

Connection

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This issue:

Practice innovation

What should the profession look like on the other side of a global pandemic? Young architects are exploring innovative practice models, unconventional career paths, and resilient business frameworks in response to changing local and global contexts.

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Cover image: Ossa Studio, founded by Jack Ossa in 2017, won the 2020 Charrette Venture Group Business Plan Competition for its mission and leadership structure that encourages employees to thrive. (See page 52.)

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Editors note:

Build. Measure. Learn.

The events of the past year forced each of us to re-think almost every aspect of our lives. As personal and professional responsibilities became more intertwined, we adapted. As our country and communities faced unprecedented health and social challenges, we responded. As it became clear that architectural practice, and much of the rest of our lives, would not return to be what it was in early 2020, we innovated.

While some firms had already established structures for remote practice and transitioned easily, others were forced to catch up with the curve. By now, the profession is made up of hundreds, if not thousands, of unique and viable models of practice varying in response to employee needs, available technology, and public health regulations. To truly drive practice innovation, increase equity, and leverage technological advances, it is just as important to measure the successes and failures of these models, learn from them, and improve upon them. Young architects are in a unique position to (1) define the parameters we can measure to determine the ideal practice model, and (2) define by what metrics we evaluate these parameters.

After our varying and shared experiences from the past year, we should not only be asking what the profession can look like on the other side of COVID-19, but what the profession should look like. Does firm culture matter? How do we measure productivity? Is a healthy work-life balance more valued? Should our professional role be more flexible with our personal responsibilities? How valuable is commuting to a shared office space each day? Which digital tools for production, collaboration, and project management are best?

The profession of architecture's growth will come from firms and individuals who best embrace disruption. It will come from those who have uncovered new sources of value for clients and communities. Growth will come from those that leverage the lessons of the past year to take small and measurable steps toward stronger and more resilient practice models.

The issue spotlights young architects who have built out their idea in practice and are continuing to learn. Sreoshy Banerjee (p. 10) founded the NYC Design Corps program to provide design assistance to New York's restaurant industry during times of mandated shutdowns. She focused on building a minimum viable program, learning, and showing proof of concept. "We often focus on getting a program perfect before launching it, but the pandemic has taught us that we just don't have enough time for perfection." In Mandy Freeland's interviews with our industry's digital content creators (p. 42), the most consistent piece of advice is to just start and build consistent habits. In this way, you can share your idea with the world, find your voice and audience, and compound growth and learned knowledge.

Closing my time as Connection's editor-in-chief and Communications Director, I would like to thank each of our talented editors and contributors over the past two years for helping to connect the voices of young architects around the country. Steven Macrae (p. 41), founder of one of the early decentralized virtual firms, encourages young architects to "create your response and jump!" Our YAF communications team hopes this issue inspires you to build, measure and learn from a unique, and innovative step to move the profession forward.

Editorial committee call

2021 Editorial Committee: Call for volunteers, contributing writers, interviewers and design critics. Connection's

editorial committee is currently seeking architects interested in building their writing portfolio by working with our editorial team to pursue targeted article topics and interviews that will be shared amongst Connection's largely circulated e-magazine format. Responsibilities include contributing one or more articles per publication cycles (3-4 per year).

If you are interested in building your resume and contributing to Connection please contact the editor in chief at: aia.beresford.pratt@gmail.com

"We should not only be asking what the profession can look like on the other side of COVID-19, but what the profession should look like."

President's message:

Blueprint for better

When I was inaugurated last December as AIA president, I quoted climate activist Rebecca Solnit's inspiring words: "Don't ask what will happen. Be what happens."

I couldn't be prouder of the way AIA members have exemplified that axiom and answered this year's challenges with leadership and action.

From the early days of the pandemic, firms contributed resources and 3D-printing technology to produce protective masks. Special AIA task forces coordinated with public officials on safely adapting existing buildings into health facilities — issuing expert guidance that was distributed by the State Department.

Through our Reopening America initiative, AIA members have continued to contribute — developing design strategies to protect front-line workers and residents of senior living facilities and high-density housing and producing guidance for safely reopening public spaces like businesses and schools when it's appropriate to do so.

With its disproportionate impact on communities of color, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated, yet again, the fundamental inequity pervading our society — an untenable reality that demands action.

In close consultation with our colleagues in the National Organization of Minority Architects, AIA is pursuing progress on a number of fronts: participating in the NAACP 2020 Diversity and Opportunity Report Card to hold ourselves accountable; reevaluating our honors and awards programs to identify unintentional biases and eliminate barriers to recognition; redoubling efforts to support students at

historically Black colleges and universities and encourage future architects, from K-12 students to emerging professionals; and providing the leadership necessary to build more healthy, just, and equitable communities.

Despite this year's challenges, our urgent climate work has continued — and achieved important milestones. We released a new Climate Action Plan, revamped the Framework for Design Excellence, and adopted a new AIA Materials Pledge. AIA's 2030 Commitment recorded its best year ever — with a record number of signatories achieving record reduction in predicted energy use intensity.

Our Blueprint for Better campaign, launched in October, ties it all together — providing architects with the tools and resources to build communities that are more sustainable, equitable, healthy, and just. Through this campaign and others, we're inviting the public, civic leaders, and allies to join us. It's all backed by a visionary Strategic Plan that underlines AIA's commitment and maps out a path to progress.

This is the kind of meaningful work that prompted the American Society of Association Executives to name AIA among "100 Associations That Will Save the World." The world has certainly changed this year. And it's safe to say some of those changes will be lasting. Will changes be for the better? It's up to all of us to ensure they are. As a profession, we've never been more focused and equipped to do our part.



Jane Frederick, FAIA

Frederick is principal of Beaufort, S.C. based Frederick + Frederick Architects, an award-winning firm specializing in custom residences. Frederick is the 2020 AIA President.

Chair's message:

Designing a new normal

My term as the 2020 chair of the AIA Young Architects Forum has come to a close, and I can't help but look back on the year. 2020 has been a year of flexibility and adaptability. We have dealt with so many challenging topics: each day, a new obstacle, a new lesson learned, a new precedent set, and a new normal becoming — well, normal.

Our society is dealing with four pandemics simultaneously. A worldwide health crisis, an economic recession with historic unemployment, racial injustice, and a changing climate. Without doubt, our response to any one of these will significantly affect the others. Our response as a society, and as a profession, will require innovative solutions as we learn from the past and plan for the future.

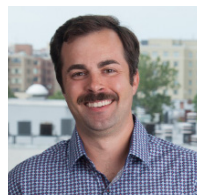
In 2017, the YAF hosted the Practice Innovation Lab, a gathering of 60 young professionals who had a charrette and brainstormed to create 10 new business models for the profession of architecture. Since then, the YAF has hosted smaller workshops on the topic of practice innovation throughout the country. Each of these conversations sparks new ideas and engages more members. But until there was real chaos, like we had this past year, many of these ideas were not put into place; they were instead simply ideas on paper.

Those of us who worked through this year will remember it fondly and will share stories for generations to come. 2020 was not all doom and gloom. There were also several positive notable changes that took place; it just took a worldwide pandemic to finally make everyone understand the urgency of the matter. The climate began to heal when the world shut down. Sure, it meant that everyone was in lockdown, and few people were working, but it did confirm that the scientists are correct about how our daily decisions affect the world in which

we live, and each of those individual moves makes a big impact when considered as part of the larger collective.

For years, the profession had been talking about how we could work better remotely and how best to support families and work-life balance. For many of us, this change happened literally overnight and in most cases without much disruption to our workflow. We shared lessons learned, policies, and best practices and adapted to the new work-from-home settings. In short order, we began to balance the daily juggling act of employee, parent, teacher, roommate, and caregiver. We redefined flexibility, prioritized our goals differently, and had a new outlook on life. All of this came to be through innovative practice models.

A friend and colleague of mine recently retired. In his career, the deliverable for architects moved from ink on Mylar to blueprints to CAD to BIM models, all in a single generation. We now find ourselves in a time when algorithms are developing zoning and massing studies by the click of a mouse. Many of these innovative practice models develop over time. On the other hand, some are forced to become reality overnight. Either way, our profession continues to find a way to support creative ideas and become stronger because of them. Our profession needs to remain vigilant, but we must also remain relevant, and innovation will continue to support efforts toward both. I look forward to being part of the innovative solutions we develop as a profession.



Ryan McEnroe, AIA, ASLA, LEED AP

As a licensed architect and landscape architect who grew up on an organic farm, McEnroe has a unique understanding of sustainability practices. An associate at Quinn Evans Architects, he serves as the 2020 YAF Chair.

Strategic Council note:

A natural connection

Young Architects Forum and Strategic Council

Two Practice Innovation Labs of AIA

Within this past decade, the AIA went through a repositioning. One of the outcomes of this effort was the creation of a bicameral governance model. The Board of Directors was dramatically reduced in size, and the Strategic Council was formed. While the smaller board focuses on governance, the Strategic Council is charged as the “think tank” of the Institute, looking to both our immediate and far-reaching future as a professional organization. At Governance Week this year, I will be rolling off the Council after spending three years representing the Central States Region and two years in the role of Council liaison to the YAF. It has been a great honor to serve in both capacities. I would like to take this opportunity, with this perspective, to encourage all within the AIA to see the key connection between the Strategic Council and the YAF. As an older and more experienced clan, the Council probes the future with some amount of perspective, but it is also hindered with a past that may make the future less clear. The YAF looks at the future with more clarity, I’ve come to believe, because of their youth and lack of experience (the proverbial “baggage”).

As has been said within many a mentorship program, the relationship is strongest when mentoring happens in both directions. So I make the case for a stronger relationship between the YAF and the Council, not another mentoring program to be clear, but rather a stronger working relationship. Especially since the YAF created, and then reinforced its interest in, “practice innovation,” the ideas that have come out of events and conversations in Practice Innovation Labs over the years have demonstrated a unique and critical insight into

the future of our profession. It is important that the totality of the AIA, and maybe specifically the Strategic Council, examine this like-minded goal of designing the future of our profession through the youth of the YAF and the experience of the Council. There is great potential in this connection.

Coming into Its Own

It could be that the maturity and impact of the Council is of my own imagining, something that I alone am realizing with each new year as a regional representative. This may be true, but for the string of comments made after the five 2020 study groups from the Council presented their year’s work on the first day of Governance Week. Some important topics were identified in December 2019 as the Council considered a rich list of ideas put forth by the 56 councilors. Ultimately, throughout this past year, five groups focused on these topics:

- Beyond 2030
- Housing
- Mental Health and Architecture
- Rural Issues
- Technology’s Impact on Practice

Without a doubt, each of these topics is grand in its undertaking. The creation of affordable housing and equitable communities is arguably one of the most complex issues we have before us. Or, if we look beyond 2030, is it that our profession needs to wrestle the 40 percent of greenhouse gases that our buildings create back down to zero. But, of course, technology has loomed large for decades, and it is time for architects to reckon with how it can overtake us or how we

can intelligently engage with it in beneficial ways for all. And then, of course, the role of architecture in the rural condition and in mental health have been ever present but rarely daylighted. Each study or incubator group this year keenly leaned into their topics. Along the way, they were asked to be nimble, to consider how the realities of climate change affected their thinking and then to examine social equity as the police killing of George Floyd and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement came to the fore in our country. In each case, the Council leaned in again, exploring and making the connections.

Practice Innovation as Strategic Vision

Throughout all this time, the YAF and emerging professionals across the United States began “exploring innovative practice models, alternative project delivery methods, and unconventional career paths” responding to “changing economical, technological, environmental, and social contexts.” (See Connection Q3 2019, Volume 17, Issue 03) The young architects of today and the future, unencumbered by how things used to be, are stepping into their future and revealing the future of all architects. This was so important to the YAF that they renamed this unique look at “practice innovation” as their strategic vision, the lens through which they saw this future. It is bold and authentic and exploratory and encouraging. It is generated from a “think tank” posture and full of inquisitiveness and imagination.

Connections

It is perhaps a simple and obvious connection: The YAF and the Strategic Council should work even more closely together. There have been stronger connection points made in the past two years. The YAF joined the Council at Grassroots 2020 in New Orleans for the all-conference breakout sessions that explored issues of the Big Move: energy, economy, and equitable communities. Not surprisingly, it became clear that these three issues are deeply interconnected. We didn’t know it in February 2020, but this realization foreshadowed

how several other key issues are obviously connected: public health and economic risk through the pandemic, the renewed awakening of our profession toward social equity in our culture and through design, and the ever-present connection to climate action and inequitable distribution of risk in non-action. If there is one thing I want to communicate to my successor as Strategic Council liaison to the YAF and to the entire Institute, it would be that we need to lean into each other more, to learn in both directions, to know that the Council’s future is the YAF’s future, which is the future of our profession. We are all practicing innovation together as if our lives depend on it. Together, I believe we can find the promise of perfect 2020 vision.

Lesniewski is an architect and principal at BNIM in Kansas City, Mo. She serves as the Senior Regional Representative to the Strategic Council from the Central States Region and is the Council’s liaison to the Young Architects Forum Advisory Committee.



Laura Lesniewski, AIA

Lesniewski is an architect and principal at BNIM in Kansas City, Mo. She serves as the Senior Regional Representative to the Strategic Council from the Central States Region and is the Council’s liaison to the Young Architects Forum Advisory Committee.

Nimble pandemic response

An interview with NYCxDesign Design Corps founder, Sreoshy Banerjea



Sreoshy Banerjea

Sreoshy is an urban designer and entrepreneur who finds interest in urban conditions and how they contribute to an equitable cultural model of development. This combines her degrees in architecture and urbanism, and helps her understand the context of projects through design development and resolution. She believes in socially conscious planning and design while maintaining a high standard of aesthetics.

Professionally over the last decade, she has worked with a variety of internationally renowned architects, including Rafael Vinoly Architects in New York and Dominique Perrault Architecture in Paris. She has worked with Dattner Architects on civic-minded urban projects as well as affordable housing master plans, including Lambert Houses and Halletts Point. For the past five years, she has led urban design at New York City Economic Development Corporation's planning division, where she uses visualization as a decision making tool for a diverse portfolio across all five boroughs. She guides design direction and manages urban design retainers for work on several visionary master planning efforts. More recently at NYCEDC, she founded NYCxDesign Design Corps in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

Aside from her professional obligations, Sreoshy is a champion of increasing diversity and equity. She has founded the Creative RFP Toolkit, an online course that provides a five step toolkit that helps design professionals respond to RFPs with a powerful storyline.

Sreoshy received her Bachelor of Architecture in 2010 from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. She received her Masters in Architectural Studies with a specialization in Urban Design from MIT in 2013.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in the spring, New York City's approximately 27,000 restaurants have been constantly forced to adapt to changing regulations and guidelines from city and state officials. Initially reduced to only takeout and delivery service in the spring, restaurants were allowed to participate in an outdoor dining program over the summer. By fall, the city permitted indoor dining at 25 percent capacity. Now due to rising cases, the city's restaurants are faced with another end to indoor dining amid winter temperatures. To help offer solutions to spatial problems arising from these restrictions, NYCxDesign's Design Corps program aims to connect designers and restaurants through pro bono design services. Over 30 designers and firms are currently registered to assist restaurants in need of site assessments based on state and city outdoor/indoor dining requirements, design of barrier elements, and dining furniture layouts. The program strives to provide access to good design while also helping restaurants achieve compliance and maintain operations amid

the restrictions. I spoke with Sreoshy Banerjea of the New York City Economic Development Corporation to learn more about her role in the founding of Design Corps and the continued impact it has had for the city's restaurants.

"Most of the restaurants who need help have specific challenges, situations or site conditions that the city guidelines did not anticipate. Interpreting guidelines to meet specific situations and solving these types of challenges with innovative solutions is what architects are really good at."



John Clark (JC): A program of this scale seemed to develop and grow relatively quickly. What were some of the key steps and decisions made to accelerate this from an idea to a functioning program?

Sreoshy Banerjea (SB): Prior to the launch of this program, I sat on the City of New York's interagency restaurant recovery group to assist in the implementation of Open Restaurants, the outdoor dining program and to provide support to the restaurant industry, which as we're all aware, was particularly hard hit by the pandemic. I am also a member of AIA and knew of their COVID-19 Recovery Task Force in NYC. Being part of both, I pitched the idea to these groups who also shared information within their networks. Having my colleague, Lindsey Mayer, a talented implementer with a tenacity for following up with multiple stakeholders was a huge asset.

However, the real turning point of this program was when we connected with NYCxDESIGN, an existing NYCEDC partner. NYCxDESIGN similarly was looking for ways to help struggling industries and enthusiastically accepted the challenge of launching a new program and website in under a month.

As we advanced in creating the website, we brought on additional partners including AIANY and Design Advocates, a grassroots organization that formed to also provide design resources to those in need amidst the crisis. They were critical thought partners in helping us iterate and think

through how we could provide the most impact to local businesses. Ultimately, we decided the program had to act similar to a directory that places the responsibility to connect on the participants. This allowed businesses to quickly get in touch with a real person and ask questions specific to their restaurant.

Another way that allowed us to accelerate was to do a soft/beta launch with a minimum viable program. This allowed us to demonstrate proof of concept to get additional partners, funding, and ability to refine based on what did or did not work. We also created an upfront training video that all participants would watch to get an idea of the scope, program requirements, and potential outcomes through presenting case studies. Thanks to our partners at Design Advocates, AIA, and NYCxDESIGN we were able to launch and help numerous restaurants.

JC: Can you describe how restaurants and designers can find each other through your platform?

