

# Special Friends of the University



**J. Robert Hillier '17 HON and  
Barbara A. Hillier**  
Studio Hillier

**E**arlier this year, New Jersey Institute of Technology renamed its College of Architecture and Design for J. Robert and Barbara A. Hillier to reflect the globally renowned architects' historic donation to the university. Their gift, the university's largest ever, will enrich the architecture and design program in many

ways: with scholarships that diversify the pool of talented architects entering the profession and funds for the technology that will advance it, to name just two.

A Princeton native and graduate of both Princeton University and its graduate architecture program, Robert Hillier founded Hillier Architecture as a solo practice at 44 Nassau St. in his hometown in 1966, and built it into the country's third largest strictly architectural firm. Just over a decade later, he hired Barbara, who in 1988 established a new office – and soon-to-be thriving practice – in Philadelphia. The firm went on to open offices in New York, Newark, Washington, Dallas and Tampa. In 2007, Hillier Architecture merged with RMJM Group of Edinburgh, Scotland, creating one of the world's largest firms with 1,200 employees. Two years later, the couple ventured out on their own to found Studio Hillier, less than a mile from their former practice's original location.

In addition to their strong Princeton ties – Barbara Hillier also has a master's degree from Princeton University and their former firm designed several buildings on that campus – the Hilliers have a longstanding connection with NJIT. For one, their firm designed all three versions of the School of Architecture, which was established in 1974.

Robert Hillier recalls being taken up to an attic gymnasium in the 1970s and given this challenge: “This is the drafting room, make it a school.” There were only about 25 students at the time. Later, the firm renovated another space to accommodate the rapidly expanding program, and then in the late 1990s, designed the modernist Weston Hall, the home of the school today.

Both Robert Hillier and his father James, chief scientist at RCA and the developer of the first operating electron microscope in the world, have received honorary degrees from NJIT. Robert served as the first chairman of the Albert Dorman Honors College Board of Visitors and endowed a scholarship in honor of his first daughter, who died in a car crash in 1984.

Having watched NJIT and the city of Newark evolve over the past several decades, the Hilliers are enthusiastic about both. They look to architects trained at the university to play a role in shaping what they call a “Renaissance City,” while making key, life-improving connections for the people who live there now.