

# Women in Corporate Firms

The top positions in large offices aren't just for men anymore.

AS IN OTHER SECTORS OF THE PROFESSION, women are gaining ground within the country's largest architecture firms. Many corporate practices report an increase in the number of women applying for entry-level work and point to the successes of experienced female practitioners in middle and senior management. Nonetheless, the number of women who have attained top positions in large firms is proportionately small. An informal survey of AIA's Large Firm Roundtable members, conducted by ARCHITECTURE last August, underscores women's limited stature within the corporate hierarchy (see chart below). On average, women represent 11 percent of all registered architects on staff, but only 2 percent have achieved principal or partner status.

This gap has not gone unnoticed. Some of the large firms contacted for the survey agreed to participate only when assured that their employment statistics would not be singled out. They were concerned that the data would paint a poor picture of hiring practices, despite the fact that many are genuinely trying to recruit more female architects. Interviews with principals and human resource directors of several respected firms indicate a sensitivity to sexism and a sincere desire to combat it. In acknowledging the poor representation of women in top positions in New York-based Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates, for example, principal Gene Kohn expressed his own frustration over the situation. "The partners here want women at the top of this firm—I just don't think that we understand how best to make it happen," Kohn explains. "Perhaps we haven't spent enough time coaching talented young women, or perhaps men have been trained early on to feel more comfortable competing for recognition."

The most obvious—and least threatening—explanation for the lack of women at the top is sheer numbers. Women have only recently entered the profession in significant numbers, so the supply of entry-level female architects is much greater than experienced ones. The majority of women now practicing

have not been in the field long enough to attain partnerships, which are usually earned, if at all, only after 10 to 20 years of hard work. "I think it is a numbers game," notes John Mahon, human resource director of HOK in St. Louis, Missouri. "It's easier to find talented women at the entry level because there are just more of them. But I just don't think there is the availability of really top-notch designers and project managers at the more experienced level." ARCHITECTURE's survey supports Mahon's contention: only 2 percent of the principal positions are held by

**Entry-level women cooperate in a team environment and are frequently more able communicators than their male counterparts.**



**RTKL associate principal Geraldine Pontius (far right) discusses projects with principal David Hudson (standing) and design team.**

women, while 11 percent of the associates and 27 percent of intern-architects are women. The current percentage of women in associate and intern positions in these firms, in fact, exceeds that of women holding regular memberships in AIA this year—roughly 7 percent.

Duane Roggow, Hansen Lind Meyer's director for human resources, has found that entry-level women are well-prepared graduates, cooperate in a team environment, and are frequently more able communicators than their male counterparts. But, at the upper levels, he sees the ranks of women thin out as many of the more experienced female practitioners settle into smaller firms or open their own offices. The long hours and frequent travel demanded of architects working for large firms can take a toll on women, who continue to bear greater family responsibilities as compared to their male colleagues.

Despite the odds, some women have managed to rise to the top. We invited eight such practitioners from large, nationally recognized firms around the country to participate in a roundtable discussion of issues facing women in architecture. While their comments acknowledge discrimination, they demonstrate a reluctance to speak out on controversial subjects such as equal compensation and promotion practices. Such reticence is understandable for women working within the system, where efforts at change must be handled with diplomacy and patience. Having shattered a few glass ceilings themselves, these female architects are paving the way for others to join them.

—NANCY B. SOLOMON

## Staff positions occupied by women and men in selected large firms

Staff position	Total	Percent women	Percent men
<b>Registered architects</b>	<b>1,511</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>Registered principals/partners</b>	<b>329</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Registered associates</b>	<b>801</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>Intern-architects</b>	<b>452</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>73</b>

Data based on a survey of 20 members of AIA Large Firm Roundtable.



CAROLINA WOO  
PARTNER  
*Skidmore, Owings & Merrill*



EDUCATED IN ARCHITECTURE AT RHODE Island School of Design and in business policy at Columbia University, Carolina Woo has been with SOM for 22 years. She is currently based in the firm's San Francisco office, and is registered to practice in four states and Great Britain. As partner-in-charge of administration, Woo is responsible for the coordination of all professional disciplines participating on a specific project, such as the redevelopment of London's Canary Wharf (below), a multi-use complex occupying 71 acres. SOM established development guidelines for the entire area, designed the infrastructure, and provided architectural and engineering services for projects on two of 26 building sites. In 1988, the New York City Art Commission presented Woo with an award for excellence in design for a transitional housing project for the homeless. She has held positions within the Royal Institute of British Architects and National Council of Architectural Registration Boards, among other professional organizations, and is a member of the AIA's College of Fellows.



CANARY WHARF  
LONDON, ENGLAND

## What changes have you witnessed over recent years in regard to female practitioners?

**Geraldine C. Pontius:** There are more women teaching architecture, in private practice, and in large offices than ever before. Although women make up a larger percentage of the work force, there still are very few women at the principal level in large offices. Unless a female architect is also an entrepreneur, it seems that the top management is still primarily controlled by men.

