

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING

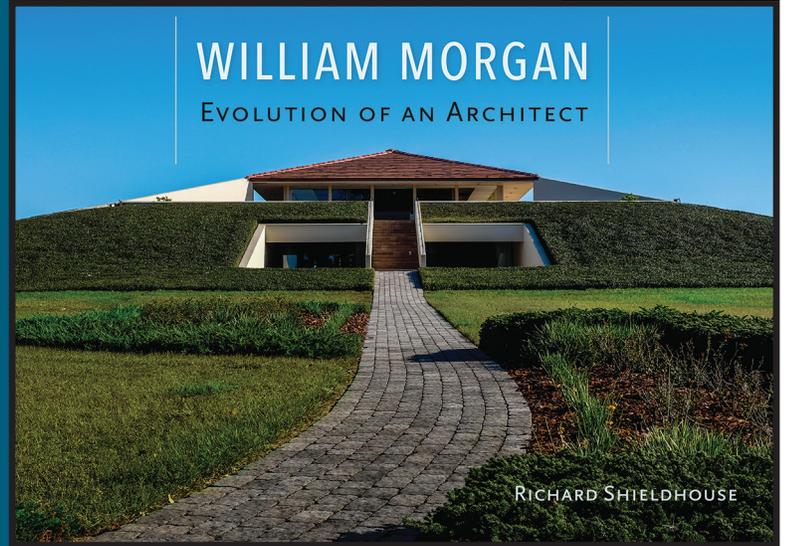


**Elegantly written and based upon Shieldhouse's extensive interviews with the architect, William Morgan is indispensable, opening new avenues of understanding why and how Morgan's research about earth and pre-Columbian architecture enabled an extraordinary oeuvre of humanist architecture in the globalizing world, achieving the embodiment of his democratic and pioneering multicultural, environmental, and ethical agenda."**

—Jean-François Lejeune, coeditor of *Modern Architecture and the Mediterranean: Vernacular Dialogues and Contested Identities*

**"The first book to thoroughly explore the personal story of William Morgan's life journey and his development as an architect, offering a better understanding of the meaning and basis behind his significant and beautiful architecture."**

—Guy W. Peterson, FAIA, founder and principal, Guy Peterson Office for Architecture



**WILLIAM MORGAN**  
Evolution of an Architect  
RICHARD SHIELDHOUSE

978-0-8130-5690-6 • Hardcover \$49.95 • 240 pages, 10 x 7  
UNIVERSITY PRESS OF FLORIDA • SEPTEMBER 2018

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WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING



**This book presents personal and useful insight into the life and work of William Morgan, a most remarkable architect who was able to combine the creed of modern architecture, the built lessons from ancient civilizations, and the spirit of place in its broadest sense.”**

—Fernando Vegas López-Manzanares, coauthor of *Centro histórico de Valencia: Ocho siglos de arquitectura residencial*

**“Shieldhouse introduces us to William Morgan, who, inspired by archaeology and the architecture of ancient and indigenous civilizations, brought a unique perspective to his modernist designs of the postwar decades.”**

—Theodore H. M. Prudon, author of *Preservation of Modern Architecture*

**“A rich tour of postwar American architectural culture.”**

—Ben Koush, architect, Ben Koush Associates

## **WILLIAM MORGAN**

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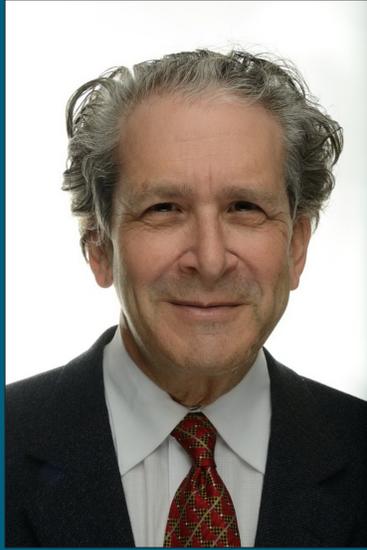
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*Credit: Brad Chesivair*

## RICHARD SHIELDHOUSE

is a planner, preservationist, and tourism expert. He has a master's degree in city and regional planning from Harvard University and a doctorate in design, construction, and planning from the University of Florida. He lives in Jacksonville, Florida, and works as a transportation consultant.

