

VERTICES

Career Journeys, Projects, Inspirations and Insights



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Gloria Casarez Residence, Philadelphia PA

MATTHEW BARTNER, AIA, LEED® AP BD+C (B.Arch. '96)

When I came to Penn State, I didn't know much about architecture and design — and whatever I thought I knew, the School of Architecture quickly moved me past those limited boundaries. While the early years of architecture school were artistically-focused, I later studied with professors such as Dan Willis who showed me that the best design could be exceptionally beautiful and functional. I was also fortunate to have **Professor John Lucas** for my fifth-year thesis advisor. He showed me the power of architecture to flourish within a framework of sustainability and to serve the human spirit. John brought forward many different aspects of what buildings could be and could do, and that influence has stuck with me from my earliest jobs to my current role as Managing Principal at **Thriven Design**.

One summer I worked for a small firm drawing single-family home additions and renovations. In 1995 the industry was evolving away from hand-drafting toward CAD systems, so this job gave me the chance to learn “old school” methods that ended up being important as my career progressed. For instance, hand-drafting instilled in me the importance of line weights in communicating information with our drawings. Pin-bar drafting taught me to think about the documentation before doing the work, carefully considering how to layer drawing elements to be efficient with the number of drawings produced.

A pattern that I have seen repeat throughout my career: gaining huge personal growth opportunities due to a combination of being-in-the-right-place-at-the-right-time and a desire to take on work that was outside of my comfort zone. Less than four years after graduating, I designed and managed a 252-bed on-campus student apartment project. It was challenging and sometimes scary, but gave me confidence to “figure it out.” I think the combination of critical thinking, judgment, and collaboration skills has allowed me to be successful as an architect and as a firm leader.

As my career continued, I worked on many impactful projects for K-12 schools, colleges, and cultural institutions. These were rewarding because the design of a learning or a worship space can have such a profound effect on users of those buildings, enhancing their mental, physical, and spiritual growth.

I lost my job in 2008, during the Great Recession. While obviously stressful and difficult at that time, it ultimately led me to a new, better chapter in my career and gave me renewed inspiration for good design.

I joined Thriven Design [formerly Kitchen & Associates] a firm focused on socially responsible, impact driven design for essential places. Designing high-quality affordable housing for people struggling with poverty, homelessness, addiction, or other social issues gives me the chance to do work that brings together the human and technical aspects of design that harkens back to my work with Prof. Lucas for my fifth-year thesis.

Two recent projects that Thriven Design has completed particularly embody this spirit: Mission First Housing Group's **New Market West** and Project HOME's **Gloria Casarez Residence**. These projects could be viewed as “just an office building” [New Market West] or “just some apartments” [Gloria Casarez Residence] but in fact each is so much more. New Market West transformed a vacant block in West Philadelphia into a community hub, providing services, affordable housing, and gathering space — all in a sustainable, LEED Silver certified design. The project required complex coordination with many specialists, including a landscape architect who designed “green roof” stormwater management for the site. Gloria Casarez Residence is a first in Pennsylvania — providing affordable housing specifically geared toward LGBTQ young adults who are at risk of homelessness.

Safe, high-quality housing is key to allowing people to resolve other challenges and stressors in their lives, which is why my work, and that of my firm, Thriven Design, has focused on these type of impactful projects for more than 50 years. While these are only two examples, they help illustrate the difference that sustainable, socially conscious architecture can make in our communities each day.

New Market West, Philadelphia, PA



Penn State Architecture Alumni



Matthew Bartner

*Managing Principal
Thriven Design*

I was back on campus several times last year, and it reminded me of the encouragement and insight that **Professor Darla Lindbergh** provided to me during our Professional Practice class at Penn State. She had a way of knitting together academic principles and “the real world” of an architect that helped me see my future in the profession.

