

Architect George Suyama to deliver Dean's Distinguished Lecture

Catherine O'Donnell, UW Alumni manazine, January 3, 2012

<http://www.washington.edu/news/articles/architect-george-suyama-to-deliver-dean2019s-distinguished-lecture>



George Suyama, photo by Mark Gsellman, courtesy of SPD

On San Juan Island, in a small, one-room building, are two built-in beds and a bathroom. At eye level near the head of each bed is a small but exquisite window. The room is emblematic of the architecture George Suyama has practiced for the last 40 years: simple and eloquent, nothing extraneous allowed.

Suyama will discuss his work in the 2012 Dean's Distinguished Lecture, sponsored by the UW College of Built Environments, at 6:30 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 9 in 120 Kane Hall. Afterward, he will sign copies of [Suyama: A Complex Serenity](#), written by Grant Hildebrand, a UW emeritus professor of architecture, and published in March by the University of Washington Press.

Suyama, 69, explains "complex serenity" as "editing and distilling a design to make it appear simple."

"It's a contradiction to our 21st-century lifestyles," he said in a recent interview.

Over time, Suyama has made his designs more and more elemental, stripping away what might be considered merely decorative. He will discuss this simplicity in his lecture, "Inspirations and Place."

In 1971, Suyama founded the Seattle architecture firm now known as [Suyama Peterson Deguchi](#).

He and his mentor, Gene Zema, belong to a group of Pacific Northwest architects whose designs work closely with the sites, taking into account climate, wind patterns, landscape and topography. In the work of these architects, a careful sequence typically draws a person from public to private spaces, often with big windows offering spectacular views and encouraging light in a region known for gray, overcast days. In such designs, walkways and verandas are often given generous eaves that protect against wind and weather.

In *Complex Serenity*, Hildebrand profiles several houses, including three Suyama designed for himself and his wife, Kim.

Hildebrand, who taught Suyama at the UW in the 1960s, said that Suyama's brand of simplicity is actually quite complex and thus requires hard thought.

"It's distillation. What looks simple is actually the long way around," Hildebrand said.

Hildebrand, 77, has written eight books about architecture. He won the Governor's Writers Award (now the Washington Book Award) in 2000. His current manuscript, *Small Wooden Buildings: The Puget Sound School*, focuses on remarkable wooden architecture from the '50s through the mid-'70s.

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