SB: Interested volunteer architectural design professionals, and restaurant owners first complete and sign an intake form that is available on the [NYCxDESIGN Design Corps website](#) and acknowledge agreement to certain program terms as a precondition to providing/receiving pro-bono services under this program. Upon submission of their signed intake form, participant profiles are visible within the online directory. The



directory includes bio information about the volunteer design professionals and information of each restaurant, including their geography and specific needs. The participants self-connect based on the information provided and decide if they would like to meet in person or in a virtual space. From there, we recommend that each party review together the priorities of the project, the dining space, and the achievable goals. It is then on the volunteer to help ensure their advice aligns with the State and City COVID-19 guidelines and establish the limits of their services.

JC: What is the typical scope of work for designers in this program?

SB: Services typically include site assessment based on guidance of state and city dining requirements, design of roadway barrier elements, and design of sidewalk and curbside seating layouts. Some restaurants have requested help in best practices for winterization of their outdoor dining setups including how to select the right outdoor heater; how to adjust their electrical lines to be able to support that additional load; and choice of materials for maximum insulation, while balancing required ventilation. Prior to winter, others have also used the Design Corps to identify the best materials, layout, and aesthetics to attract customers for outdoor dining to increase their revenue.

JC: What innovations have you seen in the built solutions knowing that space, cost, materials, and functionality are key factors to a successful and operational installation?

SB: Built solutions that deal with unique site conditions are one example of how the Design Corps has helped restaurants with non-standard solutions to outdoor dining setups.

To take a step back a moment, I think it's important for people to know how innovative and revolutionary the city's Open Restaurants program is for the time. In a matter of weeks, the city found a way for restaurants to create brand new dining spaces that could coexist with cars, bicycles and pedestrians in a city of 8.6 million people. While we may turn to other European cities that have been doing this for centuries, New York City is different and we had to figure out a system that worked with infrastructure as we have it now.

That being said, what has emerged is that most of the restaurants who need help have specific challenges, situations or site conditions that the city guidelines did not anticipate. Interpreting guidelines to meet specific situations and solving these types of challenges with innovative solutions is what architects are really good at.

One example of this is a restaurant in East Harlem called Pro Thai that teamed up with Design Corps volunteer Andre Soluri. The restaurant is located on a hill and a corner that complicated the design and build-out. As a result, they (along with most of the neighboring restaurants) did not build outdoor dining until they received help through the Design Corps. To solve this challenge, the architect had to innovate to design a build-out that complied with DOT guidelines, accounted for the hill, and was inexpensive to build. The architect teamed up with

a structural engineer and a contractor both who specialized in wood frame construction. The contractor ended-up building the project at-cost which made it affordable to the restaurant and saved upwards of \$20K. The completed build-out is a great example of the architecture, design and construction industries coming together to help small businesses survive this pandemic.

JC: What have you heard from restaurant owners about the ability to engage with and work with architects through this program?

SB: We have received an outpour of appreciation from restaurant owners who received support from in-person design resources which they wouldn't have had otherwise. One example, Sommy Puthida, owner of Pro Thai in East Harlem said, "I am thankful to be accepted to this wonderful program and be part of this lovely community. I don't know anything about construction or design and not sure I would have continued without this help." In speaking with her, she spoke about how she had just tables and chairs out initially and didn't know what to do or where to go to create a space that was compliant and also something she could afford.

As individuals trained in design thinking and creative processes, we often take design thinking and access for granted, and most small businesses do not have the resources now to access architects for a fee. This program has helped those restaurants take advantage of the Outdoor Dining Program and connect with contractors that can build out these structures for a more reasonable fee.

Another restaurant owner, Gehad Hadid, owner of La Bonne Soup in Midtown said, "The Design Corps is a great resource that actually provides assistance to restaurants. I would recommend every restaurant to participate, if only to have an expert provide some feedback on your outdoor structures." This restaurateur created a structure by himself and realized early on that it was insufficient to withstand inclement weather. He didn't know any architects or designers but knew he needed to create a more durable structure that could accommodate diners in cooler temperatures. He received custom drawings from a Design Corps architect that also allowed him to expand his dining space to allow for more diners. He also received recommendations from a Design Corps landscape architect to improve the space's flower beds.

JC: The program itself is an innovative example of problem solving and partnership. What have you learned while developing the program that would be helpful to a young architect considering starting a similar design assistance program?

SB: COVID-19 has increased the need for interagency collaboration towards creating policies and programs for economic recovery. It has also increased efficiency, transparency and the desire to move as fast as possible

towards a better future. This coupled with the influx of offers to help from the private sector, including the design industry, helped Design Corps get off the ground at record speed. I have learned that no idea is too small or complicated to pitch to your broader network as well as your workplace.

To narrow it down specifically, there were two key elements I found paramount: persistence and partnerships. I found staying focused on the positive impact that your program can have in helping people and making the right partnerships across public and private sectors to implement were the leading drivers. We

"We often focus on getting a program perfect before launching it, but the pandemic has taught us that we just don't have enough time for perfection."

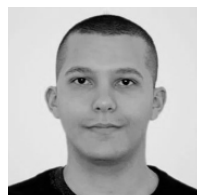
often focus on getting a program perfect before launching it, but the pandemic has taught us that we just don't have enough time for perfection. People are at risk of losing their livelihood and

it is our duty as a city but also as fellow New Yorkers to provide support as quickly as possible.

I would advise those looking to start a similar program to be nimble, iterative and focus on a phased launch strategy. The first being a quick 'beta/soft launch' that has basic mechanisms in place to make the program work, then taking lessons from the first phase and raising funds for a more refined program later. Once you can demonstrate proof of concept, more partnerships and money will follow. Also, don't go at it on your own. Find a partner to help support your journey from pitch to launch! Ideally this partnership would be made up of two parties with different strengths. For example, one is the big-picture creative thinker and the other is an expert implementor.

Previous: The completed Pro-Thai build-out by Design Corps volunteer Andre Soluri is a great example of the architecture, design and construction industries coming together to help small businesses survive this pandemic.

Left: NYCxDesign Design Corps press event in Chinatown.



John J. Clark, AIA, NCARB

Clark is an architect and Enterprise Rose Fellow with the South Florida Community Land Trust. He is a graduate of the University of New Mexico and the 2019-20 Communications Director for the AIA YAF.

The move to online proctoring

NCARB adapts the ARE to pandemic conditions by embracing technology



Jared N. Zurn, AIA, NCARB

Vice President, Examination

Zurn joined NCARB in 2008 as assistant director of Architect Registration Examination® (ARE®) development. As a licensed architect, he's actively involved with all aspects of the examination including development, operations, security, and implementation of ARE 5.0. Promoted to vice president in 2013, Zurn is an advocate for transparency into the examination with a focus on refining the efficiency of the process while maintaining high standards and measurement quality.

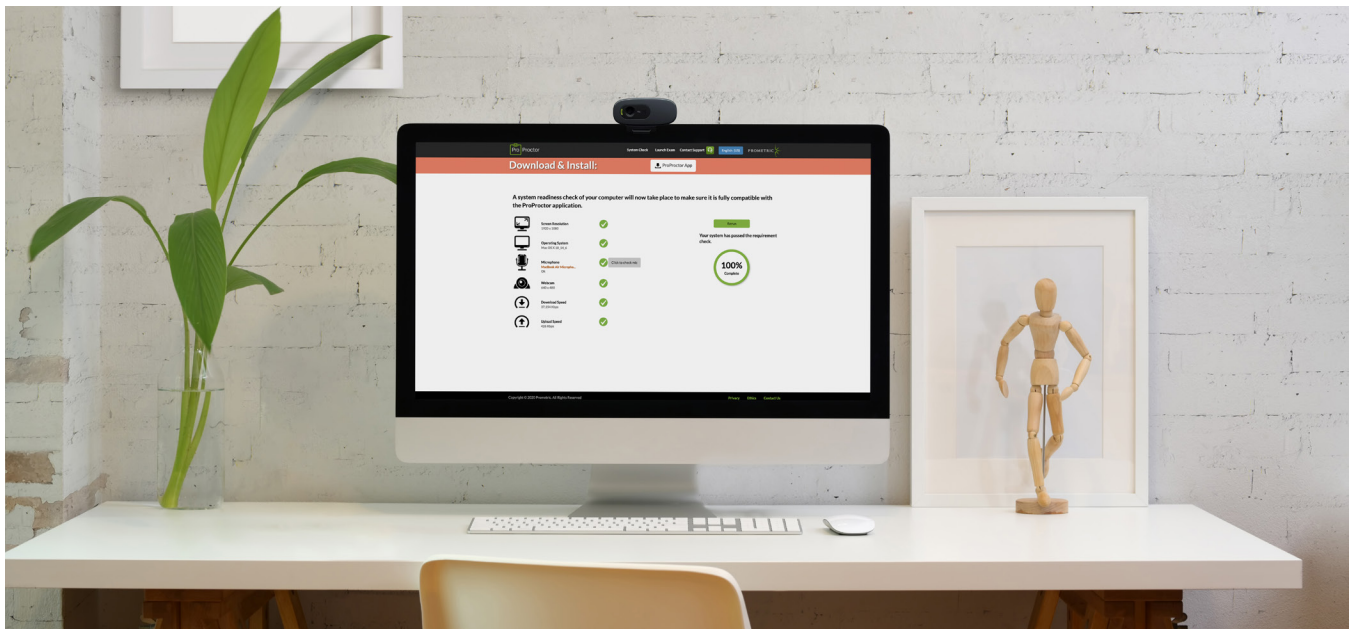
Before joining NCARB, Zurn ran a sole architectural practice in northwest Minnesota. He also served as faculty of the architectural technology program and division chair at Minnesota State Community and Technical College, where he led the architectural technology program in the areas of curriculum development, course assessment, and program outcome assessment. Zurn earned his professional degree from North Dakota State University.

Many of us have experienced drastic shifts in our lives over the past year. Testing with the ARE (Architect Registration Examination) has been no different. Testing candidates have been experiencing cancellations on their exams at an unprecedented rate as testing centers scramble to abide by local and federal guidelines on social distancing and slowing the spread of COVID-19. As the pandemic continues to haunt our everyday lives, companies have been looking for innovative ways to continue “business as usual” through the work from home model. This type of practice has given NCARB the push necessary to implement online proctoring, allowing testing candidates to test from the safety of their homes or offices without having to step foot in a testing center. The changes implemented in online proctoring have raised several concerns among testing candidates. For this issue, I interview Jared Zurn, Vice President of Examination at NCARB to help provide all licensure candidates with more insight into online proctoring and its effect on the ARE.

Evan Berger (EB): How long has NCARB been evaluating this testing alternative and why is now the right time to launch?

Jared Zurn (JZ): While the current pandemic moved up NCARB’s timeline to release an online proctored version of the ARE, this change has been under consideration for about seven years. As a regulatory organization, NCARB works to ensure that licensing boards have full confidence in the security of our exam. Given the unprecedented nature of COVID-19, the number of candidates who have been (and may continue to be) affected by test center closures and state protocols, and our responsibility to continue delivering a fair and accessible licensing exam, we were prompted to move up the planned evolution to an online delivery option.

The addition of an online proctoring option, while still delivering in the Prometric test center network, will provide candidates with greater flexibility to test anywhere. As NCARB looks to



the future, we'll continue to balance the necessary rigor of a licensure exam, needs of jurisdictional licensing boards, and the public they protect, as well as the needs of candidates.

EB: Can you describe more about the efforts and research needed to protect the security, integrity and rigor of the exam in this format?

JZ: For many months, NCARB has been working with our Board of Directors, psychometricians, vendors, and volunteer architects (many of whom are licensing board members) to determine the adjustments needed to successfully launch an online-proctored exam. We consulted with multiple providers of online delivery and our psychometricians to determine the appropriate protocols to have in place for the online security check-in process. Changes like the new whiteboard tool, the requirement to have an external autofocus webcam for a 360-degree room check, and updated break policy will maintain the exam's security.

The rigor of the exam remains the same, as the content and division structure are unchanged. NCARB will also be conducting a cut score setting process, based on the reduction in number of exam questions and other item changes, to ensure a fair assessment based on the updates.

EB: How does NCARB plan on supporting licensure candidates through this change?

JZ: NCARB continues to support our licensure candidates' journey to licensure through our programs, services, and free resources. Since we first announced the launch of online proctoring and exam changes, we've developed several resources and tools, including our [Guide to Online Proctoring and ARE 5.0, demo exam](#), and [updated ARE 5.0 Test Prep videos](#). Our Customer Service and Examination teams remain available to answer any questions our candidates may have.

A full-length demo exam was released more than four weeks before the launch of the online option so candidates could familiarize themselves with the navigation and tool changes.

EB: What do candidates need to know about the room they will be testing in or any required equipment for online proctoring?

JZ: This is a big one. All of the requirements are available on NCARB's website, specifically our [Online Proctoring Requirements](#) document and [ARE 5.0 Guidelines](#). Both of these documents also have links to the [ProProctor User Guide](#), which is published by Prometric and includes other important set up requirements.

Key requirements include a private testing area—meaning a room with a door that you can close without being disturbed while testing—as well as a clean desk area. This means there can be nothing on a candidate's desk other than their computer and mouse. Candidates should also be aware of the technology requirements, such as having an external autofocus webcam with the ability to give a 360-degree view of the space, a monitor that's an appropriate size to see the resolution of the exam (we recommend at least 19 inches), plus making sure there is a stable Wi-Fi or ethernet connection at their chosen testing location. We encourage all candidates to read and understand all of these requirements before choosing to test online.

EB: Candidates have brought concerns to the AIA, both local chapters and AIA National, about NCARB's decision to replace scratch paper with a digital whiteboard. Can you describe more about the digital whiteboard why this decision was made?

JZ: NCARB understands that some candidates feel this is a major change, and it was not a decision that was made lightly.



However, our primary goal is to ensure the ARE is a valid, trustworthy measure of candidate competency, and scratch paper or the introduction of dry-erase whiteboards into remote testing locations is a security risk. To eliminate that risk and maintain fairness across delivery modes (by providing all candidates with the same tools while testing), the decision was made to develop a digital whiteboard.

Additionally, our volunteers reviewed all exam questions to ensure they can be answered with the time and tools available. We encourage all candidates to familiarize themselves with the testing experience by trying out our new whiteboard tool, plus additional features, in the updated demo exam.

EB: Is the online format anticipated to affect the future of the exam? Will this option continue to be provided after the end of the pandemic and its related public health crisis?

JZ: Candidates should expect online testing (along with all exam policy and feature updates) to be the new normal going forward—even after the global pandemic ends. Online proctoring provides candidates the flexibility to take their exams and continue on their licensure journey. Rest assured, we've invested time and effort into planning, researching, and collaborating with subject matter experts, psychometricians, staff, and volunteers to develop a national licensing exam prepared to withstand the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Above: Architect members of NCARB's 2019 Examination Committee, which oversees the development and evolution of the ARE.

Quick hits: What's changing with the ARE?

When did this format launch?

The online proctoring option for ARE candidates and related exam changes launched on December 14, 2020.

Who administers the tests in this situation? Is Prometric involved?

Both online and onsite tests will be administered by Prometric. In summer 2021, NCARB will migrate to a new vendor, PSI.

Are breaks still available in this format?

Yes. Depending on the division, candidates now have an expanded break time of 30 or 45 minutes, which can be used for one long break or several shorter breaks. However, items seen prior to break(s) will be locked (unable to access or edit) upon returning from breaks.

When online proctoring is introduced, will I still be able to take the test in person?

Yes. Candidates still have the option to test in-person.

Will this change the format of the test for in person?

All changes to the exam's navigation, timing, and policies impact both in-person and online exams, which will maintain the exam's security and validity.

Will these exam changes affect cut scores?

Yes. We will adjust the cut score for each division, which ensures all candidates who receive a passing score have demonstrated the same level of competency—whether they tested before or after the launch of online proctoring. Cut scores identify the number of items you need to answer correctly in order to receive a "Pass" on an ARE 5.0 division.

What happens if my internet or computer crashes during the exam?

If your computer or internet crashes, your exam will "pause" while the issue is resolved, without locking any items. If you log back into Prometric's system within 30 minutes, you will be able to resume testing at the point where the exam paused. If you are unable to log back in within 30 minutes, please contact Prometric for next steps.



Evan Berger, Assoc. AIA

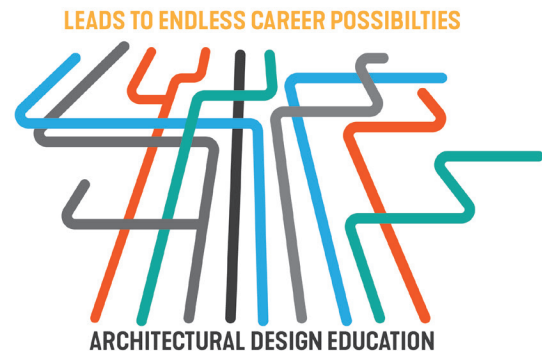
Berger is an intern architect with Archis Design in Albuquerque. He is the Architect Licensing Advisor for AIA New Mexico and currently a testing candidate himself.

Endless possibilities

An architectural education background may seem like a unique course of study with limited career paths, but when you look at the overarching lessons, it may be the key to endless possibilities. When you take a step back, you can see the common threads between architectural programs across the country: learning how to solve problems critically, openly, and from different angles. Problem solving is the foundation of the profession and the guide that can take your career in many different paths. The problem you are solving is up to you.

Many recent graduates will start their careers in a traditional architectural firm where they learn more about the profession and about themselves and begin to understand some of the possible career paths. Choosing to leverage your strengths and focusing more energy in those areas may help you take your career down some unique paths.

But a career in a traditional architecture firm may not be the right fit for you. The art of problem solving is the endless number of ways you can approach it. The built environment can be approached through several angles and perspectives. The roles, such as architect, owner's representative, facilities manager, subcontractor, construction project manager, project engineer, developer, real estate agent, tradesperson, etc., all contribute to the built environment, and each has its own distinctive approach. The beauty of a background in problem solving through an architecture program is that it allows career paths to be as unique as the individuals choosing them.