On one assignment, Prof. Lindbergh wrote a note which said, essentially, “you’re going to do well working in a firm.” As it turns out, she had a good insight. At the time, studio classes were “king” of the B. Arch program and I have never been a great blank-paper designer. Despite this, I had an aptitude for other aspects of the profession: working with clients, managing teams, mastering the specifics of building envelope and detailing, and the technical tools that we use to do our work. My academic career was... Less than distinguished, but Darla's feedback encouraged me to look at the rich variety that the profession has to offer and see that there is more than one path to success in our industry.



111 South Wacker Drive, Chicago, IL

JOE CLIGGOT, AIA, LEED AP (B.Arch. '94)

I [still] love architecture. I [still] love being an architect.

I have been fortunate, lucky, and often simply in the right place at the right time throughout my career. I have also been exposed to great mentors and leaders, many of whom have led by example, others who intentionally took me under their wing, and still others who simply pushed me out and gave me as much as I was willing to take on while providing the necessary support when I needed it. I am standing on the shoulders of giants.

During high school, growing up in Massachusetts surrounded by traditional New England shingle-style architecture, I discovered – via books – the work of Wright, Mies, and Le Corbusier. Eventually, a long weekend trip to Chicago with a group of PSU Arch classmates only cemented my love of modern, contemporary solutions. Post-graduation, the early '90s recession led me to Chicago to start my career. Best decision I could make, and my life and career path were irrevocably changed.

I've been agnostic when it comes to type, scale, geographies, having worked on a wide variety from kitchen & bath renovations to multi-million square foot new construction; from down the street to around the world. I've enjoyed each and every project along the way.

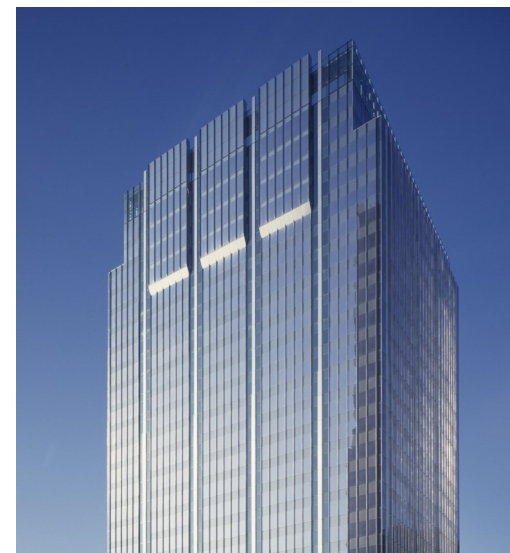
Though time is linear, a career journey has many fits and starts, steps backwards, leaps forward. Sometimes, opportunities arise and change the path completely. One project comes to mind as a key pivot point in my career. While the building itself can be celebrated as a work of architecture, for me personally it was the doors that opened beyond, some intentional and still others opportunistically, that had the greatest impact.



111 South Wacker is a 52-story office building in downtown Chicago, completed in 2005. The project followed closely on the heels of 1 North Wacker Drive, a similarly scaled speculative office building, both developed by the John Buck Company. Up until then, Buck had hired almost exclusively Pritzker Prize winning architects: Philip Johnson, Kenzo Tange, Kevin Roche. And they had never worked with the same architect twice. In our case, because of the great success of the first tower, Buck would hire my firm again for 111, and subsequently several other prestigious assignments. I was the project architect for both buildings and worked from concept design through the end of construction and beyond.

In addition to being the world's first LEED-Core & Shell gold project, and winning numerous design awards, the success of 111 South Wacker gave me a significant level of exposure to the client. Thus, when the **John Buck Company** opened an office in London in 2007 to oversee projects in Abu Dhabi, I was offered a role in their new international division.

From JBC, I joined **Rafael Vinoly Architects**, first in RVA's London studio for two years working on projects throughout the UK, Europe, and the Middle East, then transferring back to the US to ultimately lead their new hospital project at the University of Chicago. This foray into healthcare architecture would then open the doors to become Managing Principal of **HDR's** Chicago studio, and then to transition to a similar leadership role 7 years later in **Stantec Architecture's** Chicago practice. Doors open. Opportunities provided. Steps taken.