**Molly Hester:** When I was in school in the 1970s, only 10 to 15 percent of the first-year architecture class was women, and the percentage of women who graduated was even lower due to attrition. From my undergraduate class, I know of only three women who are registered architects. Now, women see architecture as a viable career, and the number of women who graduate annually from architecture school is much higher.

**Marcel Quimby:** When I first started working 13 years ago, there was only a handful of female architects in Dallas. Currently, the number of female architects in the city is at the national norm—8 percent of registered architects and 25 percent of intern-architects—so a lot of progress has been made since 1978. Women are taking a very active role in local AIA activities, creating the perception that there are many more female members than there really are.

**Carolina Woo:** It depends on where you are in the country. In my experience, the Northeast corridor is the most advanced. Women are more generally accepted in interior design, but still face an uphill climb in architecture.

**Elizabeth S. Ericson:** There are more of us practicing architecture. More women are having children and continuing their architecture practice at the same time. More women are filling more diverse positions, such as field work, engineering, and marketing.

**Deborah L. Booher:** The most interesting recent changes are in how women are working. A significant number of women are opening their own firms, working as freelance consultants, and teaching in our architecture schools. In other words, they are discovering successful alternatives to working in male-dominated situations.

**Ruth M. Gless:** The people in our industry—clients, contractors, engineers, and sales representatives—are growing more accustomed to working with women. Time is a great equalizer; the longer women are in the profession and the more experience they gain, the more people will think of them as archi-

tecs rather than as women. The goal is to think of women as professionals, not as women professionals.

## Do you feel women have made progress within your firm or other firms over the last few years?

**Quimby:** I think women have made great progress over the last few years but there is a very long way to go. The profession is very short on women at middle- and upper-management positions and as partners.

**Booher:** Some women have made progress, but not as many as should have in ratio to their male counterparts. As things operate today, only those women who are aggressive enough to actively compete with the men at their level will make significant forward progress. Unfortunately, I believe this applies no matter how talented a woman may be.

**Gless:** My perception is that there are more women in positions of authority and more female partners in large firms than a few years ago. Female architecture students number around 40 percent or more in most schools, and hiring practices in most firms have kept pace.

**Hester:** Within HLM, there are a lot more women in responsible positions. There are 17 female associates, 63 female professionals/managers, 20 female technical staff, two female construction administrators, as well as female directors and managers of personnel, interiors, environmental graphics, public relations, and marketing.

**Ericson:** Women have not gained greater authority, nor made a greater impact on the decision-making process, unless they own their own firm.

**Norma Sklarek:** The progress has been slow.

**Pontius:** Prior to the recession, women had attained a certain amount of leverage. There was enough quality work available such that talented architects could negotiate better positions for themselves. In general, women seem to progress through the ranks at a slower pace, so given the current economy, the progress may slow even more.

## Do you feel you have progressed and been compensated at the same rate as your male colleagues from architecture school?

**Booher:** No, I have not. I take a portion of the blame for this myself. While I am aggressive and able, and have progressed very well into new roles and responsibilities, I did not understand until the past few years that



these qualities are not always enough. Different abilities and compensation are required to gain the recognition and compensation that one would naively expect to follow this sort of growth.

**Woo:** Ten years ago, I would have said no. Today, looking at SOM, I would answer yes. This does not mean that women and men are at parity in every firm—I know examples to the contrary. But the situation for women improved markedly during the 1980s.

**Ericson:** I recently attended my 25th reunion at Columbia's School of Architecture and was surprised at the diversity of achievements of my male and female classmates. Many of them have turned their energies to construction companies, academic careers, regulatory agencies, and other associated fields. Those who started their own firms early on have experienced unpredictable profitability. A few of us joined larger firms and are partners with—I am guessing—about the same pay and status as each other.

**Pontius:** Measurements for progress are very elusive. It's true that some men seem to progress at a more rapid rate than some women. I feel fortunate in that I have been challenged with many splendid opportunities. Commonly, the compensation for design-oriented architects is less than for project managers regardless of gender.

**Gless:** I have not always felt well compensated, but I never thought it was because I was female; I thought it was because I was an architect. I think women suffer from unequal compensation because they are more reticent about their abilities and less likely to complain if they think they are being underpaid. I also believe that this situation is exacerbated by the precariousness of the profession during an economic downturn. My perception is that the people in charge are really trying to be fair and non-sexist.

#### **What has been the most difficult stage in your professional career?**

**Pontius:** I completed my master's in architecture at a time when jobs were scarce. After months of searching unsuccessfully for an architecture job, I found work as a systems computer programmer in my former field. My first long-term architecture job was for a husband and wife partnership. I probably would not have gotten started except for the female partner's determination to hire a woman. Her company policy was specifically aimed at maintaining an equal number of male and female employees.

**Woo:** I joined SOM in 1969, and became an

associate in 1974. The next eight years until I became an associate partner were the most difficult. The "old boy" network was still largely in force, and though a woman's ability might be recognized, there was still a reluctance to advance her based on capabilities. This situation made for a lot of frustration.