There are also careers completely unrelated to the built environment in which those with an architectural background can thrive. The technology industry is a great example of an alternate career path. Evelyn Lee is an architect who has been working in the technology industry for years. She also co-hosts a podcast, [Practice Disrupted](#). She is one example of how your background and education in architecture can lead to a path that's unrelated to the built environment but that aligns with the environment of human experience and the digital world.

To share some more examples of individuals who took their design education in a different direction, I reached out to a few colleagues. I hope their stories inspire you to carve your own path that aligns with the problems you want to solve, regardless of whether that is being a traditional architect or something completely different.



Dana De Filippi

BIM technologist

Degree: Bachelor of science in interior design, minor in industrial design (Virginia Tech University)

Why did you choose this career path?

I excelled in technology. Also, given the recession during the time I graduated, it made sense to go this direction.

What do you enjoy most?

I enjoy seeing many project types, working with many project teams, and coming up with advanced workflow solutions.

Any advice for a young professional looking to do something similar?

Connect virtually with user groups/online presentations and seminars, and network with experts in the BIM management role.



Christiana Copper, RA, MBA

Project Manager at a reinforcing-steel manufacturer

Degree: Master of architecture and master of business administration (Kent State University)

Why did you choose this career path?

I was first drawn to this path when I took a job working as a detailer for a structural steel engineering and manufacturing company. Working for the subcontractor, I got to see how the architect's drawings are used by other disciplines. I am now in a leadership role in a company of 30 people.

What do you enjoy most?

I like being close to the construction process. Being part of steel manufacturing gave me the opportunity to work with people in skilled trades and gain experience on the job site. You see for yourself how the pieces of your design are made and delivered to the site, which is the kind of experience that strengthens your skills as an architect.

Any advice for a young professional looking to do something similar?

Be open to less traveled paths and unconventional opportunities. Your skills as an architect can be honed in many different environments, and you can bring unique value wherever you go.



Clarke Lewis

Senior Development Manager

Degree: Bachelor of architecture (Kent State University), master of architecture and graduate certificate in real estate development (University of Michigan)

Why did you choose this career path?

I can't say I consciously choose real estate development, but I sort of fell into the profession during grad school, and my career path unfolded from there. While studying at the University of Michigan, my roommate suggested I tag along to an intro to real estate development course he was signed up to take. I was hooked instantly. Between the insight into real estate development and our professor Peter Allen's infectious energy, I knew I was in the right place. From there, my focus certainly shifted to pursue real estate development as my career. I enrolled into Michigan's graduate certificate in real estate; I began networking within the field and decided, along with two classmates, to push our term project beyond the classroom and move forward with developing two properties in Detroit. All this said, I believe the main reason real estate development was so attractive to me was the fact development is the business of the built environment. It combined my interest in business and entrepreneurship with my passion for cities and the built environment. Essentially, each development is like starting a new business and brings new opportunities and relationships. It's really all fascinating. Another bonus is that real estate development offers a way to build wealth over time, more so than if I stuck with architecture solely.

What do you enjoy most?

My work ranges from day to day. I really enjoy the wide array of people I get to converse with and how one day I could be negotiating a lease with a restaurateur and the next participating in a design charrette with our architect. Being involved in every aspect and stage of a project from acquisition to disposition is really interesting and satisfying. Real estate development has widely expanded my knowledge in how a project gets planned, built, and succeeds, and that learning and broad experience keep me curious and very intrigued.

Any advice for a young professional looking to do something similar?

A degree in architecture has played an enormous role in how I work, create, think, and process issues. Value your education and learning experience in architecture, and tailor it to the career path you have interest in. Creative thinking and understanding complex decisions/problem solving are some of the best skills you can concentrate on mastering, and they are in fact rooted within your education in architecture school. Lastly, I'll add, and end with, two of my six principles that help steer my pursuits in life. (1) Simplify with action. (2) Prepare well and often. There is no better time than now: Take action, follow up with everyone, and keep practicing. At the end of the day, inaction kills any progress or dream. Preparation helps with all pursuits; continue to gather meaningful information, learn, improve, and make yourself ready for the next opportunity.



Leland Curtis

Co-leader of computational design

Degree: BAE/MAE in architectural engineering with a minor in architectural studies (Penn State University)

Why did you choose this career path?

I try to follow my passion, and that led me here! Architecture is a wonderful blend of creative and technical thinking, which fits my personality well. Focusing on computational design allows me to feed my curiosity because my job is to dream up new workflows and design methodologies that technology only recently made possible. Not only do I get to work within an industry that I love, but I get to operate as an entrepreneur and inventor as well. It's a dream job.

What do you enjoy most?

I love learning new things, solving complex problems, and sharing ideas with people. It is also wonderful to know that my work helps make high-performance, sustainable design feasible. It is nice to feel like I'm a part of something larger than myself.

Any advice for a young professional looking to do something similar?

Learn to code and invent a new, better way. Industry experience doesn't translate into an understanding of the digital age. Young people, being digital natives, are in a great position to re-evaluate how digital workflows can disrupt any industry. Your boss likely knows less about coding and data than you do, so why wait for them to tell you how technology will affect your workflow or business? Seize the opportunity and add value in new ways.



Kelly Cummings

Business Development and Strategic Marketing Manager

Degree: master of arts in communication (Duquesne University), bachelor of arts in interior design (Kent State University)

Why did you choose this career path?

I didn't choose my career path; my career path chose me. I followed my passions. My interests in technical drawing and graphics led me to pursue a bachelor's degree in interior design. My interests in psychology and nonverbal and visual communication led me to pursue a master's degree in communication. I combined all that with my love of architecture and found the perfect spot for all my talents and interests as a leader in branding, marketing, strategic planning, graphic design, and business development for architecture firms.

What do you enjoy most?

Design thinking. Everything I do for my job is grounded in it. I really enjoy strategy, immersing myself in research and data to understand the big picture. I then enjoy the challenge of translating that data into comprehensible stories and graphics that are relatable and easy to digest. From proposal and interviews to strategic planning and branding, by understanding others' needs, I can design human-centered solutions to any problem.

Any advice for a young professional looking to do something similar?

Pursue your passions, keep an open mind, and think big. There is no right or wrong way to pursue your interests. Rarely does your first job align with all of your interests; each internship or job experience is a steppingstone that teaches you more about who you are and what you want. By choosing to learn, reflect, and grow from these experiences, you can discover the path that is right for you. In the end, it does not matter how you get there.



Katelyn Rossier, AIA

Katelyn is an architect at SmithGroup in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She is a graduate of Kent State University, and manages the blog mentorarchitect.com.

Opportunities for innovation in rural and urban practice

**Miranda Moen, Associate AIA**

Miranda Moen, Assoc. AIA is an architectural designer and the Founder of MO/EN Design Practice, LLC based in Austin, Minnesota. Moen is a 2021-2022 Fulbright Scholar and is passionate about rural design and cultural heritage research. Much of her work centers around working with rural artists, economic development leaders, and private clients in Southern Minnesota and Northern Iowa.

**Christopher Fagan, AIA, LEED AP**

Christopher Fagan, AIA is Owner and Principal Architect at Christopher Fagan Studio Architecture, PLLC. He is also Chair of AIA Queens chapter's Emerging Professional's Committee. Christopher's practice blends innovative design and collaboration tools with an affinity for traditional architecture.

In November 2020, Connection contributors Miranda Moen and Christopher Fagan sat down to discuss architectural practice innovation as it relates to rural and urban settings. Our conversation centered on existing issues in practice and experiences that have deeply impacted our work.

Practice innovation starts with identifying issues and existing barriers to progress and understanding their context. The result of the conversation is an honest recounting of experiences in architectural practice, including barriers to progress. We hope this article shines a light on existing issues and encourages more nuanced conversation about practice innovation.

Introduce yourself.

Miranda Moen (MM): I am an architectural designer originally from a predominantly rural southeastern portion of Minnesota. I graduated from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities with a Bachelor of Design in Architecture in 2015 and from Iowa State University with a Master of Architecture degree in May 2019. My interests lie at the intersection of how cultural background, history, and lifestyle influence built structures, especially in the rural Midwest.

Shortly before graduating, I realized that there were virtually no paths towards rural practice. As someone originally from a small town, this motivated me to seek out other designers and practices who felt value in rural work. This search led me to start freelance work to assist small towns and, after a year and a half, I established my own business called MO/EN Design Practice, in August of 2020. I now operate as a regional design and research practice, with the goal of serving rural communities through cultural heritage research, attainable architecture, and creative projects that ignite economic development.

Chris Fagan (CF): My choice to pursue a career in architecture arose naturally from my artistic ability, public service in home construction, and my lifelong observation of the cultural and built environment that formed me. I grew up in urban Connecticut, raised by an artist who I accompanied to contemporary galleries and crumbling, pre-war factory complexes where she and other artists found studio space and community. Rather than the sterile, “white-box” gallery spaces, I was captivated by the solidity and whimsical detail of those ancient factories around Bridgeport, New Haven, and Waterbury, Connecticut. I always wondered, why don’t we build like this anymore?



I earned my B. Arch from the University of Notre Dame, which offered the only comprehensive architecture curriculum focused on classical and traditional design. In that course, I found my calling in vernacular architecture: the informal building art idiosyncratic to each culture and climate around the world. I am continuing to explore the role of craft in architecture and how builder and designer can advance our built world through a closer collaboration. I earned my license and LEED credential while working in Chicago and have since returned to New York, where I founded my architecture practice in 2018.

Why did you decide to practice in a large city? In a small town?

MM: I chose to practice in a small town for a variety of reasons, but at its heart, I felt I better understood the culture and issues in small towns and that I could make a greater impact by serving there. One major barrier to rural practice is that there is no clear path. In addition, if you end up pursuing a small-town practice, it's often looked down upon by others. Part of my mission is to legitimize rural practice as a valid path and one that has immense value and potential that I believe is untapped. I also feel that working in a small town has made it easier for me to work on rural issues more effectively, such as the lack of access to design services in small towns. My creative process thrives on being surrounded and fully immersed in the culture, in order to think more clearly when approaching solutions to a problem.

CF: I grew up both in cities and small towns. Ultimately, I wanted to jump into the biggest pond I could find. New York

City is close to my family roots and where I feel comfortable living and starting a family of my own. I still feel like a newcomer in New York and am only scratching the surface of the city's complex professional network. Standing out in the crowd of exceptional designers will require a lot of luck, my best effort, and honesty with myself. But for me, being in a place that draws the world's best and leads in innovation is priceless.

What is the most common role of the architect on a project in your daily experience?

MM: Besides traditional architectural services, in rural practice the architect often ends up being the project manager and sometimes assumes roles that are commonly handled by general contractors. For example, the architect may be more involved with getting quotes from local lumber yards or finding local subcontractors for projects. Architectural projects in rural areas tend to be anything but traditional. In this instance, "traditional" is in relation to the common practice model that hosts pre-design through construction administration project phases and other processes that we are taught by architectural education and firms. Rural-based project scopes and processes vary widely project to project, but it certainly keeps work interesting, and you learn much more holistically about the project!

Above: A concept proposal for an RFP to reimagine New York's public housing by providing mixed-use infill developments for affordable senior housing. Care was given to include design improvements responding to the needs of seniors during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Image Credit: Christopher Fagan, 2020*

CF: New York's regulatory environment makes architects essential for a wide range of projects. We are called upon to guide our clients through the permitting process and make early feasibility checks. We serve as a liaison to the planning and building departments. Contractors often hire architects directly and bring the architect on board with their own clients. Therefore, it makes sense to work as a design-build firm in order to streamline communication with the contractor and deliver a project quickly.

What challenges and rewards have you discovered practicing in a small town? In a large city?

MM: In our industry as a whole, there is a lack of available tradespeople knowledgeable in historic and advanced techniques. A huge part of architecture after all is finding the people with the skill sets to bring your design to life. In rural areas, this issue is exacerbated by the small population and a lack of service competition. Architects often have to choose between standards or high-cost contractors from metro areas. In small towns, clients rarely have even moderate budgets for design, let alone unexpected repairs. In addition, historically few architects have worked in small towns. To compensate, contractors and lumber yards developed their own process to fill the gap in service. Consequently, small-town contractors are not often familiar with architects, perpetuating poor communication and coordination onsite. As you can tell, working in rural areas is quite different from what you are taught in school or perhaps have experience with in traditional architectural firms. But for myself, I simply cannot imagine working anywhere else. I want to help create a better system for the ease of both future architects and clients alike.

CF: It's daunting to start out here: high overhead costs and high barriers to entry. Getting a project reviewed in a timely fashion depends on the relationships you have with city officials. Any local code is more restrictive than the state's, more strictly enforced, and will be quick to absorb progressive standards.

A prime example is 2020's Local Law 94, which mandated green roofs or solar panels on new buildings before the details were ironed out. That said, many of those challenges are what makes being an architect in New York great. We are essential here and respected for our knowledge. We are participating in reforms that will make all of our lives better and ensure a just, sustainable future.

Was there one particular event or moment that challenged you to think differently?

MM: I don't think there was a particular moment, but one day, I realized that if our practice model doesn't change, it will be impossible for me to serve working-class people and small towns. Practice innovation is really step one instead of the end goal, so there must be a series of small steps to move towards it. Besides my architectural practice, I spend a lot of time mentoring and discussing rural practice to advocate for this sector of work. I really feel like there is so much potential for great design and innovation because it's been so historically overlooked. Recently, I read that only 15 percent of America's housing stock is designed by architects. If this is true, then why does it seem that architects can't find enough work or aren't paid their value? If we can find out what's wrong with our system, perhaps we can get closer to practice innovation after all.





CF: The shutdowns in March. I had barely launched my practice and planned to open a local office with full-time staff. I was collaborating remotely with designers in Michigan and working freelance from my New York apartment. As the health crisis expanded, I managed to keep my projects going and became busier. I began appreciating the advantages of my unconventional workflow and formed them into a business plan that felt exciting: rethinking the outdated standards of our profession. A collaboration this summer with a traditional small office helped affirm my commitment to build a new kind of practice suited to our changing world.

As a business owner and sole proprietor, what are some common issues you have faced? Any insights into how practice and/or business models could change to remedy these situations?

MM: I have been interested in understanding current business models in architecture for a few years now. Starting my practice forced me to jump into this right away, and the Practice Management ARE exam provided a lot of insight into how business in architecture is usually conducted. As a designer working towards licensure, the tools I found when studying for the Practice Management exam were essential to the financial management of my business. General issues I've encountered include burnout, as a sole practitioner's capacity is limited, as well as the fee-for-service model, which makes our services time-dependent. How do we create passive streams of revenue to keep everyday operations and overhead costs covered? I love doing the creative investigations and design processes but find that when these are time-dependent, it creates quite the "writer's block" when it comes to design ideation.

CF: Many of us have accepted that architects must suffer. I think that the root of this trope is our reluctance to innovate our practice. Efficiency is key to my success as a sole proprietor. The more value I can provide per hour of work, the more freedom I have to raise my rate, manage more projects, and maintain my health and relationships. In the days of hand drafting, firms needed to employ more draftspersons, spend more time communicating design intent, deal with construction conflicts due to the limitations of 2D ... and had less freedom to revise drawings along the way. The last thing I want is to push back against my client's design participation because I can't make time to change a rendering. By embracing advanced design tools, we can be more responsive to our client's needs while trimming production time and errors in our documents. This could develop a healthier and more respected profession of architecture.

How do you start implementing changes to innovate architectural practice? Before we can answer this question, it's important that designers and architects begin to understand the existing barriers to change. Most importantly, we need to have open discussions to find a solution together.

Opposite: Fagan's first project created entirely through remote collaboration with a local designer: a home renovation and addition for aging-in-place in Michigan. *Photo Credit: Christopher Fagan, 2020*

Above: An example of rural architectural practice: Partnering with a contractor to lead a supervised demolition workshop. The goal was to provide locals with technical training and DIY skills while obtaining demo labor for our project. *Photo Credit: Ashley Hanson*

Think big, have fun!



Ryan Gann, Assoc. AIA

Gann has blazed a trail founded on service, leadership, and design. From his time as an engaged student leader to his expanding contributions to the built environment, Ryan has managed to stay ambitious while having fun along the way.

As a designer at Ross Barney Architects he has worked on some of the studio's most ambitious civic projects. These architectural and urban design investigations have allowed him to collaborate with communities across Chicago and the world, expressing the role public space plays in everyday life.

Ryan is the recipient of the 2018 AIA Associates Award, Schiff Foundation Fellowship from the Art Institute of Chicago, and was the inaugural architect-in-residence at the Hyde Park Art Center. Ryan currently serves on the national board of the American Institute of Architects, and previously served on the boards of the American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS) and National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB).

Ryan and I met on the AIA National Associates Committee. I instantly found myself gravitating toward his energy and enthusiasm. It became apparent that Ryan has an intense passion for making a difference and an impact in people's lives. One lesson I have learned from his leadership is to think big, remain nimble for the curve balls, and, most importantly, have fun!

Ryan is a creative thinker and has an equal passion for leadership and design. From serving on the national board of the AIAS to his recent role as the Associate Director on the AIA national board. Ryan's experience at all levels within the Institute and collateral organizations shows his strong, encouraging, and thought-provoking leadership.

His creative approach to leadership was on full display at the annual meeting of the National Associates Committee in 2019. Ryan led a group discussion challenging us to remember the larger picture. He helped establish the following agreements for our committee, which have continued to guide our discussions and work.

The Agreements: THINK BIG! Have fun. Be honest about capacity. Come prepared and ready. Keep enthusiasm and momentum. Remain visible — share stories as leaders. Stay connected: communicate, respond, and engage. Ask why five times. Acknowledge rabbit holes. Ask who and what, not how. Earlier this year, Ryan embarked on an exciting endeavor, running for at-large director on the AIA national board. It is truly inspiring to have a leader representing emerging



professionals. He serves as a conduit for information and knowledge across generations.