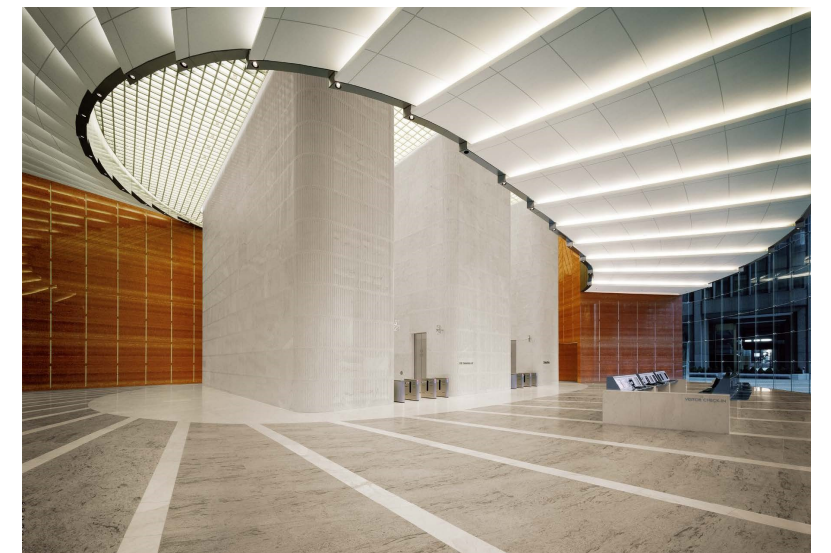
Joe Cliggot

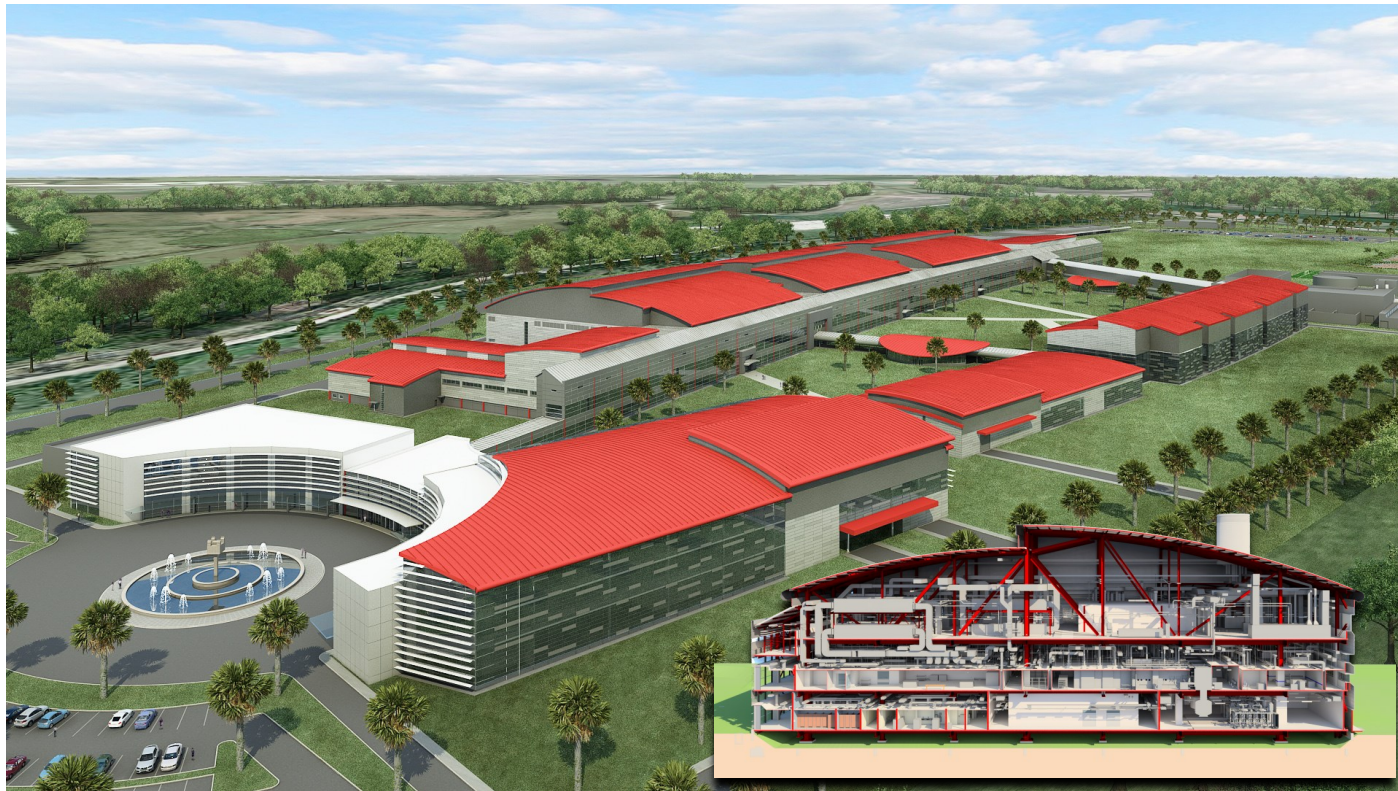
Principal Business Center

Practice Leader

Stantec Architecture

Of course, one of the first inspirations for me – as well as many, many, many of my fellow PSU Arch alums – was the experience of **Professor Lou Inserra's** third studio. Lou showed us the value of research, rigor, and storytelling. Above all else, Lou taught me to care. I've tried to live and work to those high ideals ever since.





Brazil Vaccine Manufacturing Campus and Building Section

JASON COLLINS, AIA (B.Arch. '96)

I have always liked to build. As children, my best friend and I would sneak into construction sites in our neighborhood to liberate whatever scrap materials we could carry home. We would bring the remnants into our backyards and endlessly build, tear down and rebuild forts. Fortunately, my high school had superb technical drawing and design classes that kept me from a life in construction crime and shepherded me toward studying architecture at Penn State.

After graduation, I worked for a small architectural firm in Philadelphia before I was introduced to the head of the architecture department of a large international architectural, engineering and construction (AEC) firm. The role I took offered insight and training for my future career in sterile facility design for drug and vaccine manufacturing. I became seduced by the international aspects of the work and its humanitarian purpose. Many years later, and after a stint living in the UK and working on projects across Europe, I returned to the US and was enticed to join a growing global AEC firm focused on the life sciences industry. In 2010, I started at **IPS-Integrated Project Services, LLC.**, where I would become a shareholder and advance my career as a process architect, designing advanced aseptic pharmaceutical facilities for clients worldwide.

There are three projects that I feel define my career. The first is a multifunctional **campus for the Ministry of Health in Brazil**. Essentially, it will provide free vaccine access for the people of Brazil, particularly for devastating tropical diseases, such as dengue fever. As a lead architect, I had never envisioned creating something the size, scope, and impact of this facility. The campus is centered around the development of vaccines on a massive scale, consisting of over 30 buildings which include manufacturing buildings, warehouses, packaging facilities, administration, and a public science center.

The master plan for the site follows a straightforward linear flow for the entire manufacturing process, focusing on quality products, high throughput, and efficiency. The manufacturing facilities themselves utilize novel design solutions involving long-span trusses and clear, open floor plans allowing layout optimization and ensuring the facilities would be capable of adapting to new technologies well into the future.



FDA-Approved Aseptic Facility, Midwest USA

On a slightly smaller scale, many of these design philosophies lead me to the multi-product aseptic manufacturing facility I designed for an **FDA approved facility in the Midwest**. Although it is challenging enough to design a facility that will make a single injectable drug in an aseptic environment, this facility design made it possible to

manufacture multiple products concurrently without risk of cross contamination between products, bringing new levels of efficiency and patient safety.

