

AMY GARDNER

FAIA | LEED AP

MULTIFACETED



Amy E Gardner, FAIA LEED-AP is a founding principal in Gardner Architects LLC and a clinical professor of architecture at the University of Maryland School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation. Gardner Architects LLC is a residential architecture practice, focusing on sustainable, artfully crafted buildings and places. Developed over two decades, the firm's work is site-specific, detail-oriented, and client-centric. At the heart of Gardner's practice is how buildings are designed and built, particularly the collaborative processes and team structures necessary to tackle the pressing problems of today and tomorrow.

WHO DO YOU LOOK UP TO AS A LEADER AND WHY?

Who? All my students, ever. Why? Because I learn from them every day. And, our future is all in their hands now. No small task, that.

HOW DID YOU DECIDE TO BECOME AN ARCHITECT?

When I was 12 in a Montgomery County public school, we had a "career development" series within a science course (I kid you not). We took a small battery of aptitude tests, and my scores suggested that I would make a great land surveyor, among other things.

We were then tasked with coming up with a preferred career choice. I was stumped, because all I really wanted to do was become a gymnast. I sat down, and thought "well, I can figure this out. I like to draw, I'm good at math, we have moved around the country a lot, I have lived in many cities and I really enjoy thinking about them. So, I think I'll become an architect."

Having made up my mind, I could then set that decision aside and go about my life as a gymnast. But I methodically continued to make choices that would support the decision of being an architect, including particular classes in high school, summer prep courses, researching and applying for early direct admission to schools of architecture. However had I been more prescient I would have included other courses such as philosophy, western civ, even business

administration and early climate science if such a thing had been possible at the time. Anyhow, I never looked back and cleaved tightly to the path towards being an architect.

CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR CAREER PATH?

I saw early on that I loved teaching, and that I loved the art of building construction. I began the process of trying to design a professional life in which teaching and practice were joined. I applied to graduate schools known for their teaching assistantship programs, and thus taught studio during graduate school.

I sought out practicing at firms that were known for their marriage of good design and building craft to build my expertise. Within five years of graduation, I began teaching full time at UMD, with the stated mission to teach, practice, & research. My teaching appointment was based on my deep interest in building craft, reflected in teaching and practice. I was awarded tenure at the University of Maryland School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation in 1996 as a reflection of accomplishment in design and building craft