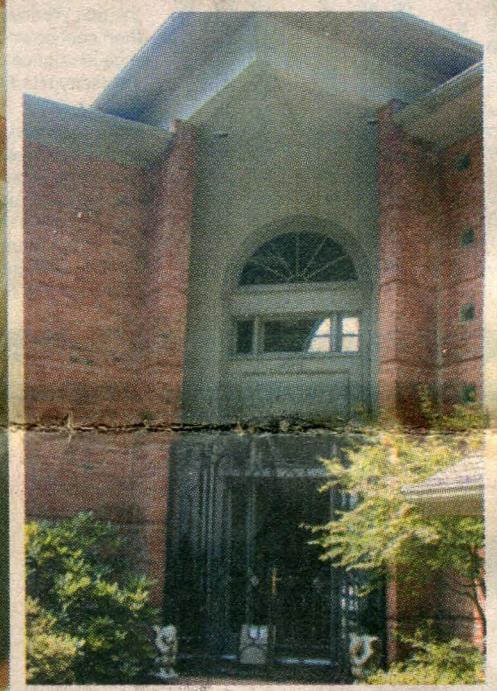


By design....



Story and photos by
Shane Morgan for the
News Journal

Structure Art - Jerry Dixon of Somerset has integrated aspects of his artistic life into the houses he designs. Many Pulaskians will remember Jerry as perhaps one of their favorite biology or art teachers.

Pulaski designer puts his heart into “Art-itecture”

■ **By Shane Morgan**
for the News Journal

Jerry Wayne Dixon, a Laurel County native and long-time Pulaski resident, has a bit of a following. People of all walks of life, artists of varying mediums, people of medicine and the life-sciences, mechanics, construction workers, chefs, writers, have been influenced by this artist/scientist/educator.

Jerry's life is filled with a love of science, the arts, and education - but mostly with just love itself. He imagines, tongue-in-cheek, a machine which a

wannabe educator would have to walk through as a requirement for employment as a teacher - a machine that could detect love.

Jerry feels that it's very important for educators to love to teach, and to love the students they teach. That's why there are art teachers, tattoo artists, musicians, painters, business people, community leaders and a host of others who respect his various work, and many who are, in a sense, carrying on his work in their own manner and stride.

“I'm first an artist,” says Jerry, relishing the words

See DESIGNER, Page A-3

DESIGNER

Continued from A-1

As they fall from his tongue. And this prime directive has guided his outlook on life, his teaching style as a long-time educator in the local school system, and even his life as a scientist.

From his accounts of early memories of crouching with a large glass marble in his hand, looking at the structure of insect anatomy through the marble-as-makeshift-microscope, one can glean that this artist/scientist/curious-person has perhaps never experienced a dull moment in his life.

Over the years, Jerry (as a high school teacher, he was simply "D" or "Mr. D") has spent a good deal of his time sharing his curiosity and love for learning. He taught at Nancy High School for 16 years, at Somerset Community College for 25 years, and at Pulaski County High for 29 years - teaching at more than one place at the same time for some of those years.

Now retired as an educator, he has taught both science and art - two roads that are often depicted as going in polar opposite directions. However, Jerry travels both roads, as if they were parallel, maybe even the same road. When, as a child, his insatiable curiosity led him to voluntarily study the physical structure of living things, and how that structure was part of the creature's functionality, he quickly gained a sense of the "artwork" within nature - that perhaps God was something of an Artist Himself, in a manner of speaking.

Jerry's family was very poor as he grew up, but this only added to his development as an artist. "Our toys consisted of what we could make," he says, adding that he took something of this, for lack of a better phrase, bring-it-out-of-yourself ethic to his students.

Many of his teachers in primary school

didn't quite know what to make of young Jerry and his fascination with "bug legs and frogs, and human anatomy" and art, but some of his art teachers caught on and let the young explorer do his thing, letting him develop his art his own way.

While growing up in London, Jerry started to gain a reputation as an aspiring artist, and some London citizens would "take him in," offering him art books and other help. Jerry now refers fondly to the support he received as "rich encouragement." Jerry adds that his parents also gave him "great support."

After helping to work himself through college via employment with the RC Cola company, Jerry landed work as a fledgling educator at Nancy High School, this being two or more decades before "consolidation" occurred in the school system and Nancy High ceased to exist.

At Nancy High, the new teacher was taken underwing by an educator who was to become an important influence in Jerry's life. Sherman Carter befriended Jerry, and shared some of his educational experience and knowledge with the young man. Carter was a state representative and an instructor of civics and history, whose demeanor and teaching style had an effect on Jerry.

"He gave such an open and light outlook," says Jerry. "He was serious, but light."

It was in the '60s that Jerry began his teaching career, and it was also during that decade that he began utilizing his artistic skills with an architecture firm called Crawford and Crawford.

Jerry now continues to put his knowledge of structure and aesthetic, of form and function, and his need for artistic flavoring to use in architecture-related work. He helps design homes, using his art experience and love for expression to help integrate the needs and wants of families into a physical, livable structure.

Jerry says he technically isn't an archi-

tect, tossing out the term "para-architect," just to see how it fits. His designs are much more personal than simple utilitarian structure, though utility is one of the fundamental priorities. Jerry cites the work of Moore, an "environmental sculptor," as a big influence on his approach to home design. Jerry feels his own work is more "sculpture" than architecture.

His work, following along with the "architecture" approach, allows him to design a plan for the home, which is then used as a guide for the building crews to "sculpt." Jerry says his designs are developed to "fit around the family" in a very custom-made manner.

Jerry has designed many homes in the region for a variety of clientele, including doctors, lawyers, public officials, and many others of whatever walk of life. Many of his designs can be seen at Eagle's Nest subdivision, at the new Waitsboro subdivision, and in several other areas. Local figures such as Alton Blakley, Jr., Dr. Theresa Bentley, attorney Joe Travis, and Dr. Kevin Kavanagh have commissioned Jerry in the past to help design their homes.

Retired from professional teaching, Jerry is own his own in the home design business now, working from the simple but warm home which he shares with his wife, Sarah, a woman he refers to as his "rock."

"She has literally given me the life I've had," says Jerry. He says Sarah has supported his art and kept him focused all along, allowing for the joy he's experienced in being able to do with his life what his heart required of him: to create and experience art in whatever form it came.

Jerry describes his life to this point in a way that seems to suit his tendency toward the nasty habit of art, of curiosity. He utilizes a quote by another Jerry, the one of "Grateful Dead" fame, to describe his own life thus far: "...a strange and wonderful trip..."

If you ever meet Jerry (Dixon, that is),

or are curious about his approach to architecture and decide to look him up in the phone book, don't be surprised if he's somewhat good-naturedly annoyed if you address him formally with "Mr. Dixon" - he prefers just plain ol' "Jerry."