#### **Have you experienced discrimination in the profession?**

**Ericson:** Indirectly. I find that we do not easily gain the trust of our male peers that we need to be fully expressed in our work. Women have to prove themselves constantly in the workplace, whereas men tend to give each other room to make mistakes.

**Woo:** I have been in practice for about 25 years. For the first 15 years, I experienced a lot of discrimination, beginning with advice not to enter the field because I was a woman. Gradually, things improved. Working in our London office put me face to face with English cultural behavior—or "institutionalized sexism"—as feminists call it. Often I was the only woman at meetings of 25 or 30 people. Questions I posed would be answered—but the answer would be directed to the man sitting to my right or left. Like Margaret Thatcher, however, I persevered.

**Booher:** I have never felt any discrimination as far as job assignments or responsibility are concerned. I have been given major responsibilities on many large, complex projects with no reservations on the part of my employers or project ownerships. I cannot say whether the same applies to disbursement of recognition and compensation.

**Gless:** Today, professionals are too well educated and too sensitized to engage in overt discrimination. Occasionally I have encountered a subtle attitude among professionals about what women can do best, and any such attitude is limiting. I have seen an office where women were channeled in the direction of design because technology was the road to management, and management was not considered in the purview of women. In that office, women did not do construction administration. Unfortunately, this attitude also limits men. They complained about not being involved in design and honestly felt it was because they were not women.

**Hester:** I think both men and women experience some discrimination. Sometimes, there is a concern about a woman's ability to lead in a technical field. You don't have to let that dictate the direction of your career. You simply analyze the situation, make adjustments,

ELIZABETH S. ERICSON

PRINCIPAL

*Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott*



ELIZABETH ERICSON JOINED SHEPLEY Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott as an associate in 1981 and was promoted to principal in 1983. She maintains an active role in the design of the firm's medical and institutional projects. Ericson is particularly committed to improving the design of hospitals, a building type she feels is the most challenging to shape into architecture. Her design for Brown University's Biomedical Research Laboratory (below), completed in 1989, integrates classrooms, offices, and laboratories. Ericson is currently working on two projects for New England Deaconess Hospital in Boston, a macromolecular research facility at Case Western Reserve in Cleveland, a library addition at the University of Oregon in Eugene, and a renovation of a performing arts center at Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Worcester, Massachusetts. Educated at Columbia University, Ericson has taught at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Boston Architectural Center, and recently served as secretary of the Boston Society of Architects.



BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH LABORATORY  
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

NICK WHEELER



NORMA SKLAREK

PRINCIPAL

*Jerde Partnership*

ANA DANIEL



TRAINED AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, Norma Sklarek became the first registered black female architect in New York (1954) and California (1962). As director of architecture at Gruen Associates from 1960 to 1980, Sklarek was responsible for the technical aspects of such projects as the Fox Plaza in San Francisco, the Pacific Design Center in West Hollywood, and the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo. From 1980 to 1985, Sklarek was vice president of Welton Becket Associates and project director for Terminal One at Los Angeles International Airport and Wilshire La Brea Metro Rail Station.

She was a partner in the firm Siegel-Sklarek-Diamond from 1985 to 1989. Now a principal of the Jerde Partnership, Sklarek completed the Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandizing (below) in 1990. Sklarek, the only black woman to be elected to the AIA's College of Fellows, is also director of the LA/AIA, commissioner on the California Board of Architectural Examiners, faculty member at UCLA, and technical adviser to Architectural Graphic Standards.



FASHION INSTITUTE  
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

and move forward.

**Pontius:** Of course, everyone who is different experiences discrimination. It is always easier for "likes" to work with "likes," but the world is filled with variety and so we are all struggling with discrimination in some way.

**Do you perceive a so-called "glass ceiling"—an invisible barrier just below the top tier of a firm—for women in architecture?**

**Quimby:** There used to be concerns about how women would "fit in" in the drafting room, now there are similar apprehensions about women "fitting in" at upper-management levels. It may not be openly discussed, but many men in management have such concerns and are slow to promote women.

One obstacle for professional women is "gender bias," where men simply feel more comfortable working with other men. This is illustrated by men in management or senior positions who prefer to have men as their top people; women are then excluded from the opportunity to work closely with these senior men, earn their trust, and develop relationships that would benefit them in the future.

**Booher:** This glass ceiling is a result of so many years of an exclusively male profession and the remnants of the "old boy" system. This exists throughout our culture. Improvements have obviously been made but much more needs to be done. Each new generation deals better with these problems and, hopefully, they will eventually cease to exist.

**Hester:** Glass ceilings exist in some firms and they have been broken in others. Women need to seek out firms in which they can reach their career goals—firms that offer equal opportunity in compensation, in professional development, and in corporate participation.

**Sklarek:** If a woman is considerably better and more productive than her male counterpart, she can rise close to the top.

