

Careers in the Arts

Architecture

Peter Goldstein

Peter Goldstein is a licensed architect and a teacher in the Dallas Independent School District's magnet architecture program.



Why did you decide to become an architect?

I have always enjoyed art, and as a child, I loved to draw and build things. When I was in elementary school, my family moved into a new house, and there were several other houses in the neighborhood that were under construction that I would visit and explore. I liked to imagine what the house would be like when it was finished. I also remember visiting the Kimbell Art Museum, and the Hall of State at Fair Park, and being amazed by the beauty of these places. Then, when I was in high school, my parents took me to Washington DC to see the newly opened East Wing of the National Gallery of Art, and I was hooked.

What kind of training is required to become an architect?

To be an architect requires a license just like being a doctor or a lawyer. In order to get your architectural license, you need to have a professional college degree which takes 5 or 6 years. Texas is an excellent state for aspiring architects, not just because we are surrounded by great architecture, but because we have a number of outstanding schools of architecture in the area. After you receive your B. Arch or M. Arch degree, you do an internship where you work in an architect's office. Then, after 3 years as a paid intern, you can take the Architectural Registration Exam. I took my registration exam in Massachusetts and will never forget it—it was on the MIT campus near a building by Alvar Aalto and next to one of my favorite buildings, a small chapel designed by architect Eero Saarinen.

Could you describe a typical work day?

My day as a teacher is really different than my days as an architect, but they both require many of the same skills- collaboration, communication, and creative problem solving. The day to day practice of architecture depends on lots of things including the size of the firm- working in a big corporate office is really different than working in a small 1 or 2 person firm. I did my internship at SOM (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill), a very large firm in Houston, where I worked on a number of high rise buildings, including two buildings in downtown Dallas. Then, I moved to the Boston area and worked in a small firm where we designed houses. They were two totally different experiences.

There is a misconception that all architects do is draw, when in reality the architect's day involves a range of activities from meeting with clients, contractors and engineers, to writing field notes after a site visit. This is one of the things I like about architecture- it involves a lot of different skill sets and activities. It also requires focus over long stretches of time which is not for everyone, some people like

to finish a job quickly and move on. The practice of architecture is not like that- it requires a lot of patience.

What is your favorite part of the job?

I really enjoy visiting a job during construction. It is very exciting to see something you designed and worked on for so long, being built. Sometimes, things are just the way you imagined them, and other times they are completely different. And, it is fascinating to see all of the different components that go into the making of a building. In a finished building many of the parts are hidden, but during construction they are there to see. On the job site, you also realize that architecture is a collaborative activity, and that it takes a large team of people working together to make a building. Unlike a painter or writer, an architect does not work alone.

What is the most challenging part of the job?

Downturns in the economy like the one in 2008 are a major challenge. When the economy slows down, so does construction, and this has a ripple effect throughout the entire building industry. Hopefully, we will not see another economic downturn of the magnitude of the one we just went through. I have been through two of these cycles during my career, and they can be a real challenge.

What advice do you have for students interested in becoming an architect?

Follow your passion, whatever it may be. If you really enjoy architecture, make it a point to explore buildings new and old, and draw and sketch as much as you can. Dallas is a great place for architects and for architecture, and I feel really fortunate to live and work here. Our city is rapidly growing and there are lots of interesting buildings in the Metroplex. The Nasher Sculpture Center is one of many new buildings in Dallas that have changed our landscape- it houses a world-class art collection in one of the most innovative museum buildings in the country. You don't have to go far to find great architecture. It's right here all around us.

Interview conducted in 2014.