Now my team looks to the future. In 2018, I led the design of the **aseptic facility of the future**- a culmination of all I have learned from clients and colleagues. The hypothetical design was presented at that year's International Society of Pharmaceutical Engineering (ISPE) Facilities of the Future conference showing that it was possible to design parenteral facilities that are flexible, adaptable and even more importantly sustainable. Since then, I have had the opportunity to speak on the subject at other conferences around the world, including a venue in Germany where I was the keynote speaker. I'm proud to say that many clients have taken notice and we are employing these design principles on a number of projects currently in design and under construction.

Aseptic Facility of the future



Penn State Architecture Alumni



Jason Collins

**Director of Process
Architecture
IPS-Integrated Project
Services**

My early years in the PSU architecture program did not come easy. I struggled to develop my style during second-year studios, lacking the artistic background to fully express my ideas.

The late **Professor Jawaid Haider** changed my life with some simple yet effective advice: "Just do one good drawing a day", he would say. He encouraged me to spend an appropriate amount of time on design, and to have the discipline to stop designing and simply complete the drawing. "Do that every day, and you will have seven good drawings at the end of the week." Spending the time to complete the drawing gave me ample practice with whatever medium I was studying. In addition, I always had plenty to pin up and talk about and could never be judged for lack of preparation or effort.

I held onto that advice throughout my career. This way of working continues to inspire me to explore different mediums and graphic techniques.



Market Street Town Homes, Pittsburgh, PA

PETER MARGITTAI, AIA (B.Arch. '93)

My love for drawing, as a child, led me to the arts. I was happiest when I was drawing, painting or making ceramics. The joy I felt while creating art was why I decided to pursue a Fine Arts Degree after graduating high school. My father, however, thought this idea was not the best. He was a mechanical engineer, my brother was an engineer, and my grandfather was an engineer. My father explained to everyone that his family had engineering lineage back to the Venetian Bridge Builders! I, however, did not want to be an engineer. Though I knew little about what Architects did, I knew that they drew, and I loved to draw. So, to appease my father and pursue my passion, I transferred into the Architecture program – one of the best decisions I ever made.

In my fourth year at Penn State, the Architecture Department offered, for the first time, the **Sedia di Roma program**, a required study abroad program located in Rome, Italy. In Rome I was afforded the opportunity to experience Architecture as it was intended - in person. Through his weekly lectures and tours of the city, **Professor Romolo Martemucci**, helped me to understand how buildings and cities are created over time. Each generation of designers and builders acknowledging what had been built before and then adding their own unique creations. The experience of standing before the Pantheon, made me feel culturally tied to this more than 2,000-year-old structure. During this program, I began to appreciate how the buildings and the cities we create are historically connected by understanding this heritage. I also learned that, as designers, we can create richer and more meaningful environments.



After the Sedia di Roma program, I was awarded a full scholarship to attend the **Ecole d'Art Americas** in Fontainebleau, France where I continued to absorb everything I could. Later, upon graduation, I went to Japan and taught English so I could continue to travel and learn. These experiences informed my understanding of how history, culture and tradition influenced how successful buildings were designed.

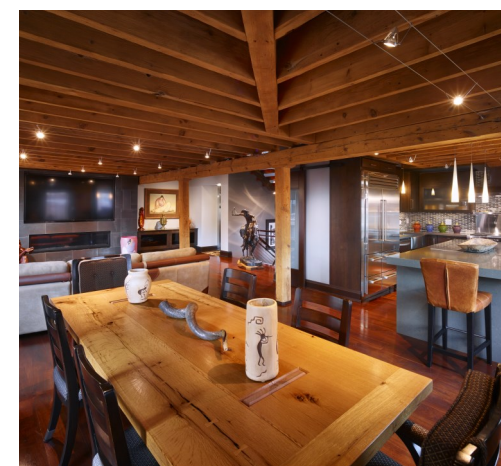


Peter Margittai
Principal
Margittai Architects

My experiences working for Pittsburgh Architecture firms, led me to start my own practice, **Margittai Architects** in 2001. My goal is to create carefully considered and well-designed projects that meet our clients where they are – in regard to scope, context, budget and aspirations – while working hard to exceed their expectations, which often results in unexpected and preferable solutions. The experience from studying in Rome, and other places, helped form my professional work as I continually try to arrive at well-crafted designs that incorporate time, style and culture.

