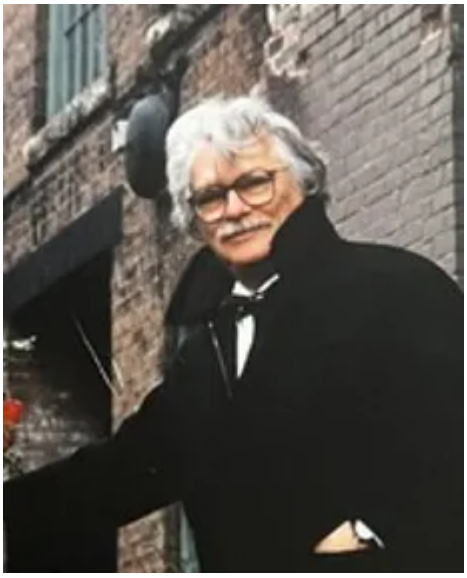
Morris Nathanson



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Obituary

Morris Nathanson, born in Providence, Rhode Island on September 9th, 1927, passed away peacefully on Saturday, September 17th, at the age of 95.

Mr. Nathanson grew up in Pawtucket, and at the age of 17, enlisted in the Navy, where he served in the Pacific Theater as a medic aboard the LSD Catamount. Mr. Nathanson experienced antisemitism and racism in the Navy, motivating him throughout his life to fight for the equal rights of all. He participated in the Freedom Rides of 1961, Dr. Martin Luther King's campaigns in Selma and Birmingham, Alabama, and the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

A lifetime member of the Providence Art Club, Mr. Nathanson was a highly regarded and prolific fine artist, with numerous exhibitions in Providence and New York. Mr. Nathanson's thousands of paintings, prints, wood sculptures, and drawings reflect nearly a century of work, and trace his truly extraordinary and vibrant life through bold colors and iconography that pulls from personal history.

Mr. Nathanson is widely recognized as the father of modern restaurant and hospitality design. He has lived his life on the international stage as a designer of award-winning restaurants, concert spaces, and hospitality venues. Among his notable design projects are food and entertainment venues aboard the Royal Caribbean's fleet of cruise ships, and the interiors of Disneyland Paris' 11 American restaurants, in collaboration with Pritzker Prize winning architect Frank Gehry, who designed the structures. Upon his retirement, Boston University approached him to donate his entire body of work to their collections, resulting in the Morris Nathanson Design Collection, housed at the renowned Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center.

Having traveled widely and with offices in Boston and Providence, Mr. Nathanson returned to his roots in Pawtucket in 1986, purchasing the historic, but decaying, Rhode Island Cardboard Manufacturing complex. He renovated the mill building into offices for his design firm, Morris Nathanson Design, and a community of live/work artist lofts to encourage other artists to rehabilitate vacant buildings in the area. As an early advocate for mill adaptive reuse, Mr. Nathanson has been in the forefront of developing Rhode Island as a highly visible and respected arts and entertainment center.

Mr. Nathanson was a founding board member of Trinity Repertory Company. One of Trinity Rep's earliest set designers, he was also in charge of its relocation to the Emery's Majestic Theater (now the Lederer Theater Center), which has been the theater's home for over 50 years.

Among his many activities in Rhode Island, Mr. Nathanson served as a member of the Providence Historic Commission and the Pawtucket Armory Association, where he oversaw the design and build of the Sandra Feinstein Gamm Theatre and the creation the Jacqueline Walsh School for the Arts. He has also offered his time and expertise to the City of Pawtucket's Riverfront Commission, the Pawtucket 2020 Committee, the Pawtucket Foundation, and the Pawtucket Arts Collaborative. He has taught design courses at the Rhode Island School of Design, and served as a design consultant to Providence Mayor Joseph Paolino. Mr. Nathanson is the recipient of numerous personal awards and recognitions, including honorary doctorates from Johnson and Wales University and Rhode Island College. Mr. Nathanson has been inducted into the Pawtucket Hall of Fame, and been awarded the Pawtucket Foundation Heritage Award, the Arts and Business Council of Rhode Island's Small Business Award, and the Pell Award from the Trinity Repertory Company for his life-time contribution to the arts. In 2010, the Exchange Street Bridge in Pawtucket was dedicated to Mr. Nathanson and renamed the Morris Nathanson Bridge.

Morris is survived by his loving and devoted wife Phyllis Van Orden Nathanson and their son John David Nathanson, and Josh (Anna) Nathanson, and Kim (Jeff) Nathanson Arsenault, from his previous marriage to Roxie Sgouros, along with four grandchildren, Emma, Sarah, Lily, and Adrian.

Funeral services will be held on Friday, September 23rd at 11:00 a.m. at Temple Beth-El, 70 Orchard Ave, Providence, RI 02906, followed by burial at Swan Point Cemetery in Providence.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made in Mr. Nathanson's honor to the 'Morris Nathanson Fund', a scholarship program supporting Rhode Island students aged K-12 to participate in youth classes at the Rhode Island School of Design.

Further information and online donations may be made at give.risd.edu/Nathanson

Checks by mail may be made payable to the Rhode Island School of Design, with "Morris Nathanson Fund" in the memo, and addressed to:

Rhode Island School of Design

Attn: O'Neil Outar, Institutional Advancement

2 College Street

Providence, RI 02903

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