**Woo:** Some firms have a glass ceiling—occasionally a very low one. If there is one at SOM, I managed to pass through it. I believe that I am a partner based on my abilities, not because of "tokenism." There are not very many female partners in SOM at present, but this reflects the fact that, for my generation, there are fewer women in general in the profession. When our associates are promoted to partners, there will be many more women, perhaps even more women than men.

**Pontius:** The number of female principals in firms around the country would indicate that there is some resistance. RTKL has expressed an interest in having a female partner and, in

fact, has a number of minority partners.

However, the economy may adversely affect promotions of any kind. Also, a number of women leave the corporate practices at about the time they might be eligible for partnership because of a common perception among senior women that opportunities for advancement do not exist.

**Gless:** As more and more women open their own practices, I wonder if a glass ceiling will continue to be a factor.

**Ericson:** I do not believe women fit comfortably within the hierarchically based organizational pyramid so typical of male-dominated firms. The office ambience is a contest as to who gets to be "The One at the Top." Success is about winning. The glass ceiling is the barrier between those people who want to compete to get to the top, and others who want to collectively support each other in their self-expression. I call this latter an "umbrella concept" of organization. Success is about personal fulfillment, and the success of the firm directly results from the fulfillment of not one but many people.

**Are there certain aspects of an architect's work, such as visits to construction sites, that are made more difficult for a female practitioner?**

**Ericson:** There is no substitute for knowledge as a way to gain respect. If you know your stuff in the field, you are accepted. If you don't know something, admit it. Humility and a sense of humor can get you out of almost any difficulty.

**Gless:** Once construction crews realize that a female architect has the same architectural ability as a man, they forget about gender. The best way to handle difficult situations is to be competent, professional, and well prepared for any meeting.

**Booher:** My favorite stage of a project is the building process—solving the day to day problems on site, coordinating with the consultants and subcontractors, punchlisting, essentially getting it done right. Most construction workers have an innate mistrust of architects, male or female. However, once they understand that you know what you're talking about, can handle yourself on a construction site, take your work seriously, and, very importantly, have a sense of humor, their respect for both you and the work grows rapidly. This phase of first getting to know each other may take longer for a woman and not all women have the kind of personality required to achieve this level of rapport—but



then again, neither do most men.

**Hester:** Frankly, from a woman's point of view, I have had very few problems. I love construction sites and like talking to people in the field. Early in my career, I became a licensed general contractor. Having that license has been a decided advantage.

**Woo:** In the U.S., visits to construction sites are no longer a problem for female architects. When the problem has arisen, my approach has always been to brush it off and move on to the task at hand.

**Sklarek:** Frequent trips to out-of-town sites can present a greater problem for women with young children than for their male counterparts.

**Have you ever perceived any reservation—on the part of a colleague, client, contractor, or subcontractor—that you could not handle the job because you are a woman? How was this communicated?**

**Booher:** At one time I was led to believe, in an indirect way, that I was slated to work on a very difficult upcoming job. But a man was assigned the project. I will probably never know if this was a result of cross-communication, personal preference on the part of the partner-in-charge, lack of ability, or discrimination. I was given no real explanation.

**Woo:** Once at SOM I was passed over as job captain for a large project because I was a woman, although it was clear that I could handle it. Once I was given the U.S. component of a large project because the country in which it was located does not accept women in positions of authority. I have sometimes declined to work on projects for this reason. I may regret their attitude, but I don't feel these countries are obliged to alter their culture on my behalf.

**Gless:** Discrimination is usually subtle. For example, contractors and clients might prefer to deal with a male colleague. Once I had a client who often observed that I was smart or knowledgeable "for a woman."

**Hester:** Occasionally, some clients have expressed initial reservations. That has meant that I have had to work harder to win them over. Those same men have become some of my best clients.

**Sklarek:** In a previous office, one major project overseas was assigned to me on a Monday and unassigned on Wednesday. The Korean client would not accept a woman in such a position of responsibility.

**Pontius:** In the business world, you are always proving yourself to someone. It is incessant,

sometimes emotionally draining. But you keep working because it is what you have chosen to do. When I am challenged professionally, I don't take it personally. Actually, I enjoy the competitive atmosphere.

**What are the advantages and disadvantages for women working within large corporate firms in comparison to those who have started their own office?**

**Quimby:** Large firms offer the opportunity to work on large-scale, unique, and high-profile projects. One disadvantage, however, is that large firms are often so rigidly structured that they have difficulty capitalizing on the talents of those employees whose experience and interests are slightly different from the mainstream. In contrast, principals of small firms know their staff better and, therefore, may be able to provide them with opportunities well-suited to their unique capabilities. Single practitioners typically may have more flexibility and control over their own time. This may be a great way to practice when you have young children and need such flexibility. But when 60 hours a week are required at work, there may not be anyone else to help you as there would be in a large firm.

