

Architect: Benedict, Frederic "Fritz" A.
Birth/Death Dates: March 15, 1914 - July 8, 1995
Practice Dates: 1946 – 1995
Firms: Benedict, Sutherland, Fallin, Inc.
F. Benedict Associates, Inc.

Biographical Information

Frederic "Fritz" Benedict was born in Medford, Wisconsin, in 1914, and earned his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Landscape Architecture from the University of Wisconsin. Frank Lloyd Wright invited him to serve as the head gardener at Taliesin in Spring Green, Wisconsin, in 1938. As Benedict's interest in Wright's philosophy grew, he studied under Wright at both Taliesin and Taliesin West in Scottsdale, Arizona, for three years. Wright's influence upon Benedict's work was evident for decades to come.



Benedict first visited Aspen in 1941 as a competitor in the National Skiing Championships. Less than a year later, he was drafted into the Tenth Mountain Division of the U.S. Army and trained at Camp Hale near Leadville. Benedict served as an S2 intelligence officer in the 126th Mountain Engineer Battalion, supporting the Tenth Mountain Division. He saw active duty in Italy in the later years of the war and served in the Army until the war ended in 1945. While ski treks from Camp Hale to Aspen were frequently a part of the training, they were also an element of recreation for the soldiers, and many, including Benedict, returned to the untamed slopes of Aspen following World War II.

When Benedict returned to Aspen he purchased a ranch atop Red Mountain. His life as a rancher was short-lived however. The arrival of artist and architect Herbert Bayer from New York City and entrepreneur Walter Paepcke from Chicago initiated Aspen's revival from an isolated mining town to an internationally-known ski resort. Bayer was important to Benedict personally as well, introducing him to his wife Fabienne who encouraged him to leave ranching and return to architecture. Benedict became the foremost architect in Aspen through his collaboration with Paepcke and Bayer, helping to establish the town's own style of modern architecture. His education in landscape architecture, the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright, and Bayer's Bauhaus influence encouraged him to blend nature with architecture, ensuring that the buildings he designed did not overwhelm the landscape but instead contributed to the overall aesthetic of the area.

Benedict designed over two hundred buildings in the Aspen area throughout his career. His primary focus was on residences, such as the Berger Cabin (1947), the Aspen Alps Condominiums (1963), and the Aspen Square Condominiums (1969). His architecture was distinctly modernist in nature, though it typically incorporated elements of the local rustic style through his use of area timber, bricks, and stone to create a style distinct to Aspen. Commercial examples of his work include the Copper Kettle (1954), the original Pitkin County Library (1960), the Bidwell–Mountain Plaza Building (1965), and the Pitkin County Bank (1978). Many of the

residential examples have been demolished, but several of the commercial examples still remain.

One of the finest examples of Benedict's work was the Edmundson Waterfall House, built in 1961 and originally located at 202 Midnight Mine Road in Aspen, next to a natural waterfall. Though the property was demolished in the early 1990s, the Waterfall House lives on through photos and Benedict's own writings. This house shared many characteristics with Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater. Both homes featured low pitched roofs, an emphasis on the horizontal, and the use of mitered corner windows. While these characteristics are strongly associated with Wright, Benedict added his own touch based upon how he used these elements in the overall design of the Edmundson house and its integration with the natural landscape. The Edmundson House was built directly into the side of a cliff and used the excavated stone to build the walls of the house. The overall style of the house was such that it melded into the landscape as opposed to overwhelming it. As Benedict stated shortly before it was demolished, "The house became part of the living rock."