An example of my design approach would be the **Market Street Townhomes** located in Pittsburgh, PA. The design challenge was to create three luxury townhomes in one of downtown Pittsburgh's oldest buildings, a 14,100 square foot warehouse, which was built in 1847. Our design included an expansion of the rooftop which provided outdoor space with views to Pittsburgh's Monongahela River. The glass and aluminum details pay homage to the nearby PPG Place, designed by Philip Johnson.

By faithfully restoring and highlighting the masonry and heavy timber structure and designing unique rooftop terraces, Market Street Townhomes now contributes to Pittsburgh's thriving downtown, and was the recipient of the 2019 AIA Pittsburgh Certificate of Merit in the Medium-sized project category. The competition's jury commented, "This is a great adaptation of a historic building. The re-use of the existing timber construction and the roof-top addition that allowed light to penetrate through the residence creates a unique experience. The jury appreciated the lengths that the architect accomplished in preserving and enhancing the existing structure."





Madison, NJ

BRIAN MARSH, AIA (B.Arch. '96)

As I started college, I felt confident that my skill set was suited to architecture, but I was unsure what a career in the profession would look like. The sentiment in the academic world at the time was not reassuring. On the first day in the assembly hall, they talked about the downturn in the economy, that jobs in the profession were scarce, and that only half of us would become architects. Welcome to five years of rigorous work and the uncertainty that it will amount to a successful professional career! There was a glimmer of hope that stuck with me though, when Don Leon, a first-year professor, quoted Wayne Gretzky, "Skate to where the puck is going, not to where it is." Fast forward to our final year, when we are visiting local firms as a part of our professional practice class, and I develop an unsettling fear that I will be living in my parents' basement on a \$15K salary. This is what a principal at one firm declared was what we could expect, so we all left feeling underwhelmed at the prospects imagining our lives in a cubicle copying and pasting boiler plate construction details. Ultimately, I did not live in my parents' basement, and I have had over 25 years of exciting opportunities, rewarding work and relationships, and strong financial stability for which I am so grateful.

So, what was the journey to such career fulfillment? It started by working with professionals whose highest priority was creating well-crafted buildings. Working with **Charles Warren**, a classically minded residential architect, gave me years of experience detailing, designing, and preparing construction drawings that were as effective and well thought out as they were beautiful.

Not only were the buildings going to be of high quality, the instructions for the builder were also going to be clear yet always artful. It was a way of representing the profession in a way that garnered respect and value. From there, I decided to broaden my design work from the restrictive parameters of classical architecture, so I moved on to work with **Dennis Wedlick** who had a more experimental approach to the use of forms and materials. Then another recession hit! But Dennis always saw opportunity where others saw obstacles. Given that mindset, he invested in developing the first Passive House in NY state with a builder on speculation. Through my work on that project, I saw how strong relationships, forward thinking, and single-minded focus is how we can make a difference. I took this perspective with me when I went on to work with my wife in our own practice, **Mowery Marsh Architects**, where our focus is on Passive House construction as the clearest path to energy independence that does not compromise but rather enhances the beauty and comfort of the occupant experience.



Brian Marsh

Owner / Partner

Mowery Marsh Architects



This home in Madison, NJ was our first freestanding Passive House which gave us the opportunity to demonstrate how this type of construction is not a design constraint but rather an asset. For example, the substantial thickened walls create deep shadow lines and the expansive use of glass provides free heat in the winter and a connection to nature all year long. This manner of construction also guarantees the best from a contractor in the level of care and thoughtfulness to create an airtight structure and systems that are advanced yet not complicated; all allowing for the greatest air quality and thermal comfort found in residential construction.