### Richard Shieldhouse

is available for interviews and appearances



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# Q&A

with  
**RICHARD SHIELDHOUSE**  
author of  
William Morgan

## **What made you decide to write about Morgan?**

Two fine books previously published on Morgan documented his remarkable body of work, but I felt there was a need to explore the roots and evolution of his creativity. *William Morgan: Evolution of an Architect* plunges into the biographical and personal realms of the architect. It also provides images of his more recent projects and documents how his buildings have endured over the years.

## **How would you describe Morgan's signature style?**

Morgan's work used a variety of architectural styles, but his best-known works uniquely married the simplicity of modernism, earth architecture, and aspects of ancient North American building.

## **What is earth architecture, and what role did Morgan have in shaping it?**

Morgan described earth architecture as the "architectural uses of earth in shaping the environment of humankind," and he meant that literally. Morgan's designs shaped earth into a variety of buildings and shapes: a mound-like oceanfront duplex, twin pyramids housing the headquarters for a navy

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submarine base, and a solitary residential pyramid atop a lofty hill in the Central Florida countryside.

### **What about Morgan's designs drew you to them?**

I'm drawn to the way Morgan's designs during the peak of his practice blended elements of the earliest American builders and earth architecture with the more orthodox modernism of figures such as Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier. His designs for urban environments in Florida sought to minimize the impact of automobiles, while creating attractive environments for the buildings' users and for pedestrians. This kind of thinking unfortunately appears to have been forgotten in recent Florida urban development.

### **What personality traits and quirks did he possess that made him such a unique architect?**

Morgan was confident, creative, original, independent. These characteristics combined in him to create unorthodox—yet fundamentally appealing—residential, governmental, commercial, and religious structures, which remain respected after many decades.

### **Was Morgan always interested in studying architecture?**

During his undergraduate years at Harvard College, Morgan flipped from one area of concentration (law, archaeology, etc.) to another until a dean literally pointed to the architecture building and suggested Morgan find a home there. But Morgan retained broad interests throughout his life, including an interest in archaeology. He published five books dealing with the subject, and he also sought to integrate principles of early builders into his modern designs.

### **Who were Morgan's most important mentors while he was at Harvard?**

Morgan's work with architect Paul Rudolph during his first year at Harvard's Graduate School of Design profoundly impacted him. Rudolph exposed Morgan to an influential architect at the apex of his career. Rudolph also provided valuable lessons to Morgan about what it takes to run a successful practice and introduced him to some of the leading practitioners in the field. But the faculty member at Harvard that most influenced Morgan was the

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architectural historian Eduard F. Sekler, who instilled in his pupil a profound reverence for buildings and places from the past.

**After receiving his degree from Harvard's Graduate School of Design, Morgan won the prestigious Wheelwright Prize, which allowed him to travel the world for architectural research. How did this experience change the way he designed?**

The Wheelwright Prize provided a platform for Morgan to investigate examples of earth architecture around the planet. His immersion into the subject led Morgan to more extensively explore earth forms as a basis for sustainable modern architecture and eventually to some of his best-known work, such as the Dunehouses, a duplex built into the remnant of an ancient dune in Atlantic Beach, Florida, and the Florida State Museum (now Dickinson Hall) on the University of Florida campus.

**How would you describe the legacy Morgan left behind after his passing in 2016?**

I believe Morgan will be remembered as an architect who married modernism with the design principles of ancient builders to create an architecture that uniquely respects both humanity and place.

**What are you working on next?**

From 1917 to 1918, the United States operated 14 naval aviation facilities along the French Coast. I am continuing archival research into these bases—their genesis, operations, struggles, and successes. This was a remarkable effort that rapidly deployed what was then advanced technology to thwart German submarine attacks. Little is known about it, and I'd like to change that.