In January 1992, Benedict lamented the looming demolition of the Edmundson House, as well as the changing nature of Aspen from its early years when "newcomers to Aspen tried to fit in with the existing community (and remarking) it was a rare classless society in which city people adopted the rural way of life. They appreciated the uniqueness of this remote corner of the mountains and wanted to become part of it – to be locals." Benedict questioned the influence of new residents who imposed Eastern and California cultures on the mountain town. According to Benedict,

these individuals possessed little regard for the environment, building large houses that dominated the landscape rather than blending into it. He disagreed with their practice of importing building materials rather than using nearby natural resources that allowed builders to create houses more in keeping with the Colorado landscape. Benedict commented:

In contrast, at the Edmundson House, we excavated red sandstone five or six feet into a cliff... The bedding plane became the interior walls of the lower bathroom and greenhouse. Excavated rock was used to build walls, thus the building became part of the living rock – an organic expression. The house intrudes lightly into the pristine landscape because it is only 3500 square feet as well as (constructed of) the indigenous stone. The red roof gravel, shadows created by broad roof overhangs, saving existing trees, (and) a gravel driveway instead of asphalt, all help to blend the house into the surroundings.¹

The unobtrusive nature of European ski villages and the way in which they existed amongst the natural landscape also influenced Benedict's sense of design. This influence was evident in the contributions he made to ski resorts throughout Colorado. Benedict designed the master plans for Vail in 1962, Snowmass in 1967, and Breckenridge in 1971. He also assisted with design work for ski resorts in Aspen, Steamboat Springs, and Winter Park. Benedict designed small ski

¹ Benedict, Fritz. "Waterfall House". January 23, 1992.

villages at the base of each mountain that could be easily traversed without the need for cars. The original design for Snowmass featured Benedict's pattern of placing residences, shopping, and the ski slopes on one side of the road and parking on the other.

Benedict wrote his thesis on a backcountry hut system for cross country skiers in the Midwest, comparing his proposed project to similar systems in both New Hampshire and along the Haute Route between France and Switzerland. It was many years later before his dream of a hut system in Colorado was realized. His initial overtures to the National Park Service were rebuffed, but Benedict enlisted the help of former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara who was interested in building a hut dedicated to his late wife. With the aid of McNamara and others, Benedict was able to convince the National Park Service to allow construction of the huts with the understanding that if they were not used they would be demolished after five years.

Benedict created the Tenth Mountain Hut and Trail System. Inspired by similar European trails as well as his own experience skiing between Vail and Aspen, Benedict led the development of a system of ten huts and 300 miles of trail between Aspen and Vail. The huts are designed to provide safe and comfortable shelter overnight on the backcountry trails between Vail and Aspen. The first two huts, Margy's Hut and the McNamara Hut, built in 1982, proved to be highly successful, and twelve additional huts were constructed over the following fifteen years. The final two huts, Fritz and Fabi, were built on Smuggler Mountain in 1997 and dedicated to the architect and his late wife. Peter Loomer, former Executive Director of the Tenth Mountain Hut and Trail System, identified Benedict as "the spiritual leader" of this important recreational asset.

As one of the leading architects in Aspen's development, Benedict received numerous awards and honors throughout his lifetime. He was often referred to as a pioneer in the growth of Aspen from a former mining town to an internationally-known ski resort. In 1985 he was inducted into the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architects, an honor bestowed on a select group of architects who have made outstanding contributions to the profession. Benedict also was inducted into the Aspen Hall of Fame in 1988 and the Colorado Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame in 1995 for his contributions to both Aspen and the Colorado ski industry. The City of Aspen awarded him the Greg Mace award in 1987 for "epitomizing the spirit of the Aspen community" and the Aspen Historic Preservation Commission awarded him with the Welton Anderson Preservation Honor Award in 1993 for his contributions to the built environment of Aspen.

Benedict was the first chairman of Aspen's Planning and Zoning commission and was instrumental in areas such as open space preservation, establishment of a city park system, development of the code banning billboards and neon signs, and the creation of a pedestrian mall. He also served on the Pitkin County Planning Commission, guiding the county through its growth as a major ski area. Benedict founded the Aspen Beautification Task Force and the Pitkin County Parks Association. He and his wife also donated 250 acres of land to Pitkin County for open space. The Benedicts were active in numerous charitable causes throughout the region; in 1993 they donated ten acres of land to tennis star Andrea Jaeger for the Silver Lining Ranch, a camp for children with life-threatening illnesses. Benedict also was directly involved in the Aspen Music Festival, serving on the board of Music Associates of Aspen from 1958 to 1992. Benedict was the festival chairman in 1985 when disagreements between the musicians and board jeopardized the festival. His skillful leadership mended the rift and enabled the festival to continue on. The Benedicts donated ten acres of land to the city for open space in exchange for four acres of land for student housing for the music school and festival.