I asked Gann why he ran for at-large director and what he hopes to achieve now that he has been elected. the foundation of my career.



Stephanie Herring (SH): How did your experiences on the NAC empower you to run for at-large director?

Ryan Gann (RG): My experience on the National Associates Committee helped showcase the invaluable forum that can take place when AIA members from diverse regions and backgrounds come together. The opportunity to mobilize this network around a shared agenda for the future they will lead is of inestimable impact.

Taking part in the energy and excitement that fills the conversations of both the NAC and YAF empowered me to run for at-large director. The opportunities before us are inestimable, requiring strong leadership to help synthesize a shared agenda. Emerging professionals play a critical role in shaping topics like climate action and equity; it is our time to lead with passion and courage.

SH: How do you intend to bring innovation to the board?

RG: Innovation may be the buzz word of the era. To me, architects are constantly taught to rethink relationships, configurations, and to dream of a future not yet created. That same spirit of investigation is required in any leadership position. I would also say that any true game-changing ideas take a little bit of risk. To meet the challenges of tomorrow, the status quo is no longer effective. Most critically, the board has the responsibility to envision a membership organization fit for the 21st century, serving an evolving profession.

SH: What would you recommend to a firm that is seeking to be more innovative during this pandemic?

RG: Constraints often present opportunities. If work from home has taught me anything, it is that the ability to communicate across platforms is critical. That means email, Slack messages, and doodles on a screen have an outsized influence in communicating ideas; talking with your hands don't get you as far these days. Our soft skills are now front and center.



Use this time to refine your presentation/pitch tactics, brush up on technology, and find ways to fully leverage the digital experience without it feeling like just another virtual meeting. These forums of communication will remain relevant, if not essential, post-pandemic.

SH: Who are your mentors and why?

RG: Throughout my growth as a professional, I have sought to surround myself with confidants and friends. The strength of this network exists in a cross-generational dialogue, from student leaders who inspire me with their fierce passion to experienced professionals whose wisdom is invaluable.

I would be remiss to not mention my gratitude to Carol Ross Barney. As a student at IIT, she recognized and endorsed the value I placed on volunteer leadership. This continues years later in the workplace. The symbiotic relationship between excellence in architectural design and leadership has helped set the foundation of my career.

SH: Outside of AIA, what are some other passions you have?

RG: Some might call me a foodie. Together with my partner, George, we enjoy traveling and eating our way through new cities. Food and architecture are the foundations of many cultures. I highly recommend pairing the two together on your next adventure post-pandemic. If you are in need of a recommendation, let me know!



Stephanie Herring, Assoc. AIA

Herring is the 2020 AIA National Associates Committee chair. She enjoys volunteering locally and nationally, establishing connections with individuals and communities. Herring is an Associate at CambridgeSeven.

One big experiment

A look into Saam Architecture



Katie Davis Kernizan

Katie is an associate with Saam Architecture in Boston, MA. She first developed a strong interest in design which enhances her community during her undergraduate education at Wentworth Institute of Technology. While she used her architectural training to volunteer locally, Katie's graduate thesis brought her to Haiti, where she conducted humanitarian work. In 2010, Katie served as a volunteer with Architecture for Humanity in Haiti, contributing to the emergency response and disaster relief efforts to rebuilding Haiti following the landmark earthquake. In 2012-2013, she returned to Haiti as an employee of a UK-based NGO, working on long-term development of four public schools in Port-au-Prince.

With her former employer, Burt Hill/Stantec, Katie was involved in numerous public and private projects, including work in higher education, corporate interiors, transportation, retail, religious, and healthcare. Katie holds a Bachelor of Architecture and a Master of Architecture from Wentworth Institute of Technology and a Master of Applied Science in Environmental Policy and Management from the University of Denver.

This past year has thrust us all into one great big experiment – working in ways, many of us, were previously unfamiliar with. But for Saam Architecture, a Boston-based practice founded on the pillars of transparency and flexibility in 2014, a hybrid remote / in-person working model has always been the norm. Now more than ever, firms are testing methods to create a flexible and equitable work environment that enables high-quality output, so we thought it would be beneficial to learn from Saam, a firm that has based their entire practice on a progressive model.

YAF contributors Jennifer Hardy and Gabriela Baierle had the pleasure to connect with Katie Davis Kernizan, an associate at Saam Architecture and an active participant from the firm's first year in practice until now.

Jennifer Hardy and Gabriela Baierle: How did you begin your career?

Katie Davis Kernizan: I graduated from Wentworth Institute of Technology in 2008, and in school, I was very interested in the intertwining of different cultures and architecture. At the time, I worked at Burt/Hill (now Stantec), where I met Saam's principals. When the recession hit and following the earthquake, I decided to go to Haiti on a humanitarian mission for architects volunteering with the rebuilding process.

This was when I began to foster my passion for traveling and helping others through architecture. Upon return, I joined Stantec but eventually went back to Haiti once more with the focus again on rebuilding schools. Saam was started in 2014, and I joined the firm in 2015.

JH and GB: What was it like to join a firm that had just started?

KK: It was very interesting! The firm was still developing their standards and tweaking the physical office space. Everyone was very involved, and we all wore many hats. We were only six to seven employees at the one-year mark and are now an office of 20 people. Saam has always been very non-hierarchical, so it was not uncommon for a junior person to be working on some of the same things as the principals.

JH and GB: The creation and development of the firm seemed to have been very democratic. Do you think that this approach impacted what Saam is now?

KK: Yes, we even gave input toward the naming and the branding of the firm. It really felt like we were shaping the firm to what it is now. With less hierarchy in place, the principals have more space to push younger staff out of their comfort zone and are really great at exposing staff to new challenges.



JH and GB: Diana (Nicklaus, principal) has alluded to Saam as “one big experiment.” In the time you’ve been there, have you rejected certain aspects and pivoted as a team? You’re not following a book.

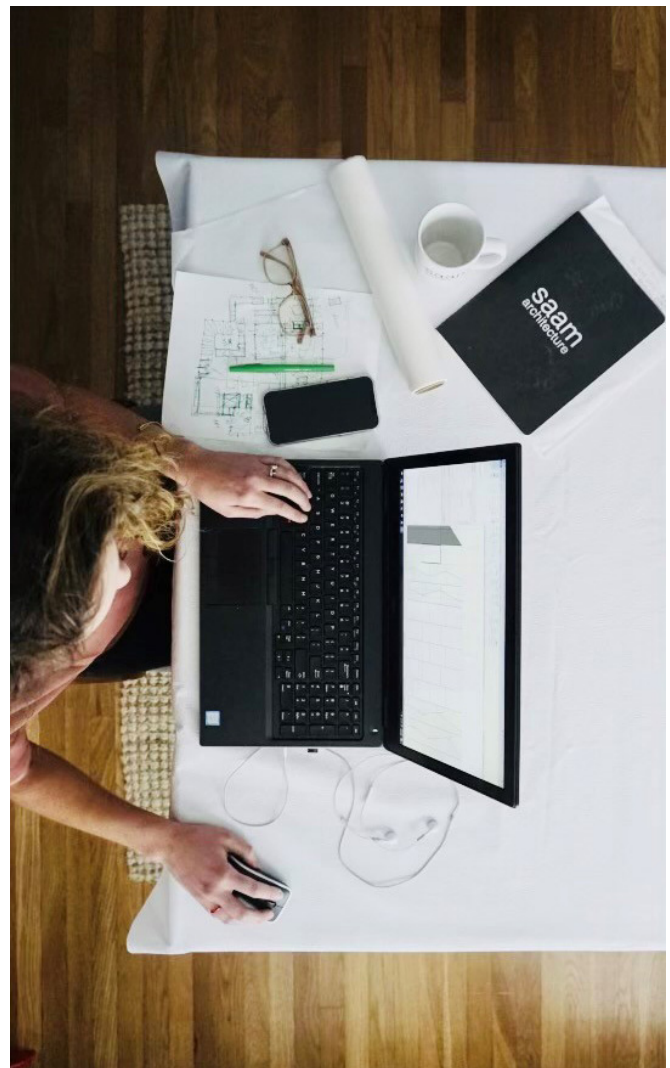
KK: The firm was founded on the principle of working remotely and being very flexible. Depending on the task and nature of different projects, attendance in the office fluctuates, and this particular ability that we have honed as a team has worked to our advantage during the ongoing COVID crisis. Over time, the principals found that requiring all employees to attend the Monday morning staff meeting in-person was a great way to kick off and coordinate the work for every project each week. Since then, Saam has made it a point to schedule lunch-and-learns and happy hours on Mondays, which we still do virtually.

JH and GB: This year, the cost of overhead and having your own space is coming into question for many architecture practices. Do you find specific value in working from home versus being in the office?

KK: I think it’s good to have the option to utilize a shared physical space. While our Monday morning staff meeting is now virtual, it is nice to have the option to go into the office for a project meeting, to collaborate, to build a model or for general housekeeping reasons. I do think it’s beneficial to have a home base. In fact, before the pandemic, we had just moved to a new office space, and I was one of the people who volunteered to practice the hoteling method.

Above: Those in the firm with friends and family abroad leverage the Saam practice model to work outside the country during the year.

Right: The home office of Katie Davis Kernizan, who has been hoteling since March 2020.





The City of Boston Engagement Center is a low threshold space for citizens struggling with substance use disorder or homelessness to seek refuge and engage in services.

JH and GB: How long have you been hoteling for, and what is your home workspace like?

KK: Since Saam began, everyone receives a laptop, so it is easy to switch desks, work from home, travel and jump into a conference room to collaborate with someone working from home. I've been hoteling in the office since January, and I've been hoteling in my home since March, as my home office tends to fluctuate as well! I usually work at the dining room table, but also took advantage of working outside when the weather was nice. In fact, when managing a project in L.A., I was technically almost always coordinating virtually.

JH and GB: It seems like you mentally don't associate a physical space with working. What do you associate "work-life balance" with?

KK: I think we are past that set definition. The term used to be associated with having the ability to leave the office to pick up kids or to run an errand, for instance. Now, one's work and lives are far more intertwined, so it's more about having general flexibility. Along with promoting working families, some people just work more efficiently in the morning and some better late at night, so we can alter our schedules for many reasons.

JH and GB: Saam is rigorous about transparency: sharing calendars, publishing the employee handbook on the firm's website. How do you feel about that?

KK: Saam has never had office phones! We have always used our cellphones for work. The general idea is that it is more efficient, and we can be reached at any time. It goes along with the flexibility factor if the employee is more productive early in the morning or later at night, you obviously have the ability to turn off notifications on the weekends and off hours, but really the benefit is, there's no set boundaries to where and when you work, so that has to work for you personally.

We share our calendars for the same reasons. With such flexible schedules, it is important for colleagues to easily view others' availability, as well as meetings, vacation or personal times blocked out, which lets us quickly set up collaboration, coordination or project meetings. I think publishing the Saam handbook on our website is the most transparent move because it lets us show our community, potential employees, colleagues and clients the extent of our business model.

JH and GB: We recognize not everyone is comfortable in this type of business model, as in-person collaboration has historically been such a key part of design. How does collaboration work for you?

KK: We've used chat and screen sharing platforms since the start, just like everyone is using Zoom now. Aside from the multiple ways of communicating, sharing and keeping our calendars up to date, Monday's all staff meeting, I use Slack, screenshare with GoTo and Bluebeam, and use Bluebeam Studio sessions a lot. It is really specific to the project and team. Again, there is still the option to collaborate in person in the office – it's about having options and working closely with your team!

JH and GB: In terms of technology and collaboration, what are the tools you use most?

KK: I use the Snippet tool a lot, and we like setting up different channels on Slack, based on teams or topics. We use Bluebeam a lot as well. Even prior to COVID, I was working on a project in L.A., so it was like I was working double remotely. Having a live Bluebeam Studio session, being able to share screens and screenshots, are all very helpful for everyone on the team.

JH and GB: It's interesting how much the pandemic has taught us all about communication.

KK: Definitely. A few times mid-pandemic, I went into the office, but my current team practices fully virtual and semi-virtual meetings with a mix of in-office and remote attendees. The skill sets I have learned over the past few years collaborating remotely, as well as for a project with designers in Italy and a construction team in California, have really paid off.

JH and GB: I relate to this. There is such an opportunity to be more global about how we work.

KK: It's part of being an architect! And coordinating different people and disciplines. These people just happen to be in different locations and sometimes in different time zones. So I've been practicing adapting to this challenge for some time now.

JH and GB: The difficulties of being a recession graduate are definitely present again. Sometimes you may have to consider big life changes in order to stay in the profession.

KK: Absolutely! I chose going to Haiti and pursuing my interest in humanitarian work, rather than feeling paralyzed by the lack of job opportunities for recent graduates in Boston. Everyone needs to be a bit more scrappy during these types of time. I have found that it usually works out for the better and can even make a positive life change.

JH and GB: I have heard concerns from a few emerging professionals about not being mentored enough while working remotely. In your opinion, how does the Saam business model promote and allow for mentorship to take place?

KK: One of the more structured mentorship practices we have is scheduling an employee lunch twice a year with a senior staff member or principal, and we rotate mentors rather than having a set mentor. It is in an informal setting but regulated by its time frame. Rather than filling out a form, these conversations are to make sure the staff is happy and working on things that inspire them and are on a path that fits how they want to see their career being directed. Saam is a small group, and it is very non-hierarchical, so we all interact closely regularly, and you consistently feel like you're being mentored naturally, which I find even more effective.

JH and GB: Is there a defined path for promotion?

KK: We don't really have a defined path for promotions – it is based on experience and performance. I talk to the principals every day, and they have told me the things I should aim for in order to be promoted. This is how I am held accountable and guided by them for the next steps in my career.

JH and GB: The structure or lack thereof seems to provide for more collaboration. Are there lessons learned that you would be willing to share with other architects looking to better their practices?

KK: Our physical space is naturally highly collaborative. When employees need “head down” time, they typically do that from home. We have learned that one big open office works better for our group rather than separate spaces. Our previous office was L-shaped, and on heavy work-from-home days, we often didn't see that someone was sitting on the opposite side. Since then, we have downsized and moved to a space with full-office visibility. In fact, we don't even use workstation panels between desks. The space is very horizontal without large barriers between desks and we use breakout areas mostly for conferencing, collaborating and coordinating with others who are remote.

JH and GB: Can the model be scaled up?

KK: There have been discussions about finding a sweet spot or a maximum number of employees for the model to work. I'm not sure what that number is, but it seems quite effective at our current size, and I wonder about losing the consistent contact with every single employee if scaled up.

JH and GB: What is the future of Saam? And what is the future of this model?

KK: I think the future of Saam would be to continue to push the boundaries of technology relative to communication and collaboration in our profession, with efficiency, flexibility, and attracting clients and talent in mind. We have begun studying VR and its capabilities and are always looking for useful tools to help us maximize the success of our work regardless of our location! At the very least, in our current situation the viability and success of this model is proving to work.

Learn more about Saam:

[Saam employee handbook](#)

[Archinect interview with principal Diana Nicklaus](#)



Gabriela Baierle, AIA, LEED AP BD+C

Baierle is an associate architect at Arrowstreet in Boston. She is also co-chair of the Boston Society of Architects EPNet and an adjunct faculty member at the Boston Architectural College.



Jennifer Hardy, AIA

Hardy is an architect at Payette in Boston, Mass. She is an active member at the Boston Society of Architects, and is the founding chair of the women in design emerging leaders group.

How to start or grow an emerging professional committee



Starting or growing an EP committee is a rewarding experience.

EP committees can often be a lifeline for emerging professionals and support their need to thrive within the architectural industry and beyond. With the aim of advancing emerging professional leadership skills within the AIA, their firms, and communities, EP committees provide a conduit for streamlining resources, communication, and funding for relevant EP initiatives.

Are you interested in starting or growing an AIA emerging professional committee?

The AIA YAF has released a toolkit to help. We studied eight EP committees across the nation, small and large as well as local and regional, to observe how diverse committees operate similarly or uniquely in terms of demographics, location, and/or culture. A deeper dive into digestible interviews and sample documents highlights how each committee manages its organization. This toolkit is a resource that can serve as a launching pad when forming or growing an EP committee, rather than a set of rigid guidelines.

1) Case Study Profiles:

In this first segment, each of the interviewed EP committees are introduced with a profile that quickly identifies the makeup of the committee demographics. This “baseball card” of information highlights committee location, size, number of licensed/unlicensed members, number of monthly events hosted, attendance, etc. The following EP committees include:

- AIA Vermont Emerging Professionals Network (EPN)
- AIA Honolulu Emerging Professionals Committee (EPC)
- AIA San Francisco Bay Area Young Architects (BAYA)
- AIA DC Emerging Architects Committee (AIA DC EAC, or EAC)
- Boston Society of Architects/AIA Emerging Professionals Network (EPNet)
- AIA New Jersey Emerging Professionals Community (AIA NJ EPiC)
- AIA Illinois Emerging Professionals Network (EPN)
- AIA California Council Academy of Emerging Professionals (AEP)



2) Interviews:

The second segment of the document takes a deeper dive by shining light on how EP committees found success in developing and operating. We will investigate various sections of how a committee organizes:

- **Structure:** Leadership structure, term limits, succession planning, elections/nomination, and subcommittee organization
- **Internal communication:** Meeting frequency, how committees meet, communication frequency, email management, and travel distance barriers
- **External communication:** Mass communication means/methods/tools, mass communication management, frequency of regional communication, and access to component/regional newsletter
- **Funding:** Component funding, regional funding, other fundraising methods, annual budget, committee budget reviews, and the COF grant
- **Programming and event planning:** Frequency of EP-related events, event planning lead(s), AIA staff support, successful programs, methods to increase engagement, frequency of other committee partnerships, and lessons learned.
- **Community outreach:** AIAS collaborations, AIAS liaisons and allied/nonprofit organization collaborations
- **Lessons learned**

3) Appendix:

The third and final segment provides supplemental information, showcasing additional context on the listed items and from the interviews. This includes organizational charts, budget reports, marketing material, etc. Each item is annotated/referenced in the interviews.

