

PLATEAU

August/September 2021

MOUNTAIN LIFE IN HIGHLANDS-CASHIERS NORTH CAROLINA

GOOD STEWARDS

Cashiers Designer Showhouse

Feathered Friends

A Bird's Eye View

Neighborhood Watch

Take a Tour Around Town

Architect
Parker Platt

Dillard-Jones
Idea Home

Artist Shannon
Whitworth

Where Conservation and Community Meet

PLATT's Parker Platt on the principal values governing his approach

By CHRISTA MILLER



The Cindy Platt Boys & Girls Club of Transylvania County

PARKER PLATT'S PASSION for designing and building homes and relationships starts with strong family ties—and continues with a sense of responsibility to community and the land on which it's built.

"If you'd have told me when I was 16, that I was going to be 48 years old and living in my hometown of Brevard, I would have thought something went terribly wrong," Parker says, "but the reality is, it's gone terribly right."

Having recently stepped up to become president of PLATT, an architecture, construction and interior design firm, Parker is quick to say that his father, founder Al Platt, is still involved with the company—just in a different capacity.

"I don't really think of it as 'taking the helm,'" he says. "Over time, a true partnership evolved between us. Dad and I have been piloting the ship together, along with our great crew, for years now."

Parker's leadership approach is grounded in the same spirit of community and relationship-building that has guided his involvement on civic boards for the past two decades—due largely to his other main influence: his mother, for whom The Cindy Platt Boys & Girls Club of Transylvania County is now named.

"She focused all her life on community and on children and children's issues, with the understanding that if we can grow great kids, that's how we can grow a strong community over time," he says.

Placemaking a community

Parker sees his work, and the work of those in his company, as pivotal to this. "We want to help people make meaningful places for themselves and their families, connecting them to this beautiful place that we all live in. We hope that connection can support strong relationships to the environment around us, the community we're a part of, and to each other."

That's what drives the PLATT placemaking approach to home design. "The clients we work for are mostly people choosing to come here for the beautiful environment," he says. "They're often building second homes or retirement homes with a focus on creating really wonderful and meaningful places for their families."

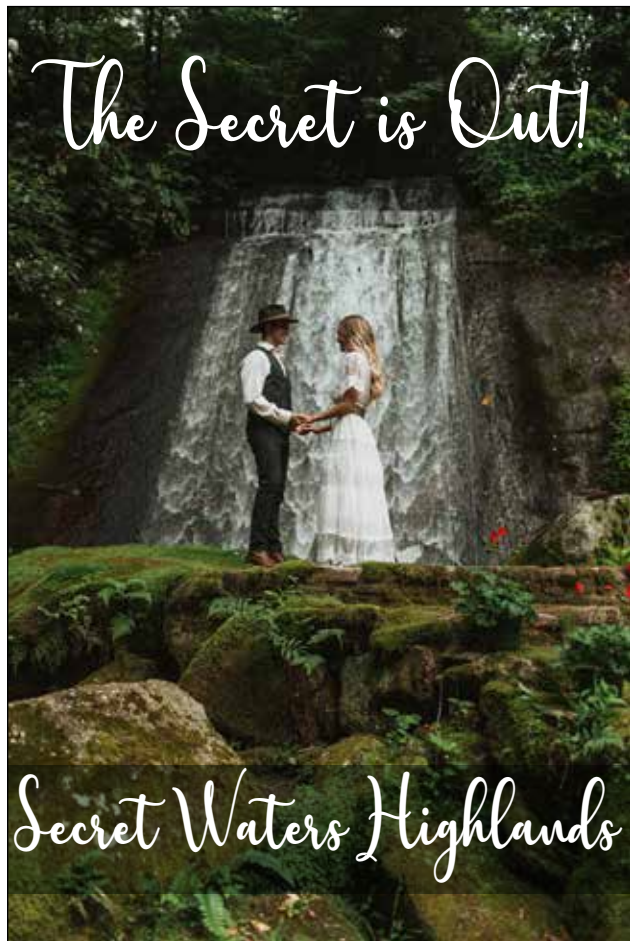
Because the mountains of western North Carolina serve as both a literal and a figurative foundation for these homes and relationships, an aspect of PLATT's work is, and has

A man with a beard and mustache, wearing a blue button-down shirt and grey jeans, stands with his arms crossed in front of a rustic stone wall. Behind him are several framed photographs of modern architectural structures, including one with a green roof and another by a lake.

Parker Platt

President, PLATT

- » **Birthplace:** Chapel Hill, North Carolina
- » **Education:** North Carolina State University, Bachelor of Architecture
- » **Hobbies:** Tennis (low skill level)
Cooking (ideally outside over wood)
Travel (current obsession is Argentina)
Fishing (mostly with my brother and mostly on the fly)
Bird Hunting (with anyone who will invite me)



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always been, land conservation. Having returned to Brevard in his mid-20's looking for a place to build his first home, Parker, along with his friend and business partner John Witherspoon and led by father Al, set about developing a 500-acre property near Lake Toxaway now called Richland Ridge.

They used a strategy that resonated: limited development. "You marry land conservation and stewardship with limited amount of development," he explains. Then, conservation strategies become a tool of stewardship, putting people on the land in a way that does less with the land versus more. The result is a conservation-based community of 25 small lots surrounded by 400+ acres of permanently conserved land containing a mile of protected river and bordered by national forest.

It was the underpinning for a new business focused on assisting landowners with development strategies and a larger form of placemaking. To date, Conservation Advisors of North Carolina, now called Witherspoon Platt + Associates, has helped preserve over 8,000 acres and has expanded into a boutique real estate brokerage with a land and conservation focus. Continuing the theme of whole placemaking, general contracting and interior design has also become an important part of the PLATT focus.

BUZZ

southern drawl

A space for people to thrive

Owning and operating a boutique firm depends on relationships. There, again, Al and Cindy's influences served as a model.

"My parents understood how to give [Parker and his siblings] our space and to let us be our own people and find our own way," he explains. As a management style, he adds, this affords his colleagues the kind of environment they need to thrive as creative professionals.

"To us, leadership is really just about listening," Parker says, pointing to his father as his example. "It's about listening and thinking and trying your damndest to provide a good, creative, comprehensive, accountable service to our clients.

"It's intense. The work is serious. It's important, and it's to a certain extent high stakes," he continues. "We take it really seriously, and we don't always get it all right. But we try to get it as right as we can."

Building future generations

Having grown up largely in Brevard, in a family whose roots stretch back three generations—Parker's attorney grandfather was part of the group that developed the Highlands-Cashiers Plateau's Sapphire Valley and the Brevard-based Connestee Falls development—Parker has been in a position to see the area transition from a manufacturing-based economy to a service- and entrepreneurship-based economy.

That, plus early travel experiences, provided the broad social education and perspective he needed to return home and plug into the local community.

"Community is a kind of a church to me," says Parker. "It's something to be accountable to and a way to make a difference. And through that, I've been really lucky to be able to have had a professional career with both my dad and mom."

In much the same way that father and son had grown PLATT, mother and son worked closely together to help grow the local Boys & Girls Club.

"Founded in the late '90s, the club went from renting some space in a 2,500 square-foot community building and serving 25 kids a day, to owning a 25,000 square-foot facility and serving 250 kids a day," Parker says, adding that the still-growing club—the primary focus of his volunteer and fundraising efforts—now boasts more than 400 members and supports over 600 children annually.

Over the years, in addition to his long-standing service on the board of The Cindy Platt Boys & Girls Club (Cindy passed away in 2013, after which the club was renamed in her honor), Parker has also served on the board of directors for Heart of Brevard, a program of the nonprofit National Main Street Center, the Brevard/Transylvania Chamber of Commerce, Transylvania Economic Alliance, as well as planning boards for both Brevard and Transylvania County. He's currently also on the board of the Transylvania Regional Hospital, Blue Ridge Public Radio and Governor Roy Cooper's Public Lands Council.

Unifying past and present

The future of Brevard, Transylvania County and much of western North Carolina lies in what Parker calls a "delicate balance" between year-round and seasonal residents, long-time locals, recent arrivals and tourists. "People are here for different reasons, for different lengths of time," he says.

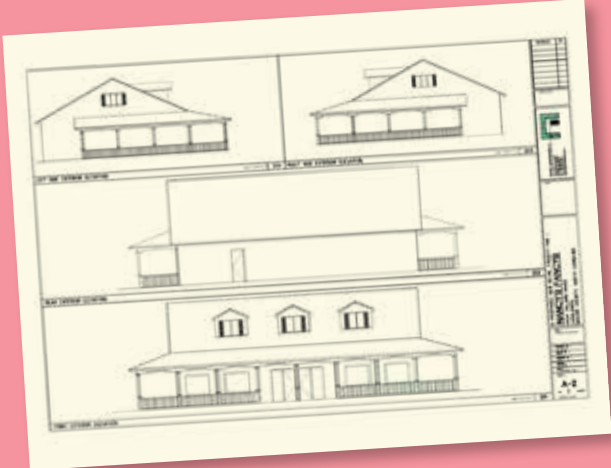
That can result in markedly different expectations among different groups, with newcomers sometimes unwilling to consider the past just as long-timers struggle to welcome new perspectives.

Even so, Parker says: "There's a unifying aspect to the place that we were either from and has kept us here, or that has attracted us here from elsewhere." The future he envisions focuses on that aspect, "recognizing that the future and the past can play together."



Part of it is coming together around decisions about "how we all live together" - infrastructure, schools and other factors. At the same time, the community needs a vision to maintain and articulate "to the world that comes to us," Parker says.

"Because if you don't have a co-directed vision that takes into account multiple perspectives, then other people are going to create the vision for you, or they're going to make the decisions for you."

Nurturing a year-round, family-oriented community is part of how PLATT tries to do business. "We can contribute to that future through our work and the way we do our work, setting an example of how you can move forward without forgetting where you came from," Parker explains. "Our company can't do what it does without a great community to attract the folks that we work for and to support the people that work with us. And the mountains tie us all together." ■



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