

Naming My Mansion

In 1974, I was working hard every evening, building a house for my family that I had designed. It was of exposed post-and beam construction, featured clerestory windows, and sat on a foundation of 96 telephone poles, each with a throw-away pie pan inverted on top. Since original home architecture was rare in the United States and almost unheard-of in Mississippi, I thought it would be good for my students to tour it while it was under construction. It might jog them to think outside the box, literally, when thinking about how to live and build.

I proposed a “field trip” to my class in Introductory Sociology and they were enthusiastic. Indeed, they suggested we hold a pot-luck there, and some of them would bring food, as would my wife and I, of course. I waxed on about some of the details they would experience and how it would function. One student asked, “Are you going to name it?”

At once, the following joke flashed through my mind. “You mean, like “The Oaks” or “Twin Pines?” I asked, to set it up.

“Yeah, yeah,” he nodded.

“Yes,” I then replied. “We’re planning to name it after the most common tree on the property. We’ll be calling it The Gums.”

Laid ‘em out. Biggest laugh I ever got in a class.