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## EARLY YEARS

# 1

William Morgan was born December 14, 1930, to physician Thomas Edward Morgan Sr. and his wife Kathleen Fiske Morgan. When he was three years of age, the family moved from Jacksonville to Lake City, Florida, some sixty miles away. Thomas Sr. had been a resident physician at the Duval County Hospital in Jacksonville with a specialty in pediatrics. When the Great Depression hit, like many others, he lost his job. In Lake City Morgan's father found work as a general practitioner, but times were tough. Morgan's older brother, Thomas Jr., remembered patients paying their father in fruit and vegetables from their yards and gardens.

Living in Lake City left a deep impression on a young William Morgan. The new home featured a wide front porch and faced a small lake with a sidewalk surrounding it where children often gathered to play. Neighboring one-story houses facing the lake flanked the Morgan home, with a small wide yard between each house and the next. This grouping of houses oriented toward a landscape feature—the lake, and its function as a natural gathering spot for adults and children—Morgan identified as his first experience of place. Early in his childhood at the lakeside home, Morgan came to understand how place creates community. During his architectural career, as he immersed himself in the thinking of early architects, his designs became increasingly sensitive to place, both in their relationship to topography and

in Morgan's impulse to create place in designs, such with as the Police Memorial Building and Daniel State Office Building in downtown Jacksonville, and the Florida State Museum (now Dickinson Hall) in Gainesville, where he created places for people to congregate by incorporating rooftop gardens and other gathering spots into the building structure. In doing so, Morgan connected people to these places, to his buildings, and to elements of the landscape that have existed since prehistory.

The communal feeling of living in the lakeside neighborhood, though, was short-lived for the Morgan family. Dr. Morgan advocated vaccines for children starting school, and that ran counter to beliefs of the small, conservative community of Lake City. At the time many conservative Christians believed vaccines interfered with God's will to decide who should be stricken with sickness and who should go unscathed. In their view, Dr. Morgan was interfering with the divine plan. "The two pastors [in town] got together and ran him out of Lake City because he insisted on giving vaccinations against God's will," Morgan's older brother Thomas recalled. "My father had a problem. He was interested in childhood diseases."

The loss of a second job during the Great Depression put Dr. Morgan and his family in crisis. He had a wife and two young children to support but no job. A friend in Tallahassee with connections to Florida's state government arranged for him to be hired as the prison doctor at Florida State Prison in Raiford. The family lived on the site of the jail complex in what Thomas described as a three-room shack elevated on cinder blocks, with a tin roof. Thomas remembered the lights in the house dimming whenever a prisoner was electrocuted in Raiford's death chamber.

"I remember playing on dark nights in the winter, and the lights would go dim and my mother would cry because they had just executed someone," Thomas said.

Although he had been run out of Lake City, word of Dr. Morgan's forward-thinking commitment to vaccinating children found its way to the White House. Thomas recalled playing with young William in the front room of their tiny house when a black Buick eased up to the front door. Inside was a well-dressed woman wearing a hat with a large, dramatic brim. "Is

this where Dr. Morgan lives?” she asked. Mrs. Morgan told the visitor that her husband was at the prison clinic.

The visitor said she’d heard that there was a doctor in Florida who had gotten in trouble for administering vaccines. She was associated with the Roosevelt Administration and its efforts to bring electrical power to rural areas, and she wanted to meet this doctor. Sometime after that visit, the Roosevelt Administration arranged for Dr. Morgan to receive a fellowship to study at the Harvard School of Public Health.

As the fellowship began in 1935, the family moved into a two-bedroom apartment in Brookline, Massachusetts. Morgan remembered the tall, densely built urban apartment buildings in Brookline. The apartment lacked a yard for young Morgan to play in, so a fire escape outside the tiny living room’s window was his fallback option. He recalled spending many hours on that fire escape watching parachutes he fashioned from his father’s handkerchiefs drift slowly down into the snow-blanketed alley with no interference from the wind.

