

GOOD AS GOLD

BUTLER LANDMARKS CELEBRATE FIFTY YEARS

Evans Woollen's connections to Butler University run long—his great-great aunt was Catherine Merrill, the second female professor in an American university, who taught English literature at the University from 1869 to 1883.

And they run tall, too: He designed Clowes Memorial Hall.

Woollen was a young, relatively unproven architect when he was hired to design the nearly 2,200-seat concert hall in 1960. Today, he's 86, with a career that includes 50 years as an architect in Indianapolis and, now, a painter. (He had his first New York gallery show in January.)

In an interview with *Butler Magazine*, he talked about Clowes Hall's beginnings.

Q: Clowes Hall must have been a fairly futuristic design in its day. What was it like to create?

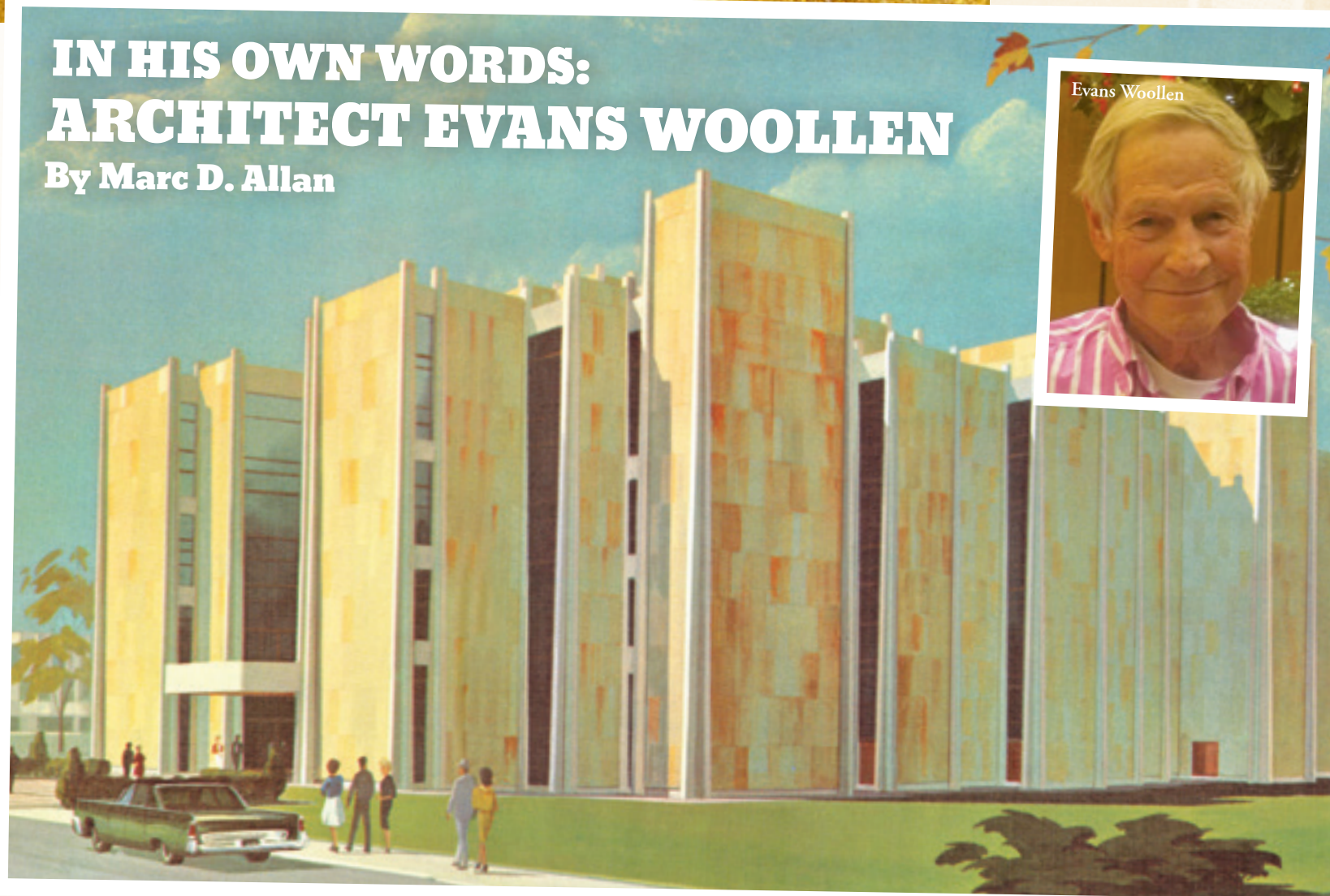
Woollen: It was futuristic in some ways, and in other ways it was trying to honor the gothic beginning—I would call it the art moderne gothic—that Butler found in its first building, Jordan Hall. We wanted to, of course, make a modern building, and we wanted to use concrete because architects were just realizing what they could do with exposed concrete. So it was part of that movement. We didn't want a building that made Jordan Hall look out-of-date or ridiculously small or something like that. That's what we were trying. Whether we succeeded, that's for everybody left to decide.