**Ericson:** The character of a large practice tends to be diverse, with a wide range of building types—libraries, laboratories, performing arts centers, hospitals, offices—and budgets. The human resources are just as diverse: specification writers, technical detailers, designers, managers, marketers. The staff is a mix of young, and old, with architectural education and heritages from all over the world. The downside is that a person can become too specialized within a large office, and, ironically, lose touch with all this enriching diversity.

**Booher:** The clear advantage to owning one's own firm is control; the major disadvantages are the pressures of getting work and being responsible for the financial side of the business. In most large corporate firms, very few women have yet achieved serious design or administrative control. On the other hand, I have had the advantage of being able to work on very large, impressive buildings that I would not have had in my own or a smaller firm.

**Woo:** Large firms—SOM, at least—expose people to different aspects of practice and provide a level of internal competition that I think is healthy for women. They also free people to find and concentrate on their strengths. Having your own practice has one

GERALDINE C. PONTIUS  
ASSOCIATE PRINCIPAL  
RTKL



EDUCATED AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, Geraldine Pontius worked at the New York firms of James Stewart Polshek & Partners, John Young/Urban Deadline, I.M. Pei & Partners, and Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates before opening her own practice in 1986. She subsequently joined the Baltimore office of RTKL as associate principal in 1989. Working on a range of building types—including office high-rises, educational facilities, cultural institutions, and corporate headquarters—

Pontius continually searches for forms and materials that reflect the character of each project's location. At I.M. Pei & Partners, she was a designer of the Portland Museum of Art, which won an AIA Honor Award in 1985. At KPF, she was a member of the design team for the Proctor & Gamble Corporate Headquarters in Cincinnati, which was also recognized by an AIA Honor Award in 1987. At RTKL, Pontius is the project architect for Commerce Place (below) in Baltimore, Maryland, and a department store in Long Island, New York, both scheduled for completion in late 1992.



COMMERCE PLACE  
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND



RUTH M. GLESS  
SENIOR ASSOCIATE  
*Perkins & Will*



RUTH GLESS GRADUATED FROM THE UNIVERSITY of Nebraska in 1969 with a major in English, taught high school, and worked as a potter before entering the graduate architecture program at the University of Virginia in 1976. She joined the Washington, D.C., office of Perkins & Will in 1982, became registered to practice in the District of Columbia in 1988, transferred to the firm's Chicago location in 1990, and was appointed senior associate in 1991. As a senior project architect, Gless has been instrumental in the design of many building types, including education facilities, research laboratories, healthcare projects, corporate headquarters, and mixed-use developments. The College of American Pathology (below) is a recent example of her award-winning work. In 1990, her design for the Westfields International Conference Center in Chantilly, Virginia, was accorded the Fairfax County Exceptional Design Award, the Best Luxury Hotel award by the Building Industry Association, and the First Award from the Masonry Institute.



COLLEGE OF AMERICAN PATHOLOGY  
NORTHFIELD, ILLINOIS

enormous advantage—no one within the firm can tell you what to do. But it can be limiting in other ways.

**Gless:** Women who have started their own practices are in control of their own careers. The decisions are theirs, the successes and failures are theirs, and if they suffer from sexism, it is from sources outside the firm. This is both liberating and frightening. The advantages of practicing in a large firm are many. There are the teams of talented young architects and the support systems such as accounting, marketing, and supply and mail rooms. Without these support systems, architects have less time to spend on aspects of projects that interest them most. Being in a large firm allows one to specialize. For me, the most exciting quality of a large firm is that the scale and variety of projects is so great.

**Sklarek:** In large firms we are able to work on larger and more exciting projects. But very often women are not given the opportunity to do challenging work, thereby hindering their advancement within the profession.

**Pontius:** A corporate firm provides a higher degree of financial security, but it often gives you less control over the ultimate quality of the product. A small practice allows you the freedom to foster your own esthetic goals.

**Have you ever experienced conflicts between your career and personal life? Are these different in degree or kind from your male counterparts?**

**Quimby:** All architects experience such conflicts—it's inherent in any business that frequently demands more than 40-hour weeks. I would like to see the entire profession become more cognizant of the quality of life of their employees, and work to positively address this issue. A firm needs to consider the affects of schedule and fee decisions on the quality of life of its employees prior to making unreasonable commitments.

**Ericson:** I don't think it's possible to devote enough energy to raising children and to creating architecture, and do both equally well. Today's women are encouraged to do both, and I hope it works for them. With or without children, female architects typically are expected to take care of the house and family members, yet devote the same amount of time to their jobs as do their male colleagues.

**Sklarek:** My career has caused some degree of conflict with the needs of my family, especially when my children were young. I believe that women, especially those in single-parent

households, experience such problems to a greater extent than male counterparts.

**Booher:** Women in our current culture are much more understanding of a man putting in long hours and spending time traveling. I do believe this is one problem that is improving as our culture changes and women are more visible in all professions.

**Pontius:** From my perspective, both men and women in American business are asked to place work first and private life second. The time commitment is enormous and business schedules change at a moment's notice. Conflict between career and personal life is a fact, for better or worse. One learns to juggle and balance. It pays to be very well organized and have a clear sense of direction.