For more information on how to start or grow your EP committee, check out the toolkit on [Issuu](#). You can find a downloadable PDF on [KnowledgeNet](#). The time is ripe to expand the EP voice and access to resources, and EP committees are the perfect conduit to do so!



Beresford Pratt, AIA, NOMA

Beresford Pratt is an Architect at Ayers Saint Gross in Baltimore. He is the 2019–2020 Young Architect Regional Director for the AIA Mid-Atlantic region and founding member of Bmore NOMA.

How to grow within your firm

If you ask young architects why they chose to leave a job to pursue a new one, you will often hear that they were looking for opportunities for growth. They might be looking to assume a leadership role or may desire broader project experience. But no matter the specific pursuit, emerging professionals do not want to work somewhere where they feel their careers stagnating. In speaking with some of my fellow young architects and some of our partners at the AIA's Large Firm Roundtable, I have distilled a few key takeaways that can make the difference in growing at your firm. This advice can be applicable if you are looking for a firm where you can develop new skills, seeking to advance at your current firm, or trying to retain and foster talent.

Clarity and Transparency

The first thing that is key to growth as a young architect is having a clear trajectory for your career within your firm. If you are at a larger firm, it is likely that your office has defined

“The first thing that is key to growth as a young architect is having a clear trajectory for your career within your firm.”

roles beginning at the level of intern all the way up to partner or managing principal. But even at a smaller firm, there are various levels of

responsibility and management. Do you know what the next step up is at your firm? And do you know what it takes to make that step?

In addition to having a path forward, evaluating your progress along that path provides you with a benchmark for your growth. Most firms utilize annual reviews (although yours may have more frequent reviews or informal check-ins throughout the year). These should not be a report card on what you did, but rather a checkpoint on how you are growing and improving in

key areas. Use reviews as an opportunity for self-evaluation and goal-setting so that you not only know where you might need to grow, but also what your next steps are.

If you are a firm leader, particularly at a smaller practice, do you provide transparency as to how people move up and how a leadership transition might occur? At least one of the young architects I spoke with indicated that they left their previous role at a small office because the “leadership was not willing to discuss future leadership and ownership opportunities for more junior staff,” and another left a firm after nine years because there was “no upward growth.” For young architects to chart a clear path for how to grow within their firms, they need to understand that there is somewhere for their career to go beyond where it currently stands.

Mentoring and Networking

One of the most crucial ways to grow in your career is through mentorship. Ideally, there should be an opportunity to be mentored by someone within your practice who is aware of your firm's culture and structure, but mentorship can (and should) take place outside of the office as well. If you intend to develop your leadership and interpersonal skills, it is critical that you also mentor others. There is a substantial amount that can be discussed [on mentorship alone](#), but the important part is that you do it!

Networking, similar to mentorship, is about building connections with other people. Even though this article is focused on growing within your firm, many firm leaders stress the importance of getting involved outside of your firm as a way to grow professionally. They recommend involvement with trade organizations such as the AIA, NOMA, and IIDA, as well as community organizations or civic boards and committees. Even when your involvement outside of the office is not directly connected to the practice of architecture, these experiences only help further your leadership and mentorship skills.



Education and Experience

It may be cliché to say “never stop learning,” but education and experience are essential ingredients to healthy growth as a young professional. When asked how many emerging professionals work at her firm, Tricia Esser, AIA, the CEO of KTG Architecture + Planning, said, “100 percent — I believe we all need to be growing, learning, and trying to develop our careers further every day.”

While there may be times you are attempting to generally improve your abilities, often there are specific areas in which you want to develop. Taking a targeted approach to improving in a particular area is a great way to take concrete steps toward making progress in your career. If you know there are areas where you want to gain more experience, communicate this to your firm. Look for opportunities to get more time on construction sites or more opportunities to work on contracts and proposals if those are areas that you want to grow in. Pursue certifications or licenses related to practice areas that interest you, and attend conferences and events that provide additional educational opportunities. If you are particularly passionate about something specific that you want to pursue in more depth, it may also be an opportunity for a non-traditional leadership position at your firm through specialization.

Many larger firms offer internal training programs and learning opportunities to develop your skills as an architect, but even smaller firms will often provide resources for an employee to gain more experience in a key area. I spoke with one young architect who has worked at his current firm for 12 years who indicated that being “exposed to all aspects of the design and construction process,” as well as taking on a small project early to manage alone, has given him an incredible amount of experience and confidence in his career. As Clymer Cease, FAIA, of Clark Nexsen states, “Career advancement is driven by gaining knowledge and experience while building relationships.”

Leadership and Responsibility

If you want to move up in your firm or to improve your skills, you have to take the initiative to do so. That may sound obvious, but not everyone thinks to ask for more responsibility or the opportunity to lead. Seek out committees or groups at your firm that you can join or lead. Ask whether your firm will provide resources for continuing education, additional training, or industry events.

“Career development is a partnership. ... An emerging professional needs to clearly indicate and exhibit a desire to learn, excel, and participate in the firm’s culture,” says Griff Davenport, FAIA, the CEO of DLR Group. “Our most successful emerging leaders are those who reach out beyond their comfort zone for opportunity.”

This is not an all-inclusive list of how to become the ultimate architect, but it is representative of key ways to grow as a young architect. This is a starting point of what to look for and take advantage of as an emerging professional and what to offer as a firm leader; the path forward is up to you.

“Career advancement is driven by gaining knowledge and experience while building relationships.”



Seth Duke, AIA

Seth Duke is an architect at Bialosky in Cleveland. He is a graduate of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Young Architect Regional Director for the Ohio Valley Region.

Wellness in the [home] workplace

How to take cognitive, emotional, and physical well-being best practices from the office office to your home office.

From lighting to storage to decorating, there are literally thousands of articles with information on how to create the ultimate home office.

This is not one of those articles.

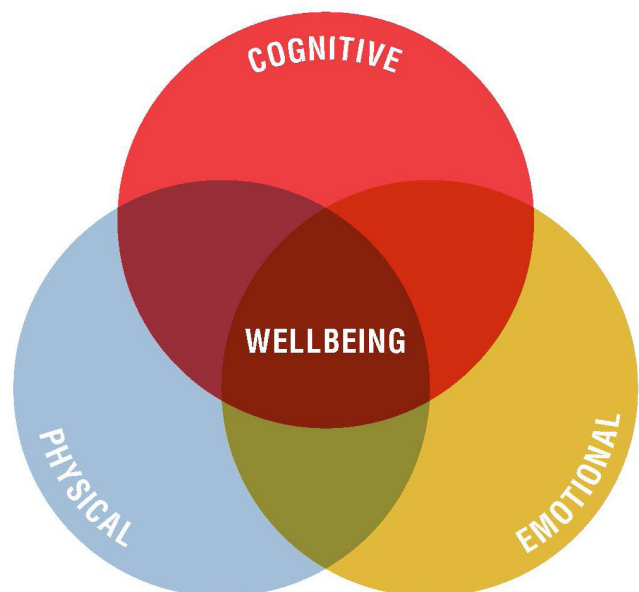
As a workplace strategist, I work with companies to help them create spaces to fit and (if necessary) transform the culture of their organizations. For years, designers have been studying and applying best practices for something called the distributed work model, an organizational approach in which a team of co-workers is dispersed throughout an open office plan rather than being assigned to one desk. This approach allows individuals to select the space that best meets their needs for any given task throughout the day. Does this sound familiar to you?

Now, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, many in the United States are working in a landscape that has taken the distributed work model and expanded it to a local, regional, even national scale. Instead of opting to sit in the office cafe to tackle emails, we're now sitting in our own kitchens, dining rooms, and home offices. We're working during unique hours to keep up with the care of loved ones. We're working — and we're certainly distributed.

It's easy to feel overwhelmed by the countless strategies and tips on ways to maintain productivity in this new working environment. I prefer to focus on the reason we're all working from home in the first place: our health and well-being. Very few U.S. workers have studied the standards of ergonomics; yet, under normal circumstances, many have the advantage of working in a space that has been thoughtfully designed and constructed to meet their unique ergonomic needs. Now as we observe social distancing and isolating, we're all having to adapt to our new normal of the home office. No one knows with certainty how long it will be until we can venture back to our professionally designed offices. In the interim, we can look

at ways to create workspaces that serve us now and for the long term. Doing so will help you not only stay engaged and productive, but also feel better.

Many researchers break well-being into three categories: cognitive, emotional, and physical. Each plays a critical and distinct role in our overall health. Let's look at each of these and what steps you can take to enhance your cognitive, emotional, and physical well-being while working from home.



Above: The three distinct categories of well-being — cognitive, emotional, and physical — each play a critical role in our overall health. *Image © RDG Planning & Design.*



For Your Cognitive Health: Bring Nature In, and Give Yourself a Break

When choosing a spot to work for the day, consider biophilic design, a strategy used in the building industry to respond to the innate connection that humans have to the natural environment. Because [Americans spend about 90 percent](#) of our lives indoors, it's important to be purposeful about introducing nature into your space. Engaging with natural materials and organic patterns and allowing yourself views to the outdoors and natural daylight patterns can help you re-energize, increase productivity, and promote alertness.

These are emotional times, and high stress levels are affecting workers across all industries. Every day, we're learning new ways to complete routine tasks, which only adds to mental exhaustion. Remember to give yourself a break – whether it's going for a walk (which will not only reduce your stress, but also boost creativity and re-energize your focus), taking a virtual coffee break with colleagues, or doing an online yoga class. The point is to allow yourself time to unplug and de-stress. A few other suggestions for boosting your cognitive well-being include:

Follow the 20/20/20 rule: Every 20 minutes, look up or away from your computer monitor and toward something that is 20 inches away for 20 seconds. This can reduce eye strain and help you refocus.

Take longer breaks: Aim for between 15 and 20 minutes every couple of hours to allow your brain to decompress and re-energize.

Log off for the night: Set a schedule that helps your mind know that your work for the day is complete.

For Your Emotional Health: Time to Phone a Friend

Socialization is instrumental in the workplace and, when done properly, can boost your productivity levels. Socialization allows teammates to form strong, trusting relationships. Providing a safe space where individuals can speak up, admit their mistakes, and share new ideas is what ultimately leads to innovation. In the office, socialization generally happens through unintentional, spontaneous interactions.

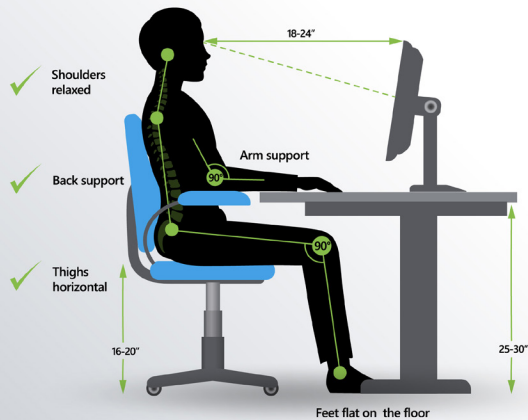
Connections like these are harder to maintain in a distributed model and can be especially difficult to replicate if an entire workforce is operating remotely. The best strategy for success is to leverage the technology available to you. Use shared scheduling tools to support dependability within a team. Consider frequent, brief videoconferences to stay connected and engaged. For leaders, be purposeful in recognizing the contributions of individuals for work completed outside the office. Instill value in the work itself, and reinforce belief in a shared vision.

For Your Physical Health: Get Up and Move

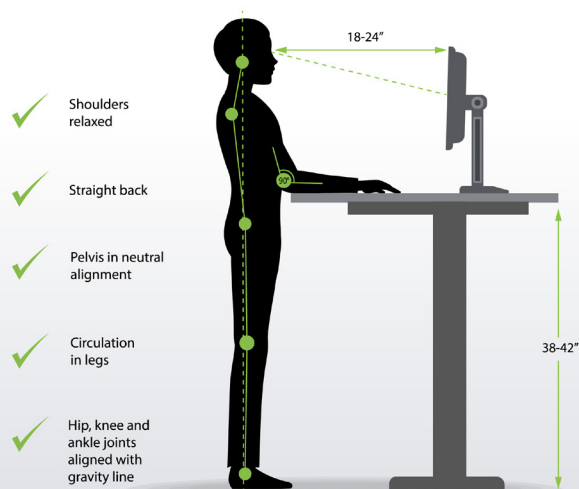
When it comes to your physical health at work, the best thing to do is stay active. Whether you prefer to work seated or standing, be purposeful about changing your position throughout the day. With the understanding that many of us will be working at a computer, here are a few critical things to keep in mind:

Allow for movement and stretching: If available, use a sit-to-stand desk. Get up and walk around during phone calls and aim to stand for at least 15 minutes every hour. Critical to all of this is to be mindful of your efforts – start your day with intentions, and set reminders so you follow through.

CORRECT SITTING POSTURE



CORRECT STANDING POSTURE



Previous: Be purposeful about introducing nature into your space. Views to the outdoors, natural daylight patterns, and house plants are simple ways to introduce biophilic elements into your home office.

Above: Correct sitting and standing postures. Images © RDG Planning & Design office.

Minimize contact stress: Avoid resting your wrists on the sharp edge of a desk or sitting without enough room for your knees and legs to rest comfortably.

Provide adequate lighting: Avoid eye fatigue by situating yourself in adequately lit spaces that limit the glare on monitors.

Pay attention to your posture: Over the past two decades, technology has drastically changed our work postures; one study even found that as many as [nine new posture variabilities](#) have emerged since smaller, touch-based phones and tablets became ubiquitous in our lives. Posture plays a critical role in our physical well-being, so it's critical to choose environments that offer both variety and support. As much as possible, maintain a neutral posture. If you're in a seated position, this means working in the "Handshake Zone," with your shoulders down and your arms parallel with your thighs.

Additional ergonomic considerations that help with positive physical well-being include:

Your chair: Ensure proper back support. Adjust the height so your feet rest flat on the floor and your thighs are parallel to the floor. Many find that a footrest can help to achieve this posture. Adjust your chair's armrests so your forearms can rest on them with your shoulders relaxed.

Your desk: Consider using a foam pad at the edge of your desk surface to keep wrists up and maintain circulation.

Your tools: Place necessary resources within an arm's reach. This might include your phone, a printer, task light, fan, etc. If you use the phone frequently, invest in a headset to avoid cradling the phone between your ear and shoulder. Keep your keyboard and mouse on the same surface. While typing or using your mouse, your wrists should be straight, and your arms should be close to the body and parallel to your thighs. Keep shoulders down. Place your monitor directly in front of you, about an arm's length away. Keep the top of the screen at eye level.

In this period of physical distancing, we still need to do all we can to care for our health and well-being. Many of the same rules that applied to wellness in the workplace can easily be applied to our home offices. By focusing on our cognitive, emotional, and physical well-being through proactive home office design, we can prevent one fewer element of uncertainty from happening amid these uncertain times.



Collin R. Barnes, IIDA, LEED AP ID+C

Barnes is a partner at RDG Planning & Design and is based out of the firm's Des Moines, Iowa office. A leader within RDG's corporate focus market, she brings exceptional design ability and acute analytical skills to work across the region.

A shift in education and practice

Our buildings are more than just a backdrop to our personal and civic life. They are key players shaping spaces and are actively involved in animating our daily experiences. Unfortunately, many of these spaces have histories rooted in oppression and racism and have become unwelcoming and unsafe for many in the Black community. As architects, we have continued to operate in the systems that produce these spaces by perpetuating a pedagogy and curriculum in our schools that's inherently exclusionary and by carrying those practices into our offices. If we truly aim to bring equity and not just diversity to our profession, we need to start at the beginning.

On Campus:

We have to take a long, serious look at whose history is being taught.

Not acknowledging or omitting the histories of Black people and other underrepresented groups makes our institutions complicit in the erasure of those histories. We rob our students of a chance to study and understand all the forces and cultures that have shaped our built environment. We cripple them by providing only one lens through which to view their increasingly complex world. Even worse, we reinforce bias. The old saying "if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail" rings true here. If the only tools our students have come from a system steeped in colonization, oppression, and racism, how can we expect them to create spaces of equity and liberation?

We have to be more collaborative.

The spaces we create can have significant social, economic, and political implications. Students should be looking across campus to other disciplines throughout their design process. The discussions happening outside of the architecture building will influence their work in the future. Conversely, we should open our spaces to these other disciplines. This should be built into the curriculum and not merely an elective or alternate track of study.

In the Office:

We have to be deliberate about hiring Black employees.

Being deliberate about a thing means you put yourself in the best position to do that thing. How does a firm position itself to hire more Black employees? Go to where the Black applicants are. When was the last time your firm participated in a job fair at a historically Black college or university or gave an office tour to a local NOMAS or NOMA chapter? Of course, a diverse staff isn't about having politically correct photos for your marketing material. It's about having diverse perspectives and a depth of experiences that lead to fewer blind spots on the design team and a more responsive design at the end of the project.

We have to put the community at the center of our process.

Truly putting the community in the center means sometimes we just show up and listen. We go to a community meeting not to present anything, but to listen. Community-centered design places the needs of a community at the center of the design process by giving its members the opportunity to provide solutions to their problems. We think we do this when we show up to present a project, then take questions at the end, but all we're doing is reporting. When we show up as a listener/observer (and not as a salesperson), we can get a fuller understanding of the community and perhaps build meaningful relationships.

Recent events have caused us to look with a critical eye at the lived experiences of Black people in all walks of life. Some have been in this fight for decades. Some are new to the ranks. All are welcome. The architecture profession isn't exempt from the biases and racism that have created the inequity in our society. The systems that created these inequities were deliberate in their construction, and our actions to dismantle them have to be just as deliberate. If we address how we educate aspiring architects and commit ourselves to growing diverse, community-centered practices, we're on the path to shaping more equitable communities and a more representative profession.



Anna McCorvey, RA, LEED AP BD+C

McCorvey is a licensed architect in Washington, D.C. She is the Executive Director of the River East Design Center and is a project architect at Cox Graae & Spack Architects. She has a passion for affordable housing and community-centered design.

Decentralized firms

Towards an unconventional model of architectural practice.



Peter S. Macrae, AIA

Macrae has 43 years of experience in the architectural profession and is licensed as an architect in 38 states. He is Principal of Macrae ARCHitecture, LLC and Peter's focus is on the acquisition and design of strategically planned, environmentally branded design projects. Peter's projects have won numerous national design awards and have been published in a variety of trade publications. He is also a favored speaker at national seminars and conferences.

Peter currently serves on several non-profit boards, serves as Chair of the Advisory Group for the AIA Practice Management Knowledge Community (AIA PMKC) and also serves on the Ohio Department of Education's curriculum evaluation board. He was recently published in multiple industry trade journals for having created a national, full service, Virtual Architectural Practice Model and in 2020 introduced the model globally on the AEC Leadership Today podcast. Peter was selected as a presenter on the subject at the 2020 AIA National Convention in Los Angeles, the 2019 AIA National Convention in Las Vegas, at the 2019 AIA Ohio Valley Region Convention in Cincinnati, Ohio, and in a 2018 webinar jointly produced by the AIA PMKC and AIA Trust (now an AIAU online CE course). Peter also taught Environmental Branding at The Ohio State University in the Knowlton School of Architecture.

As we are headed towards the end of 2020, It is clear that this year has been detrimental to the form and the future of the architectural practice. When the COVID-19 Pandemic did hit our cities earlier. Many architects and business owners were searching for a quick solution to keep their businesses functioning while reducing the risks on their profitability and the overall morale within their firms.

In early June, our Strategic Vision committee members were questioning the possibility of a decentralized firm as an alternative to a monolithic one. During that debate, the name of Peter Macrae was mentioned and his story immediately triggered the curiosity of other committee members. Being able to start a fully virtual office a decade before this pandemic, Macrae ARCHitecture exhibits a firm with innovation built into its roots.

I'm so fortunate to be able to talk to Peter for this short interview and I hope the readers will be inspired by his story, his vision, and his personal and leadership traits.

Tay Othman (TO): As an entrepreneur, what is the philosophy that helps you overcome the unexpected and redefine what's common in the profession?

Peter Macrae (PM): I call it the "pivot." I set goals. If presented with an obstacle, I stay focused upon the objective, assess the attributes of the new situation, design the path forward, pivot and achieve beyond my original expectations!

TO: What inspired you to start this endeavor, how did you feel encouraged to do so?

PM: My career path was relatively traditional for 30 plus years. That all changed in 2011 when I started my own practice, I parted ways with my previous company, where I had served as President and Partner, after it was ravaged by the Great Recession. My goal was to start a firm without any seed cash. I thought it possible to have a full-service, national architecture practice with zero fixed overhead. No rent. No equipment. No payroll. Just a laptop with everything located in the cloud. And it has worked like a charm. So, after the Great Recession, I had a thought: "if necessity is the mother of invention, this model may just be it's offspring."

TO: Can you tell us how you structured your business?

PM: My business is an architectural practice that is established as a single member LLC – (which the federal tax forms now place in the same category as a sole practitioner)

TO: Outside architecture, what are your hobbies? And how do you maintain your daily energy flow to lead this organization?

PM: I serve on several non-profit boards. I am a member of the Socrates Café, a philosophy discussion group. I am a member of the Columbus Futurists, a group that brainstorms on the evolution of our culture and the role of science and technology. My energy flows because “I just don’t work that hard.”

TO: How did this entrepreneurial mindset help you as a student and young architect?

PM: This mindset can be explained by the following life milestones:

1971

Goal: Architecture school

Barrier: Drafted with no available college deferment

Pivot: Enlisted in Coast Guard Reserve and enrolled back in college the following year. I learned that merchant marine ships take passengers.

1974

Goal: Study abroad

Barrier: Unaffordable

Pivot: Hitchhiked on an Italian freighter (in lieu of school sponsored group travel)

1976

Goal: Thesis project

Barrier: Overtures to Airstream failed

Pivot: Iconic rural schoolhouse and 1800s barn addition/renovation to 2,500 square foot home (in lieu of traditional in-school graduate thesis project)

1979

Goal: Initiate architectural career

Barrier: Offered partnership opportunity

Pivot: Began a design/build company for earth sheltered homes (prior to employment in first architecture firm)

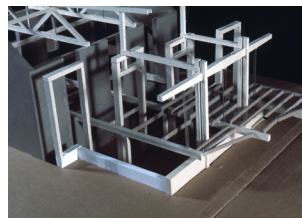
TO: What parts of the architectural process attract you the most?

PM: I enjoy understanding the big picture and acting as the puppeteer. I especially enjoy sharing in and augmenting the vision of clients by empowering them as co-designers of their projects.

1974



1976





TO: Returning back to your virtual practice, how do you see work flexibility as a perk for your teams?

PM: The biggest benefit by far is the freedom offered by the model. My collaborators enjoy a healthy, self-directed work-life balance, as do I. Soon after establishing the practice, I experimented to see if I could successfully run my virtual practice remotely. My wife and I decided that our 60s were going to be our “travel decade” and we tested the idea by traveling the globe. My wife allowed me to periodically tap into readily available Wi-Fi, often while vacationing in far-off locales like Cambodia or Peru. I never told anybody we were going and no client, collaborator or consultant ever noticed that we were gone.

This year we gave the model its ultimate test by spending the entire month of January in New Zealand. While there, I responded to inquiries for new work, submitted proposals and executed agreements to secure projects. I was even able to kick them off successfully. While in the Southern Hemisphere, I was also digitally signing and sealing the permit sets of other projects using newly available, third party verified software (which I now believe is the permit submission mode of the future). And thus, the big test worked beautifully. I now know that I can successfully manage the company from anywhere in the world.

TO: For the projects that are carried out by your firm, are you the architect of record? How do you navigate through contracts and form your agreements between your teams and your clients?

PM: I am the Architect of Record for our projects. I am licensed in 38 states and at any given time we have ongoing work in as many as 30. I have my own agreements and update them regularly just as AIA documents are updated and per suggestions from my errors and omissions insurance underwriter. My teams are made up of contracted collaborators

who are engaged as specialists and not assigned just because they are on the payroll. Clients benefit from skilled talent working flexible hours who possess abilities required for the task at hand and thus are “role-fulfillment experts.”

TO: How do you manage intellectual property when it comes to completed or published projects?

PM: I’m not freakish about it, nothing would be a greater honor to me than to see a fellow architect take my ideas and use them in a better way. I do not give out my CAD files. However, if portions of my design and detailing get “sampled” and appear in the work of others, I am flattered.

]

TO: Obviously as a seasoned architect who practiced architecture for decades, how do you transfer your mentorship role from in-person consultation to the virtual world? How do you keep your teams engaged

PM: I have not only encouraged and required my contracted collaborators to form their own firms, I have helped to mentor them to do so. In 2015, NCARB called my virtual architectural practice model “an incubator of solopreneurs.”

TO: What if one of your smaller teams was able to expand, obtain and maintain a consistent client relationship through its own business development initiatives?

PM: Great for them. I never ask my contracted collaborators who else they are working for. Why? Because it is none of my business.”

TO: How do you plan ownership or leadership transition within your business? And how do you cultivate the feelings of ownership within your teams?

PM: My virtual architectural practice is not about “legacy” or having a large market valuation formulated for a future sale.



The profits have been enjoyed and invested all along the way. My collaborators have learned to keep their individual firms profitable, using the same techniques that I use and I am confident that they will be successful long after my firm ceases to exist.

So “when it’s over, it’s over.”

TO: How can the AIA and the Young Architects Forum support you and support your fellow entrepreneurs who are defining the future of architectural practice?

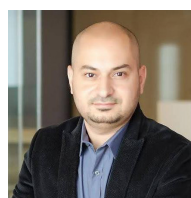
PM: Spread the word and encourage entrepreneurship within the profession.

Look, I don’t believe that the virtual architectural practice model is the only way that we will manage the business of architecture in the future there will be many new and creative methodologies developed.

And, that’s the point – your practice is a design problem. I would say to other interested practitioners: remember “out of crisis comes opportunity.” Study the projected social changes likely to result once the new normal arrives then create your response and JUMP!

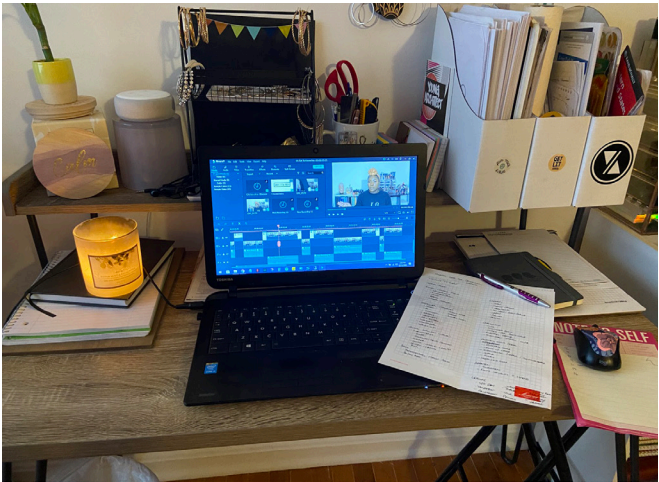
“Your practice is a design problem. I would say to other interested practitioners: remember out of crisis comes opportunity. Study the projected social changes likely to result once the new normal arrives then create your response and JUMP!”

Left: Hero USA Boathouse, Columbus, Ohio.
Above: Worthington Jewellers, Worthington, Ohio.



Tay Othman, AIA

Othman is an architect at DES Architects + Engineers in the San Francisco Bay Area. Tay is currently serving as the Young Architect Regional Director for Northern California.



The voice of the next generation

Designing success in content creation

Once limited to a collection of articles in paper periodicals, knowledge sharing in architecture is now a virtual plethora of individually crafted voices produced by architecture professionals themselves. The advancement of technology has made digitally created communication accessible to the masses, paving the way for people like you and me to find their voice, curate their message, home in on their passion, and support the profession.

The avenues of digital communication are widespread, catering to the readers, listeners, and watchers —podcasts for the listeners, vodcasts (video podcasts) for the listener-watchers, blogs for the readers, vlogs (video blogs) for the

reader-watcher-listeners. Platforms are the programs used by the content creators — Instagram for the visual and brief narratives, Facebook for group collaboration and forums, YouTube for presenting and learning, Twitter for quick text bites and link sharing, Pinterest for visual presentations and link-backs to post of origin, LinkedIn for brief professional articles, and websites for background info and hosting. These are just a few of the main platforms in use right now.

We gathered a few incredible content creators to share in their own words a bit about themselves, what they create, and how they create it.



Feyi Quadri is an architectural and interior designer in Maryland and an ARE candidate. She is a content creator on YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and Pinterest. Her platforms of choice are Instagram and YouTube. She says, “I love how interactive Instagram is and how creative I can be with editing on both YouTube and Instagram.”

How, why, and when did Feyi get started creating content?

In her words, “I always wanted to create content since I was an undergrad, but I didn’t know how to approach it. I started to think about what content I would have wanted to see when I started school four years ago and I realized that was the gap I wanted to address. I want to make architecture more accessible to Black women, especially because there are only about 500 licensed Black female architects living in the U.S. I want to be a face that people see while helping make the field more diverse in thinking and in culture. I started planning content in August when I was laid off from my job and published my first video then.”

Feyi’s tips:

- You can get started with Instagram by documenting your process and life.
- Make sure that you use the methods and platforms that you’re most comfortable with.
- Video and blogging are great ways to help communicate your ideas and make you a better professional.
- Show your personality! Don’t force yourself to have a bubbly personality if you are soft spoken, don’t go out of your way planning trips if you are a homebody. Your audience will enjoy your authentic self.
- There is space for you in content creation. Create your lane and inspire people with your voice. It can be intimidating at first, but keep at it.

You can find Feyi here:

YouTube: youtube.com/c/heyitsfeyi

Instagram: instagram.com/hey.its.feyi/

Twitter: twitter.com/heyitsfeyi

Pinterest: pinterest.com/heyitsfeyi/



Emma Greenberg is a licensed architect in NYC. For the past six years she has been working at small firms on all stages of design on residential, commercial, and retail projects. She recently launched her own firm, Emma Greenberg Architect, to both support other architects on their projects and work on architectural and interior residential projects of her own.

When asked about her favorite platforms, she responded, “As a visual medium, I prefer video because you are able to see my guests and I interacting during a conversation. It has been an awesome way to connect with and learn from leaders and content creators doing amazing things in the architectural field.”

How, why, and when did Emma start creating content?

"I started creating content in September 2019. I had finished my last licensing exam after five years of studying. Along [with] feeling accomplished and energized, I really craved being creative after focusing so intensely on this one goal. I created an Instagram account to share tips on how to organize and design your home. I post twice a week for inspiration and also to give tips.

“I wanted to collaborate when creating content, like we do with architectural projects. I reached out to another content creator, Christiana Copper. I interviewed her on topics that overlapped with my focus on organization. From there I continued

interviewing other architects and professionals and hosted the interviews on YouTube. Also, during the pandemic, I began holding weekly livestreams on topics such as art, organization, and design. I am so happy that I've found ways to express my interest in the details and materiality of architecture, and connect with others to expand my horizons through content creation."

Greenberg described how her content has helped her to meet other inspiring architects and to be a better listener. “For example, I spoke with Graciela Carrillo who has held many leadership positions with the AIA. Throughout her interview she describes her journey obtaining her license, citizenship, and becoming a leader as a shy person in a way so that others can learn from her experiences. I find it uplifting to connect with these people serving as leaders and mentors and share their stories.”

Emma's tips:

- Whatever you pick, stick to one format starting out and make a commitment to be consistent, whatever that is for you. By being consistent, you gain credibility, and a sense of community because people look out for your content.
- It becomes even harder if you don't feel like you're following your feelings and values so I really only put things out there that I feel comfortable with.

You can find Emma's platforms at

Instagram: [instagram.com/emmasarchitecture](https://www.instagram.com/emmasarchitecture)

YouTube: [Emma Talks Architecture](#)



Joann Lui is a licensed architect in New York State. She works as an Associate Architect at Gensler and serves as a Process Design Leader within her studio, creating efficient process workflows for colleagues and hosting best practices training for BIM. Joann is the founder of the Women Architects Collective — a Facebook group community of over 2,700

women building careers they love. In her spare time, she helps architects build their personal brands so they can make their voices heard.

How, why, and when did Joann start creating content?

Joann started writing a blog called “Just an Intern” on Archinect after graduating from the New Jersey Institute of Technology and beginning her first job. “I needed an outlet outside of work to keep my creativity going and share my journey with other people who might have struggled as I did when coming into the architecture industry.” After a few years, she noticed the challenges that women architects faced in the profession. Joann was inspired to create content for women architects who want to take control of their careers or business and make their voices heard. “In 2018, I launched the Women Architects Collective (WAC) as a Facebook group for female

architects to support each other. At the beginning of the pandemic, I decided to double down on my work and passion for mentoring others by coaching other architects on how to build their personal brand to create a career that they love.”

Joann's tips:

- Start small and be focused! It can be overwhelming to jump into the online world of content creation, so my advice would be to pick a platform for short-form content and one for long-form content.
- Your target audience will have different preferences for where they consume content, so it's important to meet them where they are.
- If you're a shy introvert like me, putting yourself out there can be intimidating. But once you do it, the results can be very rewarding, especially since you are also showing up for others by sharing your knowledge and helpful insights or resources. Let your mission be bigger than your fear!

You can find Joann here:

Instagram: [instagram.com/joannlui](https://www.instagram.com/joannlui)

Website: joannlui.com

LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/in/joannlui/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/joannlui/)



David Stumpf is a licensed architect, registered in North Dakota, Pennsylvania, and Texas, and NCARB certified. At the beginning of the pandemic he was one of the many architects that was laid off from a large corporate firm. He went into business for himself almost immediately, moving from Dallas to his hometown of Pittsburgh to be close to family. He is

now the principal of David Stumpf Architecture.

David's platform of choice is YouTube, but he and his brother also use Facebook and Instagram to help drive traffic to YouTube. "We focus mostly on YouTube because we enjoy the creative process of filming and editing videos, and we feel that you just don't get that same level of creative expression in a medium such as Instagram."

David has two YouTube channels. The first is called [The Brothers Workshop](#), a multimedia collaboration between identical twin brothers that focuses on their interests of architecture, construction, skateboarding, vehicles (mostly pickup trucks), woodworking, and furniture building. The second YouTube channel is focused on his business and personal brand. David says, "I have a few videos posted here related to architecture, and my unique take on the practice. I hope to add more in the future as I get more comfortable filming client projects, and as my workflow gets quicker." David has a [business/personal brand channel](#) on YouTube. He also has a [firm website](#) for David Stumpf Architecture.

How, why, and when did David start creating content?

"We got started back in 2015, with the goal of building a channel around our interests of filmmaking and furniture construction. My brother was a film major in college, and due to his career trajectory he lost that creative outlet. I was a teaching assistant in graduate school, and taught furniture design and construction at the University of Texas at San Antonio. I was still building all of my own furniture, and Sean and I decided to start shooting how-to videos that people could find helpful and enjoyable."

