

**AIArchitect****In Memoriam: Elmer E. Botsai, FAIA, 54th AIA President**

Elmer E. Botsai, FAIA, AIA President from 1977-78 and former dean of the University of Hawaii's architecture school, known for his leadership in strengthening the connections between practice and academia, died on Aug. 28 in Honolulu. He was 85.

When he was elected AIA president, no other head of an academic program had ever held that AIA office before, and throughout his tenure as an AIA leader, he emphasized continuing education and professional development. In his professional career, Botsai also specialized in building failures and forensics, investigating unforeseen decay in major building commissions.

A native of Roseville, Calif., Botsai briefly served in the United States Army before studying architecture at the University of California-Berkeley. He graduated in 1954, and founded the firm Botsai Overstreet in 1963 in San Francisco.

In the 1970s, Botsai embarked on two career transitions that would come to define his legacy as a leader: He was appointed the first chair of the University of Hawaii at Manoa's architecture school in 1976 and he ascended to the highest levels of AIA national leadership. Botsai was elected AIA Treasurer in 1972, and was an AIA Vice President from 1975-76.

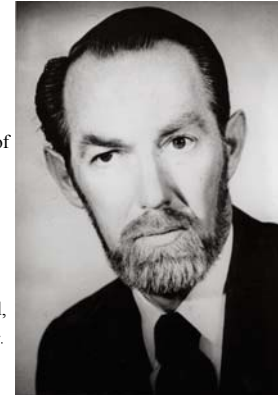
One concern Botsai emphasized as AIA president was the financial sustainability of the profession, though he didn't see the need to make money as the architect's highest calling. "I know there are some architects who see profitability as the big goal, and I feel sorry for them," he said, according to *Legacy of Leadership: the Presidents of the American Institute of Architects*. Another important directive was changing the composition of the national board to include the first non-architect public member.

Botsai became dean of the University of Hawaii at Manoa's architecture program in 1980, a position he held for 10 years. Throughout his academic tenure and after it, Botsai continually encouraged cross-pollination between professors and practitioners, continuing his professional life with Group 70 International. To ensure that other academics would be able to bring cutting-edge pedagogy earned in the professional realm into their classrooms, he and his wife Sharon Botsai funded the creation of the Elmer Botsai Professional Practice and Research Award at the university. This fund allows tenured or tenure-tracked professors to work at architecture firms and bring their research experiences back to students.

Throughout his career, Botsai was known for his detail-oriented mastery of corrosive maladies many architects don't bother unraveling: water infiltration, membrane and sealant failures, and dry rot. Colleagues remember his exacting standards and blunt candor. "There was never any doubt where Elmer stood on an issue of interest to him," said former AIA President Donald Hackl, FAIA. "He said what he said because of his conviction, not for oratorical impact. Elmer was to the AIA what Harry Truman was to the U.S.A."

Soon after his term as president, Botsai led a delegation of American architects and academics on a trade mission to China. He was president of the Hawaii Society AIA in 1985, and was later awarded the AIA Hawaii State Council Medal of Honor. With his state component, Botsai led the creation of a local architects speakers bureau, and was responsible for helping the broader board membership get involved in more positions of leadership. Botsai has also co-authored four books on building technology.

Botsai is survived by his wife Sharon, his daughter Kiana, his sons Donald and Kurt (from a previous marriage to Patricia Botsai), and four grandchildren. Memorial services will be held at 4:00 PM on Sept. 14 at Calvary by the Sea Lutheran Church in Honolulu, Hawaii.

**Elmer E. Botsai, FAIA.**

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