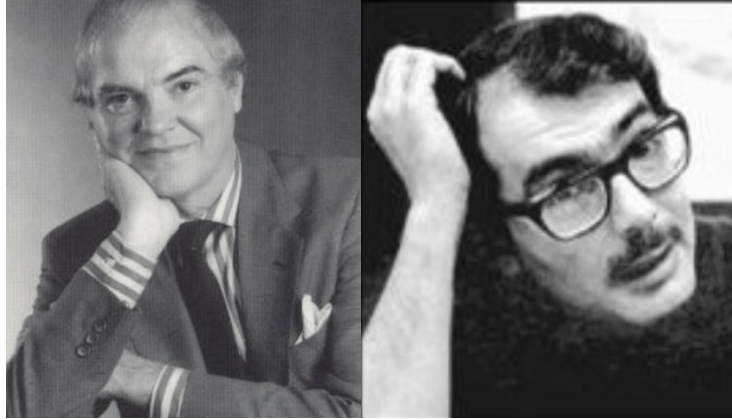


Pentes Place

1346 Hill Road, Charlotte, NC

Written By: Dan Morrill of Preserve Mecklenburg



Architect Murray Whisnant (left) says that to do a good project you have to have a good client. There is no better example of this truth than the office building Whisnant designed in 1980 for Charlotte artist and performer Jack Pentes (right). In keeping with his training at the School of Design at North Carolina State, Whisnant created a long, slender structure that shows great sensitivity to the tree-filled, corner lot on which the building was erected. When I visited the site recently, I walked toward the entrance and saw a squirrel scurrying up a tree. Believe me, there are no squirrels on the other commercial lots in the neighborhood. According to Jack Pentes' daughter, several deer recently showed up on a security camera.

In August 1990 Richard Maschal wrote a feature article on Murray Whisnant for the *Charlotte Observer*. He asked Jack Pentes (1931-2015) to explain how Whisnant responded to the need to design a building that would fit the needs of the Pentes Design Studio. "He knew he was doing a building for creative people," said Pentes. All offices have windows. The offices have 21' high ceilings. Pentes explained: "This feeling of space overhead allows your mind to expand." Pentes called Whisnant "probably the best-kept architectural secret in America." In 1990 Whisnant did win the \$10,000 Kamphoefner Prize, given to the North Carolina architect who made a "sustained contribution to the modern movement." The prize was named for Henry Kamphoefner, the seminal Dean of the N.C. State School of Design.

The Pentes Office Building does not dominate the site. From some angles in the summer you can barely see the structure. The parking lot is gravel instead of impervious asphalt. All of these features stand in stark contrast to the unimaginative and environmentally insensitive commercial structures that line nearby South Boulevard, one of Charlotte's garish examples of what preservationists call "road rash."