Q: How were you hired? Was it a bidding process?

Woollen: It's a funny story. I knew Allen Clowes; I know

IN HIS OWN WORDS: ARCHITECT EVANS WOOLLEN

By Marc D. Allan



I did mention my interest to Allen. He recorded this, and when a time came for interviews, I think there were probably three or four. The most glamorous and outstanding interviewee was Eero Saarinen (who designed the St. Louis Gateway Arch). We thought we didn't have a chance. He was one of the great architects of our era.

As it happened, when he was interviewed, he was on the way to Australia to participate in the jury for the opera house in Sydney, a very famous building. He was already a day late for the jury, and when he did get there, they had already made a choice informally, without him. He looked over the submissions, and he talked them out of their choice and talked them into the Danish architect whose solution is now the famous building. That all happened after the Butler interview. He was

in a hurry, and during the interview he constantly looked at his watch. This mannerism deeply upset Mrs. Clowes. She felt he was slighting the cause of her building.

So we were the next to come in, two or three days afterwards.

She was still stinging with what she thought was a rebuff, so this put us in favorable position. It was a great stroke of luck for me, and I've always been grateful to her and to Allen.

Q: When you showed the Clowes family the design, did they like it immediately?

Woollen: I think they did. I don't remember resistance or hesitation. And I think they liked it tremendously when it was finished. Kurt Pantzer, the chairman of the building committee, liked the design but was embarrassed by the exposed concrete. At one point after the hall was complete, I saw him at some occasion, and he said, "You know, I'm raising money to have all the exposed concrete inside the building painted gold." I frowned, and, of course, it never happened.

Q: What do you remember about opening night?

Woollen: It was a great occasion for Indianapolis—huge searchlights and valet parking and cars lined up and ladies

getting out of backseats in their finery and going into the hall. I can't describe it in great detail because I'm so old, and it was so long ago. I didn't have a very big practice at the time. My wife and I owned a car that was somewhat out-of-date. I remember the people in my office were very concerned that the car would look shabby in front of the television cameras. A thing like that didn't make any difference to me at all. I didn't have any pretensions of arriving in a gold pumpkin or something.

Q: Are there elements of the design or Clowes Hall you think people should pay particular attention to?

Woollen: We were very conscious that older theatres, both in Indianapolis and even in New York City, had inadequate lobby space. The old Met was a beautiful, big house, once you were in the auditorium, but it had a small lobby. The Murat Theatre in

Indianapolis had sort of a measly lobby. Lobbies up until that time had not been considered that important.

But the Lincoln Center theatres—the opera house, Lincoln Center, and the philharmonic hall, which all preceded Clowes Hall by a year or two in completion—were the beginning of great attention to lobby space and the enjoyment of intermission, which Europeans had known about and indulged in for a hundred years. Especially German theatres and opera houses.

So we were trying to make the wrap-around lobby an interesting experience and a walking experience. You could get out of your seat at intermission and go 180 degrees or so and back again and see people from balconies up above. We were into the game of seeing how we could make the lobbies as much fun as possible. Other architects were doing the same thing to some degree. In a way, we went a little further.

Maybe a year or two after completion of the hall, which only cost about \$3.5 million, I believe—the Lincoln Center theatres had cost around \$13 million—the Lincoln Center Authority sent one of their important people out to study Clowes Hall and give them a report about how in God's name we were able to do a 2,200-seat house with only \$3.5 million. This guy came out, and he spent a day or two looking at everything, measuring things and going over the plans. He went back to New York and he said, "The only real difference is they have more toilet facilities than we do." Which was true. And some toilets had to be added later.

Q: You were back on campus for the first time in about 10 years and went inside Clowes. What were your thoughts?

Woollen: I was surprised at a few things. I felt disappointed in a few things. I was surprised by the carpet that was new to me in the lobby. We had tried so hard to make a small-scale carpet to balance the grandeur of the columns. My design for that is still in the house itself, but not in the lobby. I don't know who did the design or why, but there it was.

Then, going into the house, I was surprised to find the walls between the columns painted a sort of rusty red. The original design was white, and the lighting system was designed to be reflective of the white. Now the lights really seem dim. Also, the bulbs have been changed, and they cast triangles on the walls. The original lighting was very effective wall-wash lighting designed by a great lighting designer in New York named Richard Kelly, who's long gone.

The early pictures of the interior show how smooth and even the white walls were lighted, and how the whole interior had a thrilling sense of light that it doesn't have now. Who knows? Someday, maybe there'll be a restoration of the original lighting system. I was told backstage that the lights were changed to save money. That's hard to argue with.