Hudson Valley, NY

JENNIFER MOWERY MARSH, AIA (B.Arch. '96)

Looking back on my journey with architecture, I have come to realize it started with my childhood home that was designed and built by my parents. Even though the process was before I was born, I had an appreciation for what they had created: the nestled siting of the house that took advantage of the hillside, the modeled appearance of the handmade bricks, the refined detail of the dormer construction, and the efficient yet deceptively expansive layout of spaces. Our house was modest, but it felt inherently different from the cookie cutter ranches and split levels that surrounded us in our rural neighborhood in south central PA. I took pride in the craftsmanship and design acumen they had developed from just observing what worked and possessed intrinsic beauty. Then after a family road trip to Charleston and Savannah where I experienced vibrant, dense communities filled with handsome structures, my eyes were fully open to the possibilities of architecture. I wanted to create beautiful environments that would stand the test of time and enhance how we experience our everyday lives.

Thirty years later, that is what I try to do each day in our work at **Mowery Marsh Architects**. But back then I started my career working at NYC firms such as **Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer** and **Davis Brody Bond**, where I quickly learned that what you draw they will build, so you better know what you want! As a good worker and proficient project architect, I did not see myself running my own practice, but having a child gave me the nudge I needed to step away from corporate architecture and give it a try. The projects may have started out small, but they were always mighty in our architectural goals, progressing from bathroom renovations to full brownstones renovations to new builds.

We found ways to stretch the client's ability to appreciate good design and then executed the work to the highest level that each contractor could muster. After 18 years of Mowery Marsh staying the course, I appreciate this opportunity to reflect and realize that we are doing exactly what I had dreamed of so long ago.

This compound encompassing a **Main House, Studio, and Pool House** located in the **Hudson Valley**, exemplifies what we try to bring to all our projects. A celebration of natural materials that grows from the land in simple forms with sensible, artful detailing and where beauty is found in function and efficiency. We strive for a sense of permanence and timeless quality in the aesthetic but also in the construction longevity which is best achieved through the rigor of Passive House certification. We would hope that one day all new homes would be built to this standard to help ensure a livable planet for our grandchildren.



Jennifer Marsh

Owner / Partner

Mowery Marsh Architects

When I arrived at Penn State that first day of studio, I had no idea what it meant to be an architect. Thankfully, it is much more than I could have imagined. It is seeing the world through varied lenses. What other profession can you approach your work with the eyes of an artist, an engineer, an environmentalist, a historian, a psychologist? Those five years at Penn State helped me forget everything I thought I knew, and start from scratch, seeing for the first time. I learned to look at precedent as a means to understand how others before have solved similar problems effectively and creatively. That ability to analyze what has worked and what we can do better allows for progress and I am grateful to be a part of the solution.



Penn State Architecture Alumni



Editor's Note

The Architecture Alumni featured in this issue are now well into the second half of their careers – they have made significant contributions and accomplished great projects in many facets of our built environment – office buildings and mixed-use developments, multi-family and single-family residences, and aseptic laboratories. After a lot of exploration and experiences, each of them have settled in and found their respective niches

across a wide range of architectural roles and careers. And not necessarily what they might have predicted for themselves upon graduation.

The current generation of Stuckeman students should be confident that their Penn State architectural education – the exposure to design ideas and mindsets from their professors, and the skills and habits developed from their studio projects – will continue to be applied and relied upon across future decades in their architectural roles and careers.

These Architecture Alumni stories (and others to come!) all demonstrate that there will be unexpected life, economic, or other events that will influence our professional roles and projects. While everyone’s career paths will radiate outward after leaving school, we all share the common experiences of continual learning, producing, and in turn influencing the practice of architecture.

We also know that each project can be a brand new adventure, and that we (usually) find enjoyment, satisfaction, and relief in completing the project(s) at hand, just as we did in fifth year studio. Enjoying that process of creating, designing, and building – is vital to sustaining interest and inspiration to successfully practice architecture across decades. We are . . .

Carla Bonacci, FAIA, PP (B.Sci. 1981, B.Arch. 1982)

Secretary-Treasurer, Architecture Alumni Group

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Stuckeman Students Tour the World Trade Center Campus (Fall 2022)