



CASE STUDY:

KIPNIS ARCHITECTURE + PLANNING
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS, USA



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When Nathan Kipnis began his career as an architect in the 1980s, “green” design was viewed as nothing more than a passing fad. “At that point, President Reagan had taken the solar panels off the White House, and there was absolutely no desire for energy efficiency,” Kipnis says. Despite the world around him, Kipnis knew green design had a future and has made it his life’s work, founding Kipnis Architecture + Planning (KAP) in 1993. He subsequently gained recognition as a winner of the Green Homes for Chicago International Design competition, and the firm has been busy ever since.

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Kipnis' passion for green design stems from a less whimsical source than the plastic building bricks and wooden logs he enjoyed playing with in his youth. In fact, it was the energy shortages following the Arab-Israeli War in 1973 and reading things like *Popular Science* and *Popular Mechanics*, which sometimes featured solar homes, that caught his eye. "I thought, 'If this is going to help, I'm in,'" he recalls. This childhood passion to make a difference in the world pushed Kipnis to pursue a bachelor's degree in environmental design at the University of Colorado, Boulder, and a master's degree in architecture with an energy-conscious design emphasis at Arizona State University, Tempe.

Today, the five-person team at KAP draws from Kipnis' environmental ethics and schooling to create buildings that are technically efficient, as well as aesthetically pleasing. "We're able to take sustainable elements and make them integral design elements rather than just tacking them on at the end." KAP's tagline of *High Design/Low Carbon™* reflects their mission to break down the barrier between environmental responsibility and beautiful architecture.



SUSTAINABILITY ON STURGEON BAY

KAP focuses over half of its efforts on the residential world, whether it be designing a new house or making an older one more sustainable. So while a modern, green vacation home in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin is a perfect example of their typical work, it also illustrates how they approach design from an atypical perspective.

The house is completely open to the lake view only 300 feet away, and sustainable features make it anything but old-fashioned.

The clients, a couple from Chicago who wanted a quiet retreat, requested a log cabin design for their property on Lake Michigan. Kipnis spent some time examining the site and imagining what the space could become. “It wasn’t an unusual request for a vacation home, but I did ask if we could present some different designs because I envisioned the agricultural vernacular of the Midwest.” He looked to a barn for inspiration in his quest to typify the rural essence of the region, fusing a modern mindset into a classic structure.

The building he eventually designed for his clients is an exploded, 21st century version of a classic barn. The house is completely open to the lake view only 300 feet away, and sustainable features make it anything but old-fashioned. “With the cool air coming off the lake, I wanted to take advantage of natural ventilation,” Kipnis explains. “The form of a barn works well for that because the curved roof encourages airflow. We attached remotes to the top windows, and so when you open the bottom windows, too, you get this great, free-flowing air movement.”



Kipnis adds that the homeowners were initially suspicious of how well natural ventilation could work. "The husband asked us to install air-conditioning in the master bedroom, but the design works so great that he's never turned it on!" The modern barn is also pre-wired for solar panels, utilizes natural daylighting and radiant floor heating, and uses many locally sourced materials. The home's ultra-efficient, ENERGY STAR® rating, as well as its recognition as the *Natural Home Magazine* Home of the Decade, clearly reflects the skill with which KAP carries out their mission of stylish sustainability.



PLAYFUL ENERGY

MEETS ENERGY CONSERVATION

KAP brings their creative design approach to more than just living spaces. For example, when the Evanston, Illinois-based firm CraftJack started running out of office space, they sought a local architecture firm that could create a bigger, better environment for their expanding business. They only had to look a few doors down the block, where KAP's office resides. "We looked on KAP's website and thought the Sturgeon Bay home was gorgeous," says Noah Mishkin, principal of CraftJack, a lead generation firm for building contractors. "Its contemporary design had a lot of character and a feel that we liked. Images from other projects really sold us on KAP's capabilities."

Mishkin, a former practicing architect, knew CraftJack chose the right firm when Kipnis and his team presented their initial designs modeled in Vectorworks® software. "I grew up using Vectorworks in school and professionally, so I knew how KAP was designing, how they were going to present their ideas, and how simple collaborating with them was going to be," says Mishkin.

The design for the CraftJack office encapsulates the architecture-centered nature of their business, as well as its startup origins.

When entering through the front door, visitors walk through a stylized blueprint containing sections of raw framing, followed by a wall with lath on it, a layer of drywall, and ending with a “finished” construction. The response generated by these few feet of walking space represents the type of work CraftJack’s clients engage in every day.

Inside the office itself, a central workspace is modeled after an outdoor space, complete with abstracted trees, as well as walled façades that house individual offices behind them. A garage door even opens up from a central courtyard of workspaces, revealing a meeting room. A cluster of desks in the middle allows for collaboration among employees in a playful environment complemented by seating areas with Adirondack chairs and a ceiling that looks like rolling clouds.

“We wanted to create an environment people wanted to be in rather than rush to exit at the end of workday,” Mishkin explains. “So we worked with KAP to create a setting that exuded creativity, as well as a sense of happiness and enjoyment.” Ping-pong and foosball tables, as well as dartboards placed within the space, foster this sense of fun.

The employees at CraftJack love their new office, but no KAP building would be complete without sustainable elements. The office is equipped with NEST thermostats, which regulate temperatures to prevent energy waste, as well as recycled and recyclable furniture and carpeting, ENERGY STAR equipment, and a Solatube® system that ushers natural light into the space. Plus, all lights use correct temperature LED bulbs, proving once again that KAP relies on sustainable elements to enhance a design rather than just lend an environmentally friendly label.

“ The future of green architecture is interesting because even though people once thought of it as a voluntary thing, it's become quite real. ”

- Nathan Kipnis



SELLING SUSTAINABILITY

KAP uses Vectorworks for all of its design work, including Sturgeon Bay and the CraftJack office, often utilizing the software's modeling capabilities to show, rather than tell, clients what their finished project will look like. "We model in 3D because it allows us to show clients a simple but understandable 3D space," Kipnis says. "This approach helps us get a client's initial approval for a design, and then we can really go into detail to show people exactly what they're getting."

On the CraftJack project, for example, designers utilized a content library of textures to give their 3D Vectorworks model a realistic look. Today, one can barely discern the difference between the rendering and the finished work. "The rendering was spot on, right down to the orientation of the carpet and the lighting," Mishkin enthuses.

This attention to detail, both in the design and the sustainable elements, has allowed Kipnis to be a visionary in the field of green architecture, and he continues to show the world that sustainability can be beautiful with each new project the firm tackles, whether it be offshore wind farms, restaurants, a terminal redesign at O'Hare International Airport, or another residence or office space.

Kipnis has enthusiastically positioned his firm, and he is capably leading this growing movement toward sustainable design by example. Issuing a call to his fellow architects, Kipnis suggests, "This is the future, and it's not optional anymore. Game on."



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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