Following his graduation from the School of Public Health, Dr. Morgan moved his family back to Florida, where he had been hired to launch a state health department office in the Tampa Bay area. From that job Dr. Morgan was recruited to work for the U.S. Department of Labor by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, who was the first woman to serve in a presidential cabinet. The family moved again—this time into a two-story house on a hill in Falls Church, Virginia. Thomas Morgan Jr. recalled Perkins reading children’s stories to him and cocktail parties at his family home, with guests such as Roosevelt’s Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes and his Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau Jr. At the Falls Church home, Morgan’s brother also remembered radio and television personality Arthur Godfrey living next to the lot where the Morgan brothers and other neighborhood kids played baseball on Saturdays. “The Old Redhead” would regularly shout at them to curtail their noise.

In 1940 the family returned northeast Florida and lived in a duplex in Jacksonville’s Riverside neighborhood before moving some twenty miles east to Jacksonville Beach.



Figure 1. William Morgan (*left*) and brother Thomas on tricycles in Jacksonville's Riverside neighborhood. From the Morgan family.

William Morgan graduated from San Pablo Elementary School in Jacksonville Beach and then from Duncan U. Fletcher High School in Neptune Beach.

The family's first house in Jacksonville Beach was located a block from the Atlantic Ocean, and Morgan noted how its two-story screened-in porch offered a sweeping ocean view. From that high perch, unobstructed by today's high-rise buildings, the beach extended across the horizon in both directions. Later, as an architect, Morgan was sensitive to the need to preserve water views.

Morgan's family moved frequently, following the demands of his father's career, but he recalled those moves as educational. By the time Morgan graduated from high school, the family had lived in ten different homes in ten different settings. In addition to the house by the lake and the multi-story apartment building, he had lived in a garage apartment in Augusta, Georgia; a simple one-story in a suburban neighborhood in Clearwater, Florida; a house with an ocean view; and the two-story house on top of a hill in Falls Church, Virginia. Reflecting later, Morgan said the experience of living in so many different settings profoundly influenced his sense of how building design and landscapes shape people, family life, and neighborhoods.

When the United States entered World War II after the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Dr. Morgan was drafted into the U.S. Army. He was stationed in Las Vegas, Nevada, where he held the rank of major and was appointed the military governor of the military district of southern Nevada, Thomas said. As part of his duties, he created a health clinic for the Clark County Health Department. There were plenty of patients. The military had undertaken a massive training program in Las Vegas, preparing soldiers and airmen to operate B-17 and B-24 bombers. There were Native Americans in the region, workers building the Hoover Dam, and prostitutes who had been brought in by the mob, Thomas said, to serve the burgeoning military population.

For three summers William and Thomas lived with their father in Las Vegas, visiting the Grand Canyon, Yosemite, Zion National Park, Bryce Canyon National Park, and other places



*Far left:* Figure 2. Morgan (#33) with Duncan U. Fletcher High School teammates. From the Morgan family.

*Left:* Figure 3. High school shot of Morgan. From the Morgan family.

that are less well known. William Morgan's interest in archaeology dates to these explorations of sites where pre-Columbian peoples lived. "I grew up in a modern Pueblo Indian community and spent much time within and around the ruins of the Pajarito Plateau of northern New Mexico," the architect wrote in the foreword to one of his archaeological studies.<sup>1</sup> On the southern rim of the Grand Canyon, the brothers visited a little-known pre-Columbian site featuring remains of a ball court that resembled the grand ball court of the Mayan site Chichén Itzá, his brother Thomas recalled.

Back in Jacksonville Beach for the school year, Morgan played the snare drum in the Fletcher High School marching band and joined the Latin Club, following his brother's lead. He played football, becoming the team's co-captain, and edited the school's yearbook during his senior year.

The Morgan brothers scrambled for money, like other teenagers. They delivered newspapers, but their biggest and most lucrative venture was hauling out cars stuck in beach sand. The brothers drove a black 1928 Model A convertible with yellow rims. They dubbed it the

“Yellow Peril” and drove seven miles up and down the beach, from Ponte Vedra to Atlantic Beach, looking for customers. Thomas had bought the car with seventy-five dollars earned from his paper route. When his older brother left for college, William inherited the Yellow Peril and ran the “Morgan Rescue Service” with a friend, Thomas recalled. Morgan fastened to the car a makeshift sign reading “Pullouts \$25,” which he would stash when police were nearby.

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