David's tips:

- This may also sound cliché, but the simplest thing to do is just start filming and creating content. You don't need any fancy equipment, and don't worry about feeling weird about it.
- Stay consistent, and upload often, but not too often. We see dips in our viewership analytics of The Brothers Workshop if we don't stay consistent and upload videos at least once a week.
- It can be hard, but try not to over think the videos and put too much time into them if you are having a busy week. Remember you have a life outside of content creation too.
- You'll be growing from 0 subscribers and 0 views, so if you mess up or feel you look funny don't worry! You'll have that to review and build off of for the next video. It's kind of like how athletes watch game tape to see what they did and how they can do it better in the future.



Adam Denais, AIA, is an Architect at JHP Architecture / Urban Design in Dallas. Adam founded the Facebook group [The NEXT Architect](#). The NEXT Architect community extends to a new website for blogging and virtual events at [theNEXTarchitect.com](#)

When asked which platform Adam prefers, he answers, "I communicate mostly through the NEXT Architects Facebook Group I founded. Starting in 2020, after being isolated working from home, I started using Zoom to create highly engaging career development events because I was missing out on going to in-person events in my area."

How, why, and when did Adam start creating content?

His content creation journey began back in 2015 with a simple blog and a dream of helping students and the NEXT generation of architects build their career development in a way that would leave them feeling fulfilled in their career. "When I pivoted to focusing on building the NEXT Architect Facebook group, I focused on stirring up conversations no one was talking about on toxic work environments, burnout culture, work-life balance, and ridiculously low compensation. What made my

voice unique was that I don't like to talk about architecture, but the people in architecture! What drives me each and every day is that I believe we must share our voice and push back on the idea that we have to settle for firms littered with unhealthy ideals. That's why I do what I do."

Adam's tips on building a Facebook group:

- First of all, as with any type of content creation, community building takes time.
- Also, you can't just post conversation starters and call it a day, the brunt of the work in building community is taking the time to build relationships with your members.
- I like to believe that my transparency about my mental health and career situations helps to show others they can be vulnerable as well. When people jump into commenting on posts they share vulnerability and know that they will receive encouragement and support.
- Staying anonymous and building a community generally don't go hand in hand.
- YOU decide how much you want to keep your life private! Each person is different in what they are comfortable sharing so don't think you have to share everything - though you will need to open up a bit to be able to build authentic relationships.



Mark R. LePage, AIA, NCARB, is an architect and content creator in Charlotte, North Carolina. He is the founder of EntreArchitect, the online resource for entrepreneur architects. He is the Co-Founder and CEO of Gâbl Media, Inc., a collaboration of architecture profession focused podcasts, and is the President of the architecture firm McCarthy

LePage Architects, PLLC. Mark's platform of choice is [The EntreArchitect Community](#), a private group on Facebook.

How, why, and when did Mark begin creating content?

LePage began creating content by launching a website for his residential firm, Fivecat Studio in 1998. "Since it was one of the first architect's websites in Westchester County, NY, we literally built our early client base through simple local SEO, leading potential clients to our website through organic search results. It was much easier when we were the only result from the search engines."

He launched a blog for the firm, Living Well in Westchester, in 2006 and a personal blog, Entrepreneur Architect, in 2007. "Since I was managing the business side of the partnership (my architect wife is my partner and the design side), the blog was filled with information for how to build a successful business. That blog very quickly found an audience of other small firm architects seeking information on business. At the time there was very little information anywhere for architects to learn

about business. On the internet there was virtually none."

That audience grew into what today we call The EntreArchitect Community, a community that encouraged and inspired LePage to launch something

"If we don't come together as a community, share our knowledge and work to become the leaders of innovative thinking for the built environment, we will be replaced."

bigger than the personal blog. "On December 12, 2012, at 12:12 PM, I launched EntreArchitect.com and EntreArchitect Podcast. I called it my 12-12-12 Project. I launched EntreArchitect to be something much bigger than me from the very beginning. It has since become the global platform for

small firm architects to learn what they need to know about business, leadership and living a purpose-filled, integrated life."

In January of 2020 LePage partnered with Dimitrius Lynch (founder of SPACES Podcast), to launch Gâbl Media. Pronounced "gable," Gâbl Media is the largest and most engaged AEC multimedia network on the planet.

"I believe sharing our knowledge is the most important thing we can do to grow our profession. The times of hoarding our "secrets for success" must be relegated to our past as a profession. The more we collaborate and share what we know, in a positive, supportive, growth mindset, the stronger our profession will become."

"If we fail to share, if we fail to grow and innovate, the profession will become obsolete. There are many other professionals, other industries and technologies being developed today to replace us. If we don't come together as a community, share our knowledge and work to become the leaders of innovative thinking for the built environment, we will be replaced. I know that is a frightening thought, but I am an optimist. I believe we are moving in the right direction and I have confidence that this and future generations of architects will be entrepreneur architects focused on leading the way for our world."

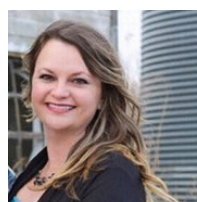
Mark's tips:

- To get started, pick one platform and start. Just start.
- It doesn't really matter which platform you use. What matters is that you are actively sharing your knowledge with the world, and working to make the world a better, more positive place.
- Be kind. My simple rules for life are (1) Love, (2) Learn, and (3) Share. Follow those 3 rules and you can't go wrong. Care for one another. Learn everything you can. Then share it with everyone you know.

You can find Mark's platforms here:

EntreArchitect: entrearchitect.com

Gâbl Media: gablmmedia.com



Mandy Freeland, AIA

Freeland is founder of Mandy Freeland Architect, Inc. She is the Young Architect Regional Director for Southern California and serves on the AIA Golden Empire board as secretary.

Practice innovators

Igniting innovation across the nation

Practice Innovators describes a diverse set of individuals who have diverted from the expected path of architectural practice, actively exploring uncharted waters or retracing apprenticeship practice from the not so distant past. Across the nation, young architects and professionally trained architectural designers break the mold in their core business or as a side venture. Each professional exhibits energy and passion for their unique path.

Innovators **enrich their community** through a side business or non-profit.

JAMB Collective

co-founded by **Christian Jordan, AIA**, aims to build a network of resources for small to medium firms. JAMB provides a platform for small voices to collectively bargain with providers with the weight of a larger firm.

Outside the Box

co-founded by **Tiersa Wodash, AIA**, creates an opportunity for middle school students to learn about the design process from architects, carpenters, lighting and set designers, and local artists. The resources and take home kits spark creatively and engage underserved individuals with off-screen activities.

***“Act big,
stay small,
do good.”***

— Christian Jordan, AIA

Innovators **redefine the scope of professional architectural services** with new business models and clear branding:

Building Science Fight Club

founded by **Christine Williamson, Assoc. AIA**, provides eye-candy on Instagram to detail hungry architects and education in building envelope science informed by her professional consulting practice.

EVIA Studio

founded by **Leah Alissa Bayer, AIA**, a fully virtual team provides custom residential architecture using technology and high-performance design that responds to the environment and creates a living and livable piece of art.

Ossa Studio

founded by **Jack Ossa, AIA** who also started the podcast “Power of Design” to compliment Ossa Studio’s three professional offerings: corporate and interior architectural services, brand design, and brand strategy consulting.

Innovators **build upon social interests** – fabricating and serving communities.

Sav’Ayn

founded by **Trayvone Mathis**, a designer and contractor, offers products and services that enhance community and living standards by encouraging urban food solutions, like a backyard greenhouse shed.

General Office

founded by **Andrew Seiger, AIA**, has a three-prong approach to our work: working with visionary clients; partnering with organizations for positive change (The Ecology Center); and pursuing self-started real-estate development.

Innovations can be as big as build a branding empire or as small as communicating a clear flashing detail. The conviction and energy of each professional inspires individuals to test personal visions for making a little piece of the world a better place to live, love, and practice architecture.



Christian Jordan, AIA

Adj. Professor | Jefferson University's College of A+BE
Principal | PJA Architecture
Co-Founder | JAMB Collective

Christian Jordan, AIA, is principal of PJA Architecture, a small architecture practice in Philadelphia, that builds upon the legacy started by his father in 1993 (Phillip Jordan Architects). He has been business partners with his father since 2012. Christian co-founded the JAMB Collective in 2017 in order to help small and mid-size architecture firms "Act big. Stay small. Do good." Since 2006, he has been an adjunct professor at

Christian's passion is working with people, spreading the word about architects and emerging professionals.

his alma mater, Thomas Jefferson University, where he is currently teaching 5th year undergraduate students the ins and outs of building

and running a firm. In 2017, Christian was awarded AIA Pennsylvania's Emerging Professional award. In 2020, he was inducted into the Carpenter's Company of Philadelphia, becoming member 949 in the Company's 300-year history. He is passionate about paying it forward within the profession and especially enjoys conversations surrounding the future of the practice and technology.

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How are you practicing beyond the traditional boundaries of architecture?

My role in PJA Architecture is fairly traditional. I partnered with my dad and had to either do what he did only 25 years behind — or compliment his skills. I went into business development, talent retention, marketing, client relations, and building the legacy of my dad's firm. Business development is a different shift from what we learn to do in school. Sometimes 'profit' and 'money' sound like bad words to millennials but they are necessary for a functioning business.

My work with JAMB Collective is trying to break down barriers to entry into projects, innovative software, and technology for small and medium firms. Did you know 52% of billings currently go to 6% of architecture firms? Our JAMB team wants to help small and medium firms be flexible and intuitive and learn to scale their problem solving beyond architectural practice.

What problem prompted you to pursue this innovation?

JAMB Collective started by trying to solve the Practice Innovation Lab (PIL) 2017 prompt from Susan Chin. She noticed our team was talking in circles. (The more you have to talk, the less you know about your solution. The drawings and concepts should speak for themselves.) We needed a punchy objective and dove into a subscription model. After that, things fell into place. We asked 'what does subscription look like? What would architects want out of a monthly membership? We checked the numbers - 48% of firms in the United States have 49 or fewer people. We decided to provide access so firms could partner and solve problems together and borrow from each other's expertise. We knew we had to create a space that was comfortable enough to share that information.

JAMB isn't for firms who just do it their own way. Members need to check their ego at the door. We want firms to easily make connections with each other as specialists and share professional services.

What was your first step towards that goal?

Understand what you know and couple it with what you don't know. You may find a need to innovate. Ask "what do I do well?" It can be professional or personal, individually or as a firm. In that gap you may find the seeds for innovation! I believe all innovation solves a need. Big or small, the innovative solution may already exist. If it does — pull it into your workflow but also build on top of it to make it your own!

What inspires you to innovate?

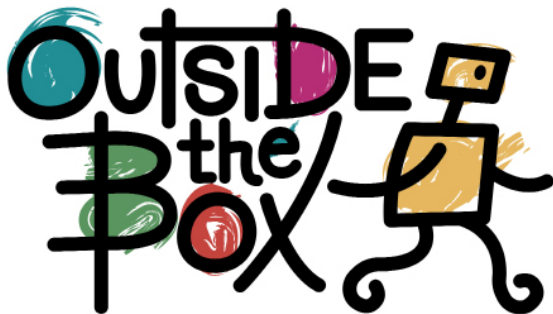
You never want to be the smartest person in the room because real growth only comes when you are tasked with something that you haven't encountered before. Every year I commit to doing one challenging thing — like the 2017 PIL. It forces you to draw on past experience and put your background in problem solving into practice while surrounded by people of different backgrounds — all going after a goal. It takes a leap of faith and gets me out of my comfort zone.



Tiersa Wodash, AIA

Owner, Architect | Brick & Mortar LLC
Co-Founder | Outside the Box, educational initiative

Tiersa is exploring her limited beliefs of what an architect does.



***I want to play more,
be present more.
I have my toddler to
thank for being my
best teacher.***

How are you practicing beyond the traditional boundaries of architecture?

By far the biggest and most fun diversion is Outside the Box. What started as casual conversations between a mentor and mentee flourished in an educational program focused on meeting kids where they are and providing opportunities for creative problem solving and understanding the built environment that surrounds them.

In response to the pandemic I created a DIY toolkit for small businesses to creatively process their operational systems and physical spaces for reopening to the public. I created an online resource hub of pandemic related links for businesses to find the help they need quickly. I also provided consultation and drawing services to local businesses at a reduced rate to assist them in their adaptation.

As we know, hard financial times trends construction toward renovation versus building new. This has led to more consultation on storefronts, signage, and other smaller building improvements. Since setting out on my own, I've also been led to new fun non-traditional clients. For instance I'm modeling and drafting for a client who designed and constructed a tent/cabin structure in the Northwoods to be sold as a buildable kit. I'm assisting them in the creation of a build manual for the kits.

What problem prompted you to pursue this innovation?

OTB was conceived through discussions about the lack of diversity in the design and building trades. The Adaptation Toolkit was a recognition that businesses needed support and were feeling overwhelmed. I could see creative ways to approach the problem and I wanted to share tools of the trade for others who don't intuitively think in systems.

What was your first step towards that goal?

In terms of OTB, Rachel and I started talking with folks that we considered stakeholders in what we were trying to achieve, to better understand the need. We spent a year in the process of defining what the program wanted 'to be'. For the toolkit, I started collecting all the information I wanted to share in the toolkit. For instance, I created the resource hub of links for myself and figured out quickly it needed to be shared.

What inspires you to innovate?

I recognize that my creativity thrives in the moments of not-doing. I'm trying to unlearn years of conditioning of what it means to be a successful responsible adult and fit into our social constructs. Instead I want to play more, be present more. I have my toddler to thank for being my best teacher.

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Christine Williamson, Assoc. AIA

Consultant | Christine Williamson Consulting
 Founder | Building Science Fight Club

During architecture school I became interested in building science while working for a terrific architect in New York City who focused on energy efficient design. Building science and construction provide us with an unbelievably helpful framework for understanding risk and performance in design, which, in turn, helps us make the best use of the resources on any given project. While building science is only a small part of architecture, it's no different than other aspects in design in that it's all about being creative with what we've got. In design we always have constraints! Building science and construction are tools to help us deal more creatively (and often more confidently) with those constraints so that our projects aren't just beautiful, but also beautifully functional, beautifully comfortable, and beautifully durable.



Apart from architecture and building science, Christine enjoys time with her wonderful dog, Katy.

Connect with Christine

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How are you practicing beyond the traditional boundaries of architecture?

I don't view building science and construction as being outside the traditional boundaries of architecture. That said, it's not uncommon for creative people who decide to pursue architecture as a career to also struggle with some of the more technical aspects of the profession. My goal in teaching building science to architects and architects-in-training is to show them how to use building science as another tool for creativity. It's like learning a language. You could memorize a few sentences in a foreign language before a trip abroad and communicate reasonably well on your vacation. But if you actually learn the language, you can express original thoughts and have real conversations. Knowledge of building science and construction gives architects a vocabulary and a grammar that permits ever more beautiful expressions of creativity.

What problem prompted you to pursue this innovation?

I was practicing as a building scientist and would share marked-up photos from my site visits with friends from architecture school on Instagram (this is the flashing, this is the window flange). It turns out they found that pretty helpful! I also found that I really enjoyed teaching. Later, I devoted more time to Instagram when I had to take some time away from formal employment (I am an immigrant and a change in my status meant I had to stop working for about 8 months). When I came back to work, I started my own consulting and teaching practice. I made a point to continue with Instagram because I really like it and it allows me to contribute to our profession's great history of apprenticeship. Being a sole-practitioner is great in that it lets me make decisions like this. I couldn't even imagine a big consulting firm being okay with me being on Instagram like this! And maybe it's not a good business decision, but it's pretty fun.

What was your first step towards that goal?

My forced sabbatical was really what made me invest more time in teaching on Instagram, but it became clear pretty quickly that architects and architects-in-training were really appreciative of teaching that (1) didn't demean them for not already knowing all this stuff and (2) showed them how to actually incorporate what they'd learned into their daily practice. Much of the continuing education for architects is provided by materials manufacturers. This is fine, but it's not healthy for this to be the only option, and manufacturers often don't know a whole lot about how architecture is actually practiced. I came to believe that architects investing in their own continuing education would be a pretty good business model for me.

What inspires you to innovate?

Architecture has a long history of apprenticeship. I've just found a new way of contributing to and participating in it, and enjoying and celebrating it!



Leah Alissa Bayer, AIA, NCARB

Founder + Managing Director | EVIA Studio

Leah Alissa Bayer, Cal Poly grad with fifteen years of experience in business management, founded EVIA Studio in 2018. It is an award-winning, 100% women-led, 100% virtual team of diverse professionals spread across the country who are dedicated to creating exceptional restorative living spaces for everyone along the Pacific Coast. Leah is also passionate about giving back to the profession, serving as the 2021 incoming Vice President / President-elect of AIA Silicon Valley and chair for NCARB's Experience Committee.

What inspires you to innovate?

My ultimate purpose is to use my curiosity, drive, and compassion to inspire and support others to create stability, joy, and beauty for (and with) the world around us.



How are you practicing beyond the traditional boundaries of architecture?

While we're a young firm and still building our unique identity, there are a lot of aspects of EVIA Studio that were non-traditional from the start. We're a virtual firm, always have been and always will be, with no set working hours. Our team is currently all women with a wide range of ages, experience levels, and cultural backgrounds. All of the business operations, strategy, and finances as well as all project details are fully transparent to the entire team. We've declared bold values and commitments and are taking action on them with policies like donation matching for marginalized populations. Finally, we're invested in automation, new technology, and productizing our process to better serve more people with great design.

