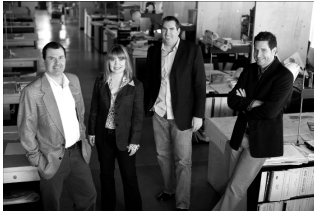


Behind the Curtain at PHX Architecture

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When it comes to seeing state-of-the-art buildings, we often marvel at their fine structures and designs. The architects behind the masterpieces, however, are often overlooked. They are the visionaries who help two-dimensional drawings come to life from start to finish. PHX Architecture is taking architecture beyond the buildings with their collaborative team effort with Erik Peterson AIA as their front man.



"It's kind of like a band where everyone has their thing, but then put it together, and it's something bigger," said Jeff Innes AIA. "Erik is the lead, and we're there with lyrics, guitar and drums," added Principal Nikal Conti. This "band" of architects has come together with a mixture of skills and talents creating the most imaginative projects.

Innes, the "writer" of the group brings creativity and playfulness to the table and considers himself the quiet one in the back of the office doing a lot of the unseen conceptualizing. He got his start in industrial design then acquired a graduate degree in architecture.

"The scale of materials and spaces are different, so instead of holding it, you're walking into it," Innes said. He came to Arizona from Connecticut to escape the traditional-style of architecture. For almost six years, Innes has been a piece of the PHX Architecture team and continues to improve and evolve within the company. "From houses to dog-training schools, to car collection garages, shooting ranges and clubhouses- it's not the same thing every day which is fun," he added.

Conti originally began traveling around the country doing retail management and marketing as a buyer. She decided to go back to school for a degree in architecture, facing a male-dominating industry head-on. After working with a few firms, she happened to meet Peterson by chance. They went out for lunch seven years ago, and two weeks later she began working with him. A few months later Innes joined the group followed by Scott Carson AIA. The rest was history.

"It really started when the office was smaller and we were in a small space with a garage in the back of an industrial park. Sometimes we would lift the garage door to let light in," said Conti about the firm's early beginning.

"We were excited because we were getting calls for projects and we weren't sure what was going to happen, but the timing ended up being perfect. It was right at the beginning of the big real estate boom. We had the amazing challenge of taking more projects than we could do and figuring out how to get them done. Then, the business grew by 300% and we went from being a small staff to a staff of 25."

With Conti's retail background, she brings the business and marketing aspect to the table. "It's even more exciting with all of the different social media initiatives we have that we didn't exist three years ago. I'm always thinking in terms of the economy, and what's going on with the region and our clients, and what kind of projects will we be doing in the future. I'm always trying to stay ahead of where we are to set us up to where we need to be, like a conductor."

The ability to be flexible in architecture is important to Conti and the staff. "Everyone's been architecturally trained and could probably run their own firms, but we all choose to work together to create things that we probably couldn't do as well on our own."

"Everybody in the office works well together as a team, and that's what makes it work," said Carson. He got his start in the field after receiving his undergraduate and graduate degrees in architecture from Arizona State University. Thanks to an internship with the late George Christensen, he was offered a full-time job with him. There, he was able to interact and build relationships with clients as a project manager. After the passing of Mr. Christensen, Scott worked briefly with another firm until by chance he met Peterson six years ago, and like Conti and Innes he saw the firm's potential.

"I take the conceptual designs and drawings, make them reality and make sure the design intent is carried through to the end. From the first time we meet the client until they move into their home— we make sure that they're happy," explained Carson. "Scott just moves right into a project, takes over, and the whole thing works, which is a huge job," added Conti. "Scott is that steady constant beat in the office, setting the pace and keeping the whole team together."

PHX Architecture is looking forward to the future of architecture and the firm. "We've reached a whole new plateau, and the world is open. At the same time we have a lot to do and want to do. The only thing constant is change," said Innes.