Drawing future plans
Architect seeks balance between beauty, function

Steve Scannell, assistant director of Design and Construction Management, displays some of the sketches of KU building projects he was worked on. A licensed architect, Scannell produces many of the sketches and renderings of KU building projects. He often mixes use of modern technology with sketchings done by hand.

Even in this world of ever-changing technology, sometimes it's just better to do a job by hand.

Such is the preference of Steve Scannell, assistant director of Design and Construction Management. Many of the conceptual renderings of proposed buildings, expansions and remodeling projects at KU come from Scannell's pen.

"Before long, I'll be a dinosaur, and no one will do (renderings) by hand like me," he said with a laugh.

Scannell is no neo-luddite, though. Many of his renderings will start with a three-dimensional computer-aided drafting model that he creates, which is then overlaid with tracing paper and forms the basis of the final, hand-drawn sketch.

His work is familiar to architects, contractors and construction companies who build at KU, but those outside of the construction business often see them when they appear in the pages of newspapers when a new project is announced.

A licensed architect by trade, Scannell comes from a long KU pedigree. His father, Dale Scannell, was the dean of the School of Education for 16 years. His mother, Jo Scannell, worked in the Department of Chemistry for many years. Two of his siblings attended KU. All earned degrees here, and his son Daniel is currently a student in the School of Fine Arts. For 19 years, he was an architect in private practice before the one job that could entice him to leave opened.

"I always thought working for KU would be great," he said.

He's been putting to paper the visions that eventually become buildings ever since. His conceptual drawings include proposed projects at the Lied Center, Wescoe Hall, Stauffer-Flint Hall, Danforth Chapel and Rieger Scholarship Hall.

Some of the projects he has managed include the recently-completed Library Annex, the Dole Institute of Politics, Eaton Hall, the Murphy Hall Addition, the Sabatini Multicultural Resource Center and the Bales Organ Recital Hall, for which he was also the co-designer while still in private practice.

The drawings are just one part of a larger process. His office takes part in interviews when outside architects and engineers are hired. The architects hired for each project will then meet with all interested parties to find out their needs and desires for the building. They then produce renderings of proposed designs and revise them until all parties are satisfied. Once construction starts, his office serves as a liaison between those constructing the building, those who will occupy it and everyone else who is part of the process.

"A big part of our job is to facilitate the process," Scannell said. "Our bottom line task is to see that projects are built on time, and within budget."
The process of determining what a building will look like before construction starts is far from the vision of any one person or group. One example is the soon-to-be-constructed Sabatini Multicultural Resource Center. The functional needs and wishes of the occupants, the Office of Multicultural Affairs and the Kansas Union, had to be balanced with the wishes of the donor family and the needs of the university as a whole. Those were all considered against the physical limitations of the space and the historic surroundings of the building.

"We're not interested in constructing buildings that are simply signature buildings for an architect, we're interested in buildings that will fit into the environs and character of the campus," Scannell said.

That give and take led to a building Scannell said he takes special pride in, Bales Organ Recital Hall. The company that built the organ, an acoustician and Jim Higdon, chair of the Organ Music Department, Peter Thompson, former dean of the School of Fine Arts and many others at KU were among the parties whose input helped shape the final structure.

"It turned out to be both a beautiful building and a functional building," Scannell said.