Don Stewart through the 1960s, doing mostly traditional homes. But he

moonlighted on his own signature projects during that time and struck out on his own in the early 1970s.

His modernist approach appealed to professorial types at UNC and Duke. “Condoret brought a European creativity and expressiveness to [the area] that set his houses apart even from other modernist architects,” says **George Smart**, founder of the website **Triangle Modernist Homes**.

Chapel Hill Realtor **Beth Loudon** sold two Condoret homes. “They're stunning almost because of their simplicity,” she says. “They were not easy to design or build, but he made it seem easy. He just was a master.”

## 'A TOTAL DREAM'

**Betty Craven** and **Michael Warner** went through two naysaying architects before they found Jon in the mid-1980s.

“He was a total dream to work with,” Betty says. “He would never say, ‘Oh, we can't do that.’ He went with us to pick out marble. He went with us to choose the wood.”

Michael adds, “We did a lot of trudging through the woods here to find just the right

place. He was tireless with that, too.”

The original house he built for them off New Hope Church Road was about 3,000 square feet. His good work was rewarded when the couple expanded in the 2000s to a 7,000-square-foot home, a pool, conservatory and a garage for Michael's collection of classic cars, all of which occurred under Jon's leadership.

## THE TREEHOUSE EFFECT

**Andy** and **Julia Burns** value “special houses.” They've never lived in anything but. Which is how they came upon the home Jon designed for his family in 1967, when the Condorets finally had enough money to leave the basement.

“This was the '60s, when they were doing away with all the formalities and it was all about the outdoors,” Andy says, standing in his living room and gazing through massive windows to the creek that runs through his backyard. “You get that feeling in here, don't you, like you're in a treehouse?”

Audie spent her formative years in

the house off Mount Sinai Road, and she cherished it, especially the loft space overlooking the main living area that served as a sort of sanctuary. So it broke young Audie's heart when financial distress forced the family out of the house in 1975 and back to the basement in Durham for a time. The thing about Jon was, though a brilliant architect, he wasn't much of a businessman.

“My dad never made a whole lot of money,” Audie says. “He was always so worried about overcharging clients that he undercharged them.”

Salvation came in unlikely form, when the modernist was called upon to create an old English village in the middle of a Chatham County pasture.

## A REAL FRIEND

Jon met **R.B. Fitch** in the late 1970s, while walking around the track at Duke. R.B. was just starting development on **Fearington Village**.

Look at a Condoret house and then drive through Fearington. You'd never think they were designed by the same guy. But as repeatedly stressed by many of his contemporaries and clients, Jon could do anything.

R.B. knew of Jon's modernist leanings but put him to work at Fearington in part because of his “European sense of scale.” And also just because the two got along. It was the beginning of a beautiful friendship and an answer to Jon's financial issues.

“We just had more fun together,” R.B. says. “In the 30-some years we knew each other, never a cross word was spoken.”

Audie says it was opportunities like the one at Fearington that informed one of the more interesting aspects of her father's personality: “He really, really loved



Michael Warner and his wife, Betty, came back to Jon in the 2000s, when they were looking to more than double their space. "He had so much energy," says Michael.

#### WEB EXTRA

See more photos of Condorel's houses at [www.chapelhillmagazine.com](http://www.chapelhillmagazine.com)



Audie and her father were bonded by their profession, which they could discuss for hours. "The wilder the ideas were, the more delighted he would be," she says. "It was so cute."

America," Audie says. "He was an incredible patriot because he was incredibly grateful to have a place to come to."

#### 'ALGERIAN FORTITUDE'

Audie's dad succumbed to cancer in 2010 at age 75. "He was so dignified through the whole thing – that Algerian fortitude," she says. "He never once said, "Why me?"

The pain of his loss "will always be raw," she says. "He was not only my dad, he was my friend."

She points to a bookcase she designed, an abstracted tree.

"Oh, Dad," she says to the heavens. "I wish I could show it to you. He would really get a kick out of that." **CHM**