As we build up our team and client base, we're looking to further challenge conventional practice with approaches such as equal salaries for all, minimum required vacations, investing in materials and construction tech research, and developing our own work. My goal as a leader is to continually ask myself and my team what we can do differently, better, and then build systems and break down barriers so we can act quickly with impact.

What problem prompted you to pursue this innovation?

The complexity and challenges of modern lifestyles, particularly for women. I've been a member of AIA Silicon Valley's Women In Architecture Committee for years and heard story after story about architecture's broken culture; abuse, burnout, exit. I saw myself walking down a similar path towards crushing ceilings and ultimatums and wanted to build something different. A firm that would support mental, emotional, and physical health and reward well-rounded, diverse individuals. How can we expect to create healthy and vibrant architecture for our communities if we're unhealthy and diminished ourselves? The strategies we implement to overcome these issues may seem innovative, but to me they're just common sense and a necessity if we want our profession to remain relevant in the coming years.

What was your first step towards that goal?

One of the first things I did as I stepped out on my own was develop a business plan for Charrette Venture Group's Architectural Business Plan Competition. So many ideas swirling around in my mind about what this firm could be was overwhelming, but it started clicking together when written out as a cohesive, structured plan. Pitching to Art Gensler and hearing his critique, the legend when it comes to the business of architecture, was icing on the cake (and maybe a little extra fuel on the fire to prove I could do it).

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Jack Ossa AIA, NCARB, LEED AP BD+C

President | Ossa Studio

Jack Ossa founded Ossa Studio using the power of design to connect hearts and minds, solve problems, and produce positive goal oriented results. Ossa Studio is a multidisciplinary firm offering architecture, office, interiors, master planning services along with brand design and strategy services. Ossa originally grew up and studied architecture in Columbia, South America. He has worked at three firms, including Gensler. He enjoyed the work, but always dreamed of having his own firm. In 2017 he started Ossa Studio and in 2020 won the Charrette Venture Group Business Plan Competition for his firm's mission and leadership structure that encourages employees to thrive.

In the Power of Design podcast Ossa explores the intersection of architecture, real estate and construction in shaping the built environment.



How are you practicing beyond the traditional boundaries of architecture?

Everything we do is paired under a belief in the power of design. I offer three distinct services and each has a separate pricing strategy. We sell hours with our architectural services at the typical market rate. We sell design with our brand design services for graphics and website design. Ultimately we sell value with our brand strategy – where we offer consulting services for defining our client's identity and place in their market. We've developed a process and framework for facilitating this process specifically for our brand strategy clients.

What problem prompted you to pursue this innovation?

I sought to create a business that fit with my own thought process. In architectural practice, I always wondered “why aren't we thinking about the brand or messaging?” The brand of a company and it's office space are not separate. Following that logic is how I like to do things. Offering brand design and strategy also allowed us to market our full skillset and brought in an additional source of cash flow.

What was your first step towards that goal?

I started learning this strategy from books, podcasts, and my own professional practice. I thought about it for so many years and slowly developed the basics of my business structure, clients, and equipment. After that, I made the jump and created frameworks, taking complex processes and making them simple steps. Then I just started executing the simple plan because it can always be tweaked. If there is something you want to do, you should at least try.

What inspires you to innovate?

I'm inspired by seeing people do amazing things! I'm a bit competitive and when I see the designs of other architects and designers, I want to make my own professional practice that much better, and my clients are happy with the results! A happy client affirms my process and gives me confidence to push the envelope a little more.

“Communication is central to my multilingual international firm. I say what I can, but rely on images and diagrams for clarity to keep discussions straight to the point.”

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Trayvone Mathis

President, Senior Designer | Sav'Ayn

Trayvone Mathis founded Sav'Ayn on the principles of "Changing what it means to live, and be alive and providing freedom through our products and services." Mathis builds and offers products and services that enrich his clients and their surrounding communities. Growing up, he traveled a lot while his father was stationed as far as Italy and as close as Alabama. He now lives in Toledo, Ohio. He remembers seeing how people lived differently, how countries developed differently, how families were structured differently, how climates created different communities, and ultimately how people interacted with architecture differently.

How are you practicing beyond the traditional boundaries of architecture?

What are the boundaries of architecture? I feel like I'm pursuing a more natural path of architecture. At some point we divided the designer from the builder and in that, we gave up so much of the pie and control of what is built and how it is built. We've moved so far away from the streamlined natural flow and now the industry is trying to get back to that. As architects, we should be leading that charge because we are more than just designers. Clients tend to overlook our design services because they can be intangible, they would rather have the builders hire us.

There are huge obstacles to becoming an architect, so people jump off the path and become a design/build firm or a contractor, or a designer. I'm pursuing licensure to try and take back control of the architecture because no one knows more about the building than us. Clients want a one-stop shop so designers are included in the process. By starting my own construction firm, I can unify the design process and take control of the cost of construction. We can't let architects get a smaller and smaller piece of the pie until they just miss out.

"My advice is to get a crew! When I build alone a project can take one and a half months. But if just one other person helps me, we can crank out the same project in four days!"

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What problem prompted you to pursue this innovation?

Our society is out of whack. I see us living out of tune of what we need to be happy. We are living against our social needs. My firm offers products that allow people to change the way they live and improve their mental and physical health.

When studying anthropology in college, I learned we used to live a different life of five hours of work a day finding food and the rest of the time being social creatures and enjoying social life. Our current society is full of work that is isolated, and everyone in the household is working. Nothing about how we live is sustainable — from our level of consumption to our mental health.

I look to urban farming and growing relationships that remove barriers so people can live a more fulfilling life. For a short time, I lived in a communal community where life was about healthy relationships, growing urban food, communal dinners, minimal work, and they lived a fulfilled life on just \$20,000 a year.

What was your first step towards that goal?

While working for another firm, I had a client who wanted to teach urban farming to kids in an underserved neighborhood. There were no grocery stores around and it would provide a center for these children to build skills and be together. I took on the project pro-bono and kept running into people with the same problems. More project opportunities never stopped.

The shed we sell is a smaller version of the long learning center greenhouse. It's built for utility with six foot wide doors, a greenhouse roof, and all wood. I've done everything in my firm and on the job site — but when I recommend architects stay in charge of construction — I didn't mean architects should be on site building. It's stressful and usually the builder brings experience by asking questions and bringing the ability to fill in the grey areas of the drawings. You see, construction has no grey areas — you have to know and fill in all the blanks. I am tackling the challenge of finding staff and skilled labor. I don't plan to be in the field much longer, but for now, this is who we are and this is what we do.

What inspires you to innovate?

In college, I started researching 'ideal design,' the origin of design and design philosophy. The way I was taught to design seemed very one sided and isolated from the way we actually live and the way we actually are as a species. We are not solitary creatures, we can't do it alone — the biggest, baddest projects people have built in the world were a collaborative effort. I make sure my team feels they have ownership. Everyone in my company has a path to ownership — whether its hours or finances, they gain a shared interest in my LLC.

Andrew Seiger, AIA

Principal, Architect | General Office
On-Site Architect, Crafter | The Ecology Center

Andrew is a California licensed architect working at the intersection of architecture, nature, and culture in order to build more vibrant, sustainable, and successful communities.

How are you practicing beyond the traditional boundaries of architecture?

My practice has a sort of three-prong approach to our work:

1. working with visionary clients;
2. partnering with organizations for positive change;
3. pursuing self-started real-estate development

The first prong is somewhat self-explanatory, except that I really focus on working with clients that are a good fit from both a design and worldview perspective.

How I partner with organizations shows up in my work with The Ecology Center where I work in-house as an architect/designer/jack-of-all-trades. Together with the founder, Evan Marks, and the amazing group of people there, we've done everything from designing and fitting out a roaming exhibit in a double-decker bus, to fabricating store fixtures, designing new buildings at the farm, reimagining the layout and functional aspects of the farm itself, and consulting with developers in the design of master planned agrihoods. Working in-house as a consultant allows us to show a singular face to outside clients, but it leaves me open to run my practice while giving flexibility to adjust my time/cost with the nonprofit as needed.

The third prong is still in its beginning stages, but we are actively working on architect-led development projects. The idea here is to focus on smaller, infill, community-serving development projects missed by large scale developers. By partnering with property owners and leading the project, we can ensure that the design and vision that architects are known for are carried through the entire project, all while having a stake in the success of the project.

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What problem prompted you to pursue this innovation?

Working in a traditional office with a traditional client/architect relationship can be a wonderful experience, but it can also be rather narrow. I often found myself working projects serving the .1%, which really felt disconnected from my own life and the life of the people and environment around me. For me, personally, I've always wanted to use design as a means for good, and to be able to work outside of the confines of a 9-5 office environment, to be able to work with my hands from time to time. This led me to the multi-prong approach I outlined above, which creates multiple avenues to build a life and practice that can stay true to a mission, remain design-oriented, and continue to grow over time. It's not the easiest or simplest path, but it's rewarding, exciting, and full of possibility.

What was your first step towards that goal?

In 2015 I stepped out of the traditional office setting to simultaneously work for the LA-based design nonprofit LA-Más and pursue a masters at Woodbury University's architect-led Masters in Real Estate Development (MRED) program. The two experiences reinforced my belief that architects can and should proactively create their own opportunities instead of waiting for opportunities to come to them. This mindset allows us to be less beholden to responding to the needs of clients while pursuing a positive vision of the future with the full force of our passions and creativity.

What inspires you to innovate?

Much of my inspiration comes simply from the world and people around me. There's so much beauty to be found, whether in natural environments far from others, or in the many seemingly mundane details around us, or in the small interactions with others. I'm a constant observer of these things, and in a place as heavily urbanized as Southern California, I often find the most inspiration where there is the least design. We design and create places and things that start out new, but over time they change and are used and take on a life of their own beyond the intent of our design... perhaps it's what we'd call 'character'. I'm inspired to create places of character while facing our environmental challenges head-on.



Katie Kangas, AIA, NCARB

Katie is a principal architect at Pasque Architecture. As the YARD for the North Central States Region Kangas connects emerging professionals with resources to position them for success.

Practice innovation [chaos] lab

YAF strategic vision group collaborates with AIAS

Too many abnormalities have come to define the year 2020 — and the Strategic Vision Group of the YAF couldn't help but add to the calamity by changing up the Practice Innovation Lab (PIL). We craved an opportunity to rethink the PIL by collaborating with our cohorts at AIAS. When we pitched the idea, the AIAS Design & Technology Task Force agreed to join us for an experiment because ... why not? With the partnership in place, the Chaos Sessions were born!

We took a risk and planned four virtual Practice Innovation Lab sessions. We didn't know what to talk about. We didn't know who would come. We just saw things happening — design, studios, classes, and project teams all meeting virtually — and wondered, was there a more engaging way to meet with people online? How could we introduce a positive disruption among the many negative disruptions we'd experienced? We'd had enough polished webinars and seminars of people talking at us. We were looking for that "spark" of design — a unique afterburn of collaborative conversations.

With that — and with calculated anticipation — we created the Chaos Sessions as an expansion of the Practice Innovation Lab. Each PIL is unique to the time, place, and hosts. However, since they started in 2017, PILs have followed a loose framework whether they were two hours or two days. The typical schedule included inspiring speakers, team-based workshop, and team presentations of their innovative idea.

For the Chaos Sessions, we didn't have the time or budget to get a speaker, we didn't expect to have enough people for teams, and we weren't sure whether anything would be worth "presenting" when we were done. So we threw away the rule book and started a new innovation process. We began with a handful of loose goals and guidelines:

Our Goals:

- Test, brainstorm, troubleshoot virtual collaboration methods.
- "Bridge the gap" by creating an accessible and engaging platform for students and professionals to collaborate.
- Focus on experiential exploration rather than practical results.

Our Guidelines:

- Test a new virtual collaboration platform each session.
- Discuss a different aspect of innovation, architectural education, and architectural practice each session.
- Play a unique "game" each session to frame our conversations.
- Invite anyone and everyone, including friends and colleagues outside of architecture.

We set the dates and each volunteered to plan one of the discussions.

Chaos lab team:



Erin Conti, AIAS,
Associate AIA
President | AIAS



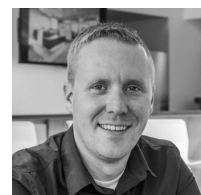
Kari Essary, AIAS
Design and
Technology Task
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Alex Geisen, AIAS
Director |
West Quadrant



Katie Kangas, AIA
Young Architect
Regional Director |
North Central
Region YAF



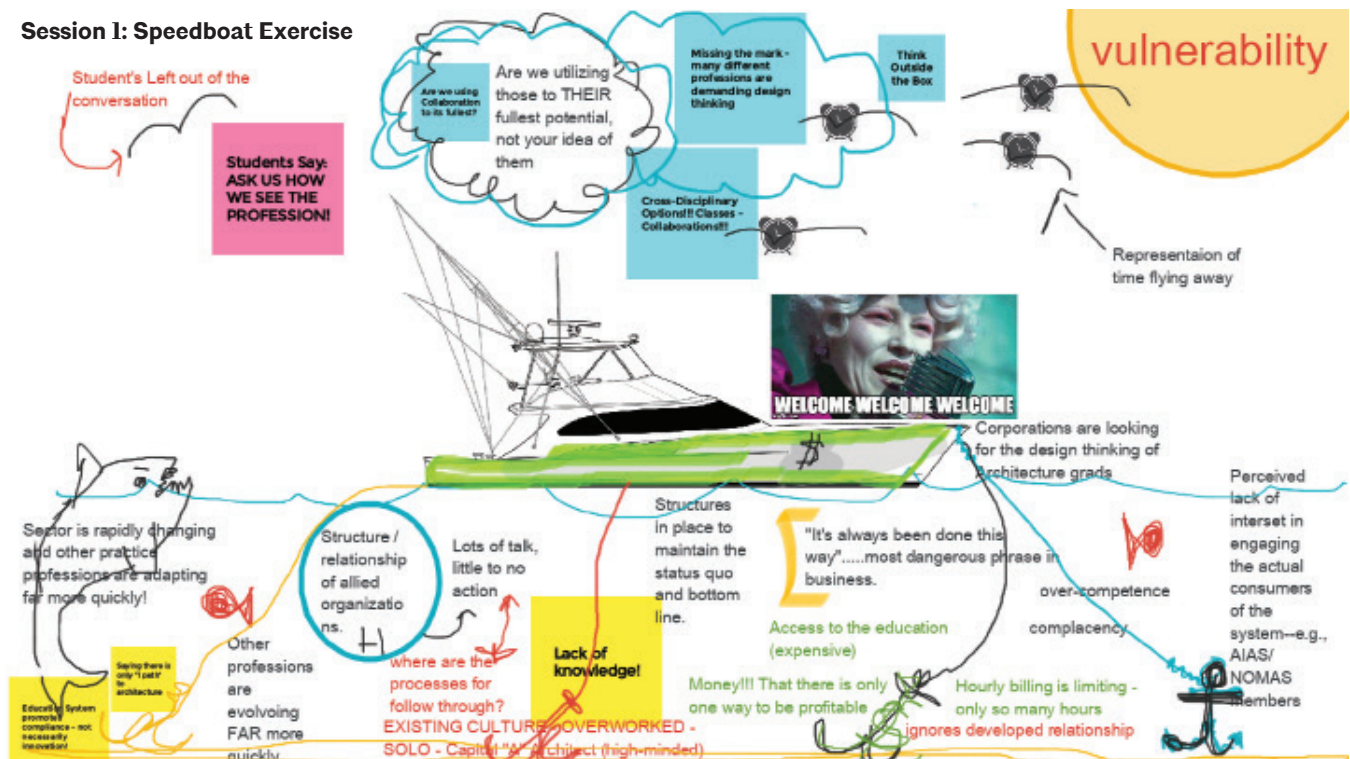
Matt Toddy, AIA
Strategic Vision
Director | YAF



For Session 1, Matt Toddy, AIA, kicked things off with a set up on Google Jamboard to introduce the concept of innovation. Toddy planned a “speedboat” exercise for groups to discuss innovation using a boat analogy. Things that moved innovation forward were “drivers,” and things that held innovation in check were “anchors.” We discussed the environment and external factors influencing innovation. The analogy helped orient participants, who included students, emerging professionals, and members of the College of Fellows, to the challenges of changing traditional practice models. At the end of the session, the group was energized to find our fellow “drivers” who advocate for a better future. We prepared to talk about those drivers as stakeholders.

The next week, Session 2 featured a stakeholder exercise. Kari Essary, AIAS, led the discussion using Mural. In breakout groups, we talked about the key actors of innovation. Who has the power to innovate? Who is affected by innovation?

Session 1: Speedboat Exercise



Who needs to be included in the conversation? We identified people we knew in school, out of school, adjacent professions, community members, clients, governing agencies, and more. The session helped us to understand whom the team consisted of, but we still didn't know where the innovation was leading us. We realized we were missing a road map.

For Session 3, we completed a few mapping exercises. Alex Geisen, AIAS, prepared a conversation for Conceptboard. We each mapped the paths that led us into architecture. Everyone had a unique story to explain their interest in our shared profession, and it became obvious that professional registration was a clear, common milestone for many of us. But after reaching that goal, the common path diverged into a multitude of passions, skill sets, and careers. We realized that everyone's career path could meander away from the concept of traditional practice. So we mapped those various paths, which ranged from historic preservation to modernism, sustainability to technology, and design process to community impact. We started to understand where we could go, but we didn't know where to start. Our final week needed to get us on the road – no matter what obstacles stood in the way.

For the final Chaos Session, we discussed dreams and fears. Katie Kangas, AIA, led a conversation using Miro in which we challenged participants to dream big – while anticipating what obstacles may exist on our way to the stars. We started with our big “innovative dream”: If we could give the world a push in one direction, where would we want it to go? We needed to understand what we were willing to risk to achieve that

Young Architects Forum

an **AIA** member group