**Gless:** I do think men and women of the current generation share a need for more balance within their lives. Architecture has historically been one of the passion professions requiring devotion to perfection and intense work, often late into the night. Architecture involves a transformation of identity; it is part of what one becomes. The conflicts arise between the desire for development of the self through professional success and the desire for fulfillment through human relationships. Since the nurturing of these human relationships traditionally belongs to women, I believe it is they who suffer most from personal conflicts.

**Has your firm established methods of accommodating family-related concerns by implementing such policies as parental leave, leaves of absence, and part-time or flex-time options?**

**Quimby:** HOK has a maternity-leave policy, and an individual may work out extended maternity leave, part-time schedules, and leaves of absence for family reasons. The firm has been good about accommodating such requests, if the situation and project are not adversely affected.

**Ericson:** SBRA is doing quite a lot to accommodate the family. Women have maternity leave and men paternity leave. Employees can return part-time and be treated as equal participants on a project. And they can return full-time when they wish, assuming there is the work load at the time.

**Woo:** SOM is "old-line" in the sense of being quite family-oriented. If an individual's situation calls for a solution, the firm will take the time and make the effort to work it out. This applies to women as well as men.

**Gless:** My firm does not have any established



maternity-leave policies separate from the legally defined disability leave. However, I have never known any female employee who was unable to work out satisfactory additional leave arrangements. Special family or health problems of all employees are addressed on an individual, more flexible basis.

**Hester:** HLM does provide various family-leave programs, flexible hours, and/or altered work hours to allow employees to tend to the illness or disability of a child, parent, or spouse. Maternity leave is also included under a family-leave policy.

**Pontius:** RTKL provides benefits comparable to other firms in the industry—standard maternity leave and some part-time arrangements—but no unusual solutions.

**Sklarek:** Whenever jobs are plentiful and employees are in demand, more policies on women's issues are implemented by firms.

**Do women bring insights to an architectural practice that are not commonly associated with this male-dominated profession?**

**Quimby:** Definitely! I think the typical female architect is likely to contribute to the profession by having a more varied background and bringing a wider range of experiences to the firm than the typical male architect, and can be more sensitive to clients and users. Women are excellent organizers and managers, and this is of real value for women in management positions.

**Ericson:** Women tend to be inclusive of ideas, jump easily between scales of thinking, and seek possibilities within constraints. Men tend to seek closure, take a step-by-step, sequential approach to their thinking, and build results from facts rather than possibilities.

**Woo:** I do think that women generally understand the needs of women (and children) better than men do. This has been an advantage in the design of housing. Today, with more women in the workforce, it may be a more general advantage in practice.

**Sklarek:** I think that women are more sensitive to the needs of facility users than to the superficial, personal ego issues.

**Pontius:** Women are often more skillful communicators and this makes them stronger managers. As the profession becomes ever more team-oriented, women will become increasingly valuable in management roles.

**Booher:** No two, three, or ten men respond to architecture with the same insights. Any good female architect can offer as much to the profession as any good male architect. I believe a good architect is a good architect.

**Hester:** Input from both genders is beneficial to any project. As more women enter the profession, it has become evident that there is the same diversity among women as there is among men. Some women are more technically oriented, some are more design oriented, and some have the ability to do both.

**Gless:** In terms of talent and intelligence, women as a group have neither less nor more than men or than dark-haired people from Texas. There is an occasional brilliant female architect just as there is an occasional brilliant male one, so to exclude women or men as a group is to exclude potential greatness in the profession. Brilliance aside, it takes competence, cleverness, and hard work to get a project out, and the talent pool for this needs to be as inclusive as possible.

**Do you receive support from other women in your firm, or from professional women's groups? Do you see a continued need for such groups?**

**Quimby:** I think such focus groups are vital. Women in our profession are constantly breaking new ground as individuals, and the opportunity to discuss this with other women and find out what others have done is very important. This doesn't need to be done formally, but can be done by phone, lunch, or at chance meetings. I envision such a need until women comprise a much larger percentage of the architectural profession.

**Ericson:** The Boston Society of Architects has been very supportive of its Women in Architecture Committee, which sponsors its own exhibition of women's work throughout the area and focuses on women's issues through meetings and lectures. Such consciousness-raising about the competency and imagination of women practicing today, demonstrated with current examples of women's work, builds credibility in the community. This committee serves as a network for job hunting and builds professional relationships.

**Booher:** The support in my firm is there, but not in any organized way. In the early spring of this year a brochure and memo discussing a professional group was circulated to the women in the firm, asking for feedback. I do not know how much feedback was returned but nothing has come of it as yet. I believe a program of this sort would be of definite benefit to both women and men, and therefore the firm as a whole.

