

# Millennial stays put and thrives in hometown

Jason Streb, a devotee of design, thrives at Clark Patterson Lee

By **KERRY FELTNER**

**W**hen it comes to a career, it is helpful for a person to know where they want to go.

Jason Streb has not only reached multiple goals for himself but also continues to set them.

The focus on improvement and desire to learn as much as he can on the job has helped position him on a trajectory that goes only one way: up.

Streb, 31, has been an architect at Clark Patterson Lee for almost eight years, starting with the firm in 2010.

"I just go after what I want," he says. "I've been very aggressive in navigating my career, and that might be a millennial thing but I (know) the kind of architecture I want to do and the kind of architect I want to be, and I try to go after that as much as I can. (I) put myself in situations where I can be in those areas and improve."

He loved drawing from an early age. "I think everybody that's an architect is interested in drawing," Streb says. "That's what gets you there. I did art classes and realized that was what got my attention and what I could get lost in during the school day. I went to architecture school (and) that's kind of when it clicked."

He grew up in Greece and attended Syracuse University's five-year School of Architecture. He dreamed of leaving the area in high school but found Syracuse to be the right fit.

"Architecture school is very different," Streb says. "The first year is your hardest because you're not writing papers or taking tests—you're building models and you're drawing. It's a unique education because it's project-based; you learn how to manage your time."

Since most assignments are project-based, architects learn differently than other disciplines. Students find their way through the design process together, a collaboration that benefits them long after leaving school, Streb said.

"There's a good camaraderie there. I think everybody that goes to architecture school ultimately reflects on that and misses that studio culture, because you're there with all your peers and you're working late and you're collaborating," he says. "It's a really cool experience, but I think from that the skills that you learn can translate so well. You have constantly to present publicly so you are forced into being able to communicate your designs, your drawings and your models."

Public speaking is part of the foundation of becoming a great architect. It is not enough to have a great design, Streb said.

"You communicate that story to them or bring them along your journey of here's how we looked at the design, here's what we did—then that project becomes successful," he says. "I think some people struggle if they can't do that."

Streb studied in Florence, Italy, for a semester and returned soon after to



Photo by Kate Melton

**Jason Streb, an architect at Clark Patterson Lee, grew up in Greece and graduated from Syracuse University's five-year School of Architecture.**

Europe as part of a grant that the architecture program received. He worked in the Netherlands studying housing designs with the goal of bringing back techniques to be applied to the city of Syracuse.

"You get the old architecture in Italy, and then Amsterdam and Rotterdam have some beautiful new buildings," Streb says. "We ended up bringing it back to the city and presenting it, and they've done some of the stuff that we presented."

Graduating in 2009 proved to be a tough year for landing a job.

That "was a horrible year to graduate," Streb says. "We saw it coming."

In prior years, most students were hired well before they graduated, but "in my year, firms started dropping out, and they weren't coming to visit."

Streb initially looked outside of Rochester for employment, believing he needed to move in order to work on the projects he aspired to be part of.

He and his wife "had talked and I said I wanted to do the big city thing, the big firm thing for a couple of years," Streb says. "I applied nationally for almost seven months, and just

nothing (materialized) because those firms were letting people go or were not hiring.

"I waited tables, (and) I remember thinking, what am I doing here?" he adds.

At that point he began looking for jobs in Rochester. He landed at Clark Patterson Lee in 2010 and found that the work he was dreaming of doing elsewhere was right here in his hometown.

CPL has focused on architecture transportation, municipalities, health care, K-12 education and academic and community projects. It has a total of 300 people across a dozen offices including 125 people in Rochester.

The firm helps its staff develop their careers no matter where they start from, Streb says.

"I (kept) getting all these opportunities. I started getting involved in things around the city and realized, maybe I don't need to look anywhere else," he says. "I'm talking to friends that had gotten jobs in New York, and they're at these bigger firms and they're a number; they're not doing anything." Streb has been encouraged to learn

and be part of a variety of projects at CPL—flexibility he credits with helping him advance his eye for design and figure out how to improve each year.

"I think I'm a little unique here because I bounced all over the place," Streb says. "I never wanted to go to just one area that we do. I've wanted to do a lot of different things and work on different projects. They throw you in and let you learn."

One challenge continues to be technology. The firm is now working with virtual reality to help clients see and experience designs in completely different ways.

"Technology is always evolving, and even since I've been here we're constantly having to learn to just keep up," Streb says. "There's all these new programs and applications that are just wild. Now it's VR, and you can walk a client through an actual building with goggles."

With all of the skills he has acquired in his career so far the focus remains on design—his favorite aspect of being an architect.

"Personally I've always wanted to keep design at the forefront of my career," Streb says. "I always want to be involved in that initial design discussion. In the next 10 years I think the challenge for me is to take that on and lead the firm into doing some really interesting projects and pushing the firm's boundaries in terms of design."

In any career there is struggle or difficulty. Streb has always been clear on how to proceed through any challenges: focus on why.

"There's times where you are frustrated with work or the job, and I think for me the one thing that I've always fallen back on is if you're always passionate or involved in what you're doing and care about it...it will lead you through," he says. "For me that's what I've always loved about architecture is that emotional connection that you can make with your design. That's always exciting and that's always the goal."

Growing up, Streb planned to leave the area after school. Now he is actively involved in helping the Rochester community change and grow.

"I've gotten involved in the city and different committees, which has been great," Streb says. "I've gotten re-engaged with the community and discovered Rochester and all the good benefits it has. It's a big enough city where things matter, but it's a small enough city where you can get involved and actually do something."

The constant in Streb's career and development has been a willingness to try. That has brought him success in unexpected ways, he said.

"As a younger professional where I've gotten excited is you start getting involved in things and it will lead you somewhere," he says. "That's what's been appealing—you start off doing something for one reason and then it brings about all these others. Now that I've been getting involved and putting myself out there, it's been really cool to see what comes back."

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