

# A Day in the life of...



## Stephen Andrews Project Design Executive, Canary Wharf Group

### MY ALARM GOES OFF...

I wake up around 6.30am. I get my daughter ready for school and leave for work around 8.00am when she goes to school. I cycle to work when I can, although that did not happen for a couple of years as I was knocked off my bike and broke my hip. Every day at work is different. Sometimes I go straight to the office in the main tower at Canary Wharf and work on emails, or to an architect's office to meet with them and offer advice. Other times I am on site, looking at construction and checking on the quality, problems, or opportunities. I also meet with specialists to work out how they are going to build something.

### I'M RESPONSIBLE FOR...

My job title is Project Design Executive. I am an architect by training but for Canary Wharf Group and I look at how new opportunities could be developed. I then try to help architects, engineers and designers work towards making it real without losing money. I also work with builders and contractors to keep the quality of work as good as possible, which can be straightforward or very technical.

### I GOT MY JOB...

I have been an architect for over 30 years. Before I started working, I tried to travel around the world with just £100. I managed to find all sorts of things to do and stayed away for four years. When I got home, I still had £100! I then qualified as an architect and worked for a few well-known architectural practices including the biggest in the world. I was a Partner in the practice, a technical lead for Europe and the Middle East, and also had responsibility for the London architectural teams, technical training, education for the younger architects and reviewing all the legal agreements with clients. Thirteen years ago, I was sitting in a café in Riyadh in Saudi Arabia when I got a call from Canary Wharf Group asking if I was interested in working for them. At the time I was spending so much time on aeroplanes travelling to the Middle East

or to America that I was not spending enough time with my family, so I thought it would be a good change. I came for a couple of interviews and that was it – I started work as Project Design Executive.

### AT SCHOOL I STUDIED...

For GCSE I studied Maths, Art, English, Physics, Chemistry, Technical Drawing (no longer available), History, Geography, German and French. I was rubbish at the last four and didn't really do well at languages until I went travelling. The subjects that have been a real help are Maths, English and Art, with Physics a good add on. I took all those aged 15 so then had three years in the sixth form. It meant I could do more A levels and I did Double Maths, Art and Ceramics, English, Engineering



Property



Project Design Executive

Science and Technical Drawing. That meant I could study Architecture, and I went to a specialist school of Architecture to do so. Normally it is a 5-year course, which involves three years studying for a degree, a year in an architect's office as a sort of apprentice, then two more years studying for a higher degree. You then do another year working before taking an examination in law and professional practice. I later took a legal course to allow me to become an adjudicator, but although it helped me a lot with legal agreements, it wasn't what I wanted to do as a job. There are not many people who have the same role as me, but they're all architects as far as I know.

### MY TYPICAL DAY...

My days are varied. Sometimes I will spend almost all day in meetings, other days I am at my desk answering emails or drawing, and I also spend a lot of time on site. I may also research building materials, stone, glass, trees, paint, history, roads, planning or utilities like power, drainage or data. I think, luckily, that architecture covers so many subjects it is impossible to get bored. Lunchtime can be any time from 12 to 3 or even 4. I might get a 10-minute break or I might get an hour. Sometimes lunch will happen whilst in a meeting.



I finish work around 6.30 or 7 in the evening, and collapse on the sofa after supper.

### THE KEY SKILLS I USE IN MY JOB...

Architecture can be split into three areas of expertise – with a few “add-ons.” Some architects concentrate on one of these areas, but others focus on two or all three:

- Design: the conceptual side of things
- Technical: working out how to build it (including on site)
- Management: ensuring everything happens in the right way, in the right order and that you get paid properly for what you do.

### THE BEST PART OF MY JOB IS...

I think architects have the best job in the world. They are paid to create things with other peoples' money, hopefully creating environments and places where people want to be that will be around for a long time - possibly centuries. I love it and just want to make those environments as best as I can.

### THE WORST PART OF MY JOB IS...

I think the hardest bit is trying to make sure that you ask all the right questions when you are trying to find out what is needed, how things are made and what limitations there are. If you don't ask the right questions, you are unlikely to get the right answers. Sometimes the limitations - which we often call constraints - make you think of things that open up opportunities and make people more creative, in order to try and overcome the problems.

### MY ROLE MODEL GROWING UP WAS...

I first wanted to be an architect because I kept drawing

buildings, but also because I met a nice architect when I was little. I would also say my Dad, because he never gave up. Also, a man called John Norton who set up learning programmes for the poor and disenfranchised in the third world and helped them build better buildings. Thirdly, there is an Egyptian architect called Abdel Wahed el Wakil with whom I designed some mosques. He helped me understand how important form in three dimensions is, and that not all decoration is bad!

### AFTER WORK...

If I have ridden home, I will have a shower and then play with my daughter for a bit, who has already had her tea. I relax a bit, then cook. I do nearly all the cooking at home because it helps my brain slow down and stop thinking about work – otherwise I would probably still be thinking about it when I go to bed and be unable to sleep.



### MY PLAN B...

I really wanted to be an architect from the age of 7. And except for a few years when I was a teenager when I wanted to go into the church, and in my early twenties when I wanted to be a revolutionary or an explorer, I always have done. If I wasn't an architect, I would probably be a sculptor, a builder or make furniture from reclaimed timber.