A vital part of Aspen's history and community, Benedict died on July 8, 1995, in California while awaiting medical treatment following two heart surgeries. In 2000 architect Harry Teague designed and constructed the new Benedict Music Tent, providing the Aspen Music Festival with both a permanent home and a memorial to the contributions of Fritz Benedict.

Credited Buildings (partial list)

Building Name	Location	Site No.	Date	Assessment
Rubey Residence / Marian Davis Residence	322 Red Mountain Road, Aspen	5PT.852		
Berger Cabin	835 W. Main St, Aspen	5PT.592	1947	
Sundeck Restaurant	Aspen Mountain		1947, with Herbert Bayer	Demolished
John P. Marquand Studio	Lake Avenue		1950	Demolished
Aspen Institute Executive Seminar Building	420 East Main Street, Aspen		1953	
Copper Kettle	845 Meadows Road, Aspen		1954	
Bank of Aspen / Norwest Bank / Wells Fargo Bank	119 S. Mill St., Aspen	5PT.977	1956	
Usonian House	615 Gillespie St, Aspen	5PT.1012	1957	Demolished
Usonian House	625 Gillespie St, Aspen	5PT.1011	1957	Demolished
Stein Cabin	Maroon Creek Road, Aspen	5PT.798	1958	
Jane Mayer Barn	Red Mountain Road, Aspen		1960 remodel by Benedict	
Edmundson Waterfall House	202 Midnight Mine Road, Aspen	5PT.590	1961	Demolished
Walter Paepcke Memorial Building	420 East Main Street, Aspen		1962, with Herbert Bayer	
Vail Ski Village			1962	
Aspen Alps	777 Ute Avenue., Aspen		1963	
Bidwell-Mountain Plaza Building	434 E. Cooper Avenue, Aspen	5PT.978	1965	Commercial Core Historic District (local)
Pitkin County Library / Design Workshop	120 E. Main St, Aspen	5PT.971	1966	Main Street Historic District (local)
Snowmass Ski Village			1965-66	

Snowmass Village Mall			1967	
Modern Chalet	745 Meadows Road, Aspen		1969, remodel by Benedict	Demolished
Aspen Square Condominiums	617 E. Cooper Ave, Aspen		1969	
Breckenridge Ski Village			1971	
The Gant	610 S. West End St., Aspen		1972	
Benedict Building	1280 Ute Ave., Aspen		1976	
Aspen Club Townhouses	Crystal Lake Road, Aspen		1976	
Pitkin County Bank	534 E. Hyman Ave.		1978	
Frederic Benedict Residence	48 Crystal Lake Road, Aspen	5PT.848	1979	
McNamara Hut	North side of Bald Knob		1982	
Margy's Hut	10 miles Northeast of Aspen		1982	

Photos:



Left to right: Allan Beck, Fred Nagel, Tom Cole; in front: Fritz Benedict



Fritz Benedict, standing outside his office



Tenth Mountain Division Huts: Margy's (left) and McNamara (right) (1982)



Jane Mayer Barn (1960 Remodel by Benedict)



Bidwell-Mountain Plaza Building (1965)



Aspen - Pitkin County Library (1966)

Information Sources

Colorado Preservation, Inc., Denver.

Shelton, Peter. *Climb to Conquer: The Untold Story of WWII's 10th Mountain Division Ski Troops*. (New York: Simon & Schuster), 2003.

Site Files Database, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society, Denver.

Site Files Database, Aspen Historical Society, Aspen.

Site Files Database, Aspen Historic Preservation Task Force, Aspen.

Western History and Genealogy, Denver Public Library, Denver.