**Woo:** SOM treads a fine line between collegiality and competitiveness. I don't think being a man or a woman particularly enters

MOLLY HESTER

ASSOCIATE

Hansen Lind Meyer



A PROJECT ARCHITECT FOR THE PAST two-and-a-half years in Hansen Lind Meyer's Orlando, Florida, office, Molly Hester specializes in government and commercial buildings. She has full responsibility for projects such as the Orange County State's Attorney and Public Defender Buildings (below), anticipated to begin construction in 1992. This project received a 1991/92 ACA/AIA Architecture for Justice citation for excellence.

Hester is also currently providing program management services for a new government operations facility in Brevard County, Florida. In addition to studying architecture at the University of Florida, she took courses in building construction, which helped her qualify in 1977 for a general contractor's license in Florida. Hester went on to complete a master's degree in architecture with a minor in historic preservation at North Carolina State University in 1979. Active in issues regarding women in the profession, she is this year's chairperson of the mid-Florida AIA chapter's Women in Architecture Committee.



ORANGE COUNTY BUILDINGS  
ORLANDO, FLORIDA



MARCEL QUIMBY  
ASSOCIATE  
*Hellmuth, Obata & Kassabaum*



MARCEL QUIMBY BEGAN AS AN INTERN-architect in the design department of HOK's Dallas, Texas, office after earning a Bachelor of Architecture degree from the University of Southwestern Louisiana in 1978. Intrigued by the technical aspects of the profession, she transferred to the production department in 1982 and undertook some management duties beginning in 1989. Quimby has worked on mixed-use developments, corporate facilities, and educational buildings. Most recently she has undertaken the design of correctional facilities. She was project architect of the MCI Campbell Creek engineering facility (below) in Richardson, Texas, which won a Texas Society of Architects Honor Award in 1990, and project manager of the Federal Bureau of Prison's San Juan Metropolitan Detention Center in Puerto Rico, which is scheduled for completion in 1992. Quimby served on the Dallas Landmark Commission from 1987 to 1989, chaired the national AIA Women in Architecture Committee in 1990, and will be vice president/secretary of AIA's Dallas chapter in 1992.



MCI CAMPBELL CREEK  
RICHARDSON, TEXAS

into it at this point. I believe in equality. If focusing on women's role in the profession will help to achieve that, so much the better. But I hope that at some point the focus will no longer be needed.

**Gless:** I have always had the luck to be surrounded by intelligent and supportive women in a number of professions. Consequently, I have not needed organized professional groups. The fact that women are involved in them is evidence of a continued need for such groups. Women will know they are fully integrated into the profession when they no longer need the groups.

**Hester:** The mid-Florida AIA chapter's recently formed Women in Architecture Committee allows interested women to network and talk informally several times a year, which is positive. There is a continued need for those groups. I frequently talk with non-architect friends who are businesswomen and find their insights valuable. I also find reading general business books and attending management seminars helpful.

**Pontius:** The women in my firm are supportive—when you can find them. Our numbers are few and everyone who is working is doing so very hard these days. Over the years, I have found it useful to spend time with women from other professions formally and informally. I was active with Barnard's professional women's organization in New York and my sister, highly successful in her own, non-architectural career, has been a great source of support and information, particularly regarding the business world. As long as business is male-dominated, I believe women's groups offer a useful forum.

#### **Have female role models made a difference in your professional development?**

**Ericson:** Knowing what women are doing and which buildings they have worked on establishes standards to which other women can aspire. For me, Sally Harkness, partner of The Architect's Collaborative and former president of the Boston Society of Architecture, has done a great deal to open up opportunities for women in the field. Zaha Hadid, with her bold, Deconstructivist ideas and beautiful drawings, has pushed all of us into new design perceptions. Teaching and working with graduates in the intern-architect development program are ways that I have been a mentor to other women.

**Booher:** As a young architect I was always delighted to hear of a successful woman, but at the time I chose my career, I did not know

of any. I have worked with several younger women or summer students who have told me, gratifyingly, that working with me has taught them many technical and managerial specifics, and also that success as a female architect is achievable.

**Woo:** Given the nature of the profession at the time, my own role models were all men. I do think some women benefit from having other women as role models. In my case, I don't think it would have made much difference. While I am both a role model and a mentor, men and women alike learn and benefit from that. My task as a partner is, after all, to encourage both sexes.

**Gless:** In the offices in which I have worked, I have either been the only woman or one of the most experienced architects. Consequently, I have found myself being a role model for younger women, which I accept as an important responsibility. I like to think of myself as a mentor for any young architect.

**Hester:** Having female role models would be helpful, but they are virtually non-existent in Orlando, Florida, so I have male role models. I try to help younger women in the office by explaining project goals and processes. I offer advice when I become aware of problems that arise within the office.

**Sklarek:** Since I was one of the pioneer female architects, there were not many female role models for me. I am a mentor to several women in the design fields.

**Pontius:** My mother had a successful career as a medical researcher. She always worked, so I knew I would, too. While I don't feel I had female mentors, I greatly admire artists Georgia O'Keeffe and Louise Nevelson. As an associate principal, part of my job involves training younger staff.

**Quimby:** Female role models are vital. Firms with very few women in leadership positions send a strong signal that such positions are only open to men. Having women in upper-level positions acting as role models lets you know that reaching that level is achievable, and provides much-needed encouragement. In recent years, I've tried to be a mentor to other women—both at the office and outside—and enjoy the fact that I'm now at a level where I can be of some help.

#### **How can architecture schools better prepare women for the profession?**

**Quimby:** Female architecture students need to have a greater understanding of the profession and the building process than male students, so they can effectively combat the



mistaken perception that they are less suited to the profession. I'm not sure how this can be done; possibly by having strong female faculty who take an interest in the issue and act as mentors for the female students.

**Ericson:** Attention needs to be paid to the accomplishments of female architects. Furthermore, architecture schools should hire more female professors and support the female professionals of today.

**Sklarek:** Institutions should provide courses on design from the feminist viewpoint and provide preparation for the reality of discrimination against women in the field and how to overcome it.

**Pontius:** The schools need to be more direct about what is attainable in the profession; they tend to promote an idealized view and that makes it harder when the graduates—male or female—enter the profession and realize not everyone is going to be a “star.”

**Woo:** Architecture schools should make no distinction between men and women in preparing people for the profession.

**Booher:** I don't think architecture schools' attitudes towards women can have much impact on the conditions in the profession today. By the time someone, male or female, has graduated from a four- or five-year architectural curriculum, they will have decided whether or not to enter the profession. Being an architect requires desire and dedication. These cannot be taught to anyone but must come from within each individual.

**Gless:** The question should be, “How can schools of architecture prepare students to be architects?” Besides being well-trained architecturally, architects need to be confident, assertive, articulate, adaptable, hard-working, and realistic. Of these qualities, the schools only address hard-working.

**Is the current economic recession hitting woman architects more, less, or the same as their male counterparts.**

**Gless:** The recession appears to be hitting every group equally. In most cases, it is the least talented, least hard-working who disappear from the studio.

**Booher:** We have felt the economic crunch and have lost some employees because of it. It seems the ratio of men to women recently laid off is proportionally equivalent to the ratio of men to women in the firm.

**Quimby:** It seems that women are being hit particularly hard by this recession. A large number of women architects in the Southwest are younger, and many firms tend to keep

their more experienced staff and release their younger personnel when times are bad. Consequently, there is a large number of female intern-architects and architects who have been affected by layoffs.

**What advice would you give to women entering the profession?**

**Quimby:** First of all, I'm very positive about the profession and would heartily encourage women to enter it. Women should do so with both eyes open, and be aware of their talents, position, and worth. Women tend to undervalue themselves and this is of no benefit to them, other women, or the profession. Secondly, be as prepared as you possibly can to identify your assets and capitalize on them.

**Ericson:** Architecture is an avocation; not a skill. Long-term commitment, talent, and experience is required to become accomplished. If you love it, do it—you'll never be bored!

**Booher:** I would suggest that a young woman be absolutely sure she wants to become an architect. Be prepared to dedicate long hours and a lot of energy to a career from which it may take a long time to reap the rewards.

**Woo:** When asked for my advice, I would tell anyone, man or woman, to think twice before entering a field in which the work is long and hard, the job security so questionable, and the financial rewards so often negligible. Architecture is really a “calling,” something people do because it's in their blood. You could almost say that if you have to ask, it's not worth pursuing.

**Gless:** I would tell women the same things I would tell men considering the profession. Besides marrying well, visit with an architect and observe whether your preconceptions about what it means to be an architect mesh with the day-to-day realities.

**Hester:** I would tell them that there is diversity within the profession. There are many ways to be a valuable asset to a firm other than being a star designer. Stay in school long enough to meet the educational requirements for registration. Take the exam and pass it as soon as possible. Don't be afraid to try unfamiliar things. Find a mentor.

**Pontius:** Understand the depth of commitment it takes to succeed. This is a low-paying, detail-oriented, and slow-moving profession. Architecture requires some talent, but mostly endless endurance.

**Sklarek:** Be prepared for the discrimination factor and never let it cause you to give up. Persevere, persevere, persevere. ■

DEBORAH L. BOOHER

ASSOCIATE

Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates



EDUCATED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE IN KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE, Deborah

Booher began tackling large-scale projects early in her career. She spent six years in the New York office of I.M.

Pei & Partners working on the design of facilities such as Raffles International Center and Raffles City in Singapore;

Johnson & Johnson Baby Products Headquarters in Montgomery Township, New Jersey; Sunning Plaza in Hong Kong; Warwick Hotel in Houston,

Texas; and Nestle Corporate Headquarters in White Plains, New York. In 1980, Booher joined Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates where she developed details for

One Logan Square in Philadelphia; served as job captain for General Reinsurance Building in Stamford, Connecticut, and 712 Fifth Avenue in New York City; and undertook the role of both job captain and project manager for the recently completed Mellon Bank Center (below) in Philadelphia. As a project manager, Booher supervises all aspects of the building process, from zoning analysis and design through construction.



MELLON BANK CENTER  
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA