



by Adam J. Bezark

Passion, commitment, consistent integrity and championing the product. These are the principles that have driven Robert L. Ward throughout his career.

Young and Hungry

Raised in Florida by adoptive parents, he says: "I am so much who I am today because of them. They showed consistent integrity, great parenting, and instilled in me generous love."

Ward graduated from Florida State with a Photography major. Heading west, he found work at WED Enterprises (later Walt Disney Imagineering). Disney sent him back to Florida... as a field construction supervisor for the opening of Walt Disney World. "That was an amazing time," Ward says, remembering the small Disney crew tasked with building the landmark destination resort. On opening day, October 1 1971, "I was actually laying sod at 4:30 in the morning with [future Disney CEO] Card Walker in front of the Polynesian."

Universal Origins

In 1979, Ward met Barry Upson. The original Vice President of Universal's planning & development group remembers, "I liked Bob right away. He had tremendous energy and talent."

Universal was planning a studio park in Orlando. Ward made the team, but the Florida project was put on hold. Meanwhile, they developed several live shows for the Studio Center; and then, in 1985, came their first major attraction for the Tram Tour: Kongfrontation. "Kong was the first significant milestone," he recalls. With its powerhouse combination of immersive scenery, high-octane special effects and the incredible,

animated King Kong figure, "it launched an all-new era of storytelling at Universal."

Upson says he and Ward were "joined at the hip" during this period. He applies a football analogy: "I had 'inside' skills, and Bob had 'outside' skills. I'd put my head down and charge up the middle; Bob had the fancy footwork and made the spectacular plays."

Jay Stein, Chairman of MCA Recreation during the development of Universal Studios Florida, remembers that "Bob was our corporate conscience. He'd fight for what he believed in, and I respected that."

Florida Bound

In 1987, Universal Florida kicked into gear. Rather than simply duplicate the Hollywood studio park, with its lengthy tram tour, Ward began thinking about another approach. "We

asked ourselves: Why not allow visitors Studio access to explore the back lot on foot... let them touch it?" Which led to:

"What would happen if we got rid of the tram?"

Suddenly the Orlando park took on new life. In Hollywood, Kong, Earthquake and Jaws were two-minute tram events. In Florida, they became full-fledged, stand-alone "mega-attractions." Ward turned his attention to the look and feel of the backlot sets. "We wanted a real, working studio," he recounts. "Each area had to work as a theme park and a shootable street set." He credits legendary movie designers Henry Bumstead and Norm Newberry as his inspiration partners.

Universal Studios Florida opened June 7, 1990 a day both exhilarating and horrifying. Many attractions experienced technical meltdowns.

PAINTING WITH BULLDOZERS

•Bob Ward: Lifetime Achievement



Bob Ward, larger than life in the middle of a Universal Studios Florida model.



Adam J. Bezark was working as a Tram Guide at Universal Studios Tour one day in 1981 when two men walked by, carrying a large piece of presentation art. One was tall and bearded; the other was shorter, also bearded... and wearing cowboy boots. Years later, Adam would realize the pair he'd passed that day were Barry Upson and Bob Ward, on their way to a pitch meeting. Today, Adam is a Creative Director with over \$1 billion of produced concepts worldwide, including several major projects for the Universal parks. Visit Adam Bezark on the web at www.bezark.com.



Bob still winces: "I was on the Jaws ride with (MCA Universal President) Sid Sheinberg and his wife... and our boat got stuck for 30 minutes, before they finally brought us a rowboat." But within months, USF was drawing record crowds and glowing reviews.

Onward and Upward

New challenges came fast. "Before things had even settled down at USF, Jay Stein wrote a memo recommending that we build a second Orlando park," Ward recalls. Universal's Islands of Adventure would require growing the Florida property into a full-blown destination resort with three high-end hotels plus CityWalk. Bob led the master planning.

The 1990s found Ward in the center of Universal's international expansion efforts. With Frank Stanek, he led the company's site search and master planning of Universal Studios Japan, which opened in 2001. Next, Bob explored future sites in Europe and Asia, and helped Universal develop long-range plans for its Hollywood property.

Not bad for starters

Today, Robert L. Ward Design, Inc. offers Ward's unique brand of signature placemaking in mixed-use, leisure and resort destination developments. He's also a partner in Azure Worldwide, a company founded by Philippe Cousteau, to create projects that increase public awareness of the oceans.

"It's pretty amazing. I've had incredible opportunities. Not bad for an adopted kid who started out as a painter and a photographer." Bob Ward thinks... and smiles. "I'm just painting with bulldozers."



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