



THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
**OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT**  
BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN

**GALE A. BREWER**  
BOROUGH PRESIDENT

**Memorial Service for Jordan Gruzen**  
**3.12.2015**

Cal Snyder and I have a son, Mo, who was in college when Jordan and Lee first met him, and now he is in graduate school. He was born in The Gambia and is very upbeat, personable, and communicative. All three of us have had the pleasure of spending Christmas with Sheila Gordon and Robin Elliott—my neighbors and friends and hosts extraordinaire—and the Gruzens.

In an email sent yesterday, this is what Mo had to say about Jordan:

“Mr. Gruzen loved his architectural career. Every time we talked, he always expressed the thrill in designing new buildings and seeing the end results. One of the most important things I took away from our last conversation was his warm heart for giving back. He said to me that it is very hard to watch TV or read about an important cause without opening his wallet to contribute because he enjoyed giving and helping others. We also talked about One Police Plaza and the new show about the Police Commissioner called *Blue Bloods*. I am going to miss him.”

What I remember about Jordan is his walking into a room and the excitement of anticipating what he was going to share—the projects he was working on, the issues he thought should be addressed, the things he thought should be happening on New York City’s waterfront, and what I, as a member of the City Council or as Borough President, should be doing about it or other concerns. Whatever he said I thought about for months afterward, redoubling my efforts to follow his lead. I wasn’t always successful, but I tried.

I also want to thank Lee for her many ideas. We have several projects that we collaborate on, and it is always an honor to work with her.

Jordan Gruzen accomplished what I’m certain many architects and planners only wish they knew how to do: he taught non-architects like me what top-flight urban design looks like, and works like, and he did this by making it better at large scale than any other residential designer of his generation, and in the toughest town there is.

Manhattan as a modern laboratory for urban residential design has produced a lot of experiments along this line: James Ware's 1890s City and Suburban Homes; the LaGuardia and Al Smith Houses; Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village; the NYCHA megablocks and Mitchell Lama towers of the seventies; and the high-rise condos (and rentals) that are still filling in the old West Side rail yards. The modernism that Jordan practiced looked at what was civic about modern buildings, and went a very different way.

Each of his projects was conceived as civic architecture in the broad sense— inner-city residential buildings, and their settings, that sought to meld pragmatic and idealized visions of how to house New Yorkers decently and affordably, how to provide their children with schools that inspire learning, and how to create public buildings that are decisive but always pleasing to look at, be around, and enter, and that make the buildings beside them better.

But not just that. For the best of Jordan's buildings were essays in human dignity, the kind that people can acquire when where they live or work provides a sense of shared belonging and striving.

New York as a laboratory for housing and public buildings like that— housing and schools as an ethical and social foundation for ordinary people—had long-inspired architects like Jordan. But looking back across nearly 150 years of experiment, it appears to me that no one mastered the elements of the urban ensemble better than he, or fulfilled more completely the promise of a farsighted civic architecture that was beautiful, beautifully scaled and welcoming, and made to the exacting standards of a real modernist.

What made this possible, I think, is that Jordan brought a profoundly ethical compass to the business of designs for living, learning, and working. I reflect on the astuteness of that compass whenever I walk across Police Plaza, or particularly around his work in Battery Park City. When the afternoon light floods the warm red and yellow brickwork of those perfectly-scaled streets near the river, the buildings speak eloquently of both tradition and innovation, and around you ebbs and flows the murmur of city life, honest and sustaining. Those are the special moments you know you're being taught about the purposes of urban living, and designing for life, by the hand of a master.

Those like me—whose imagination of the built city he deepened and inspired—as well as those whom his work shelters and nurtures every day, owe Jordan Gruzen a great debt of thanks. I feel very lucky to have known him, and to have learned from him what makes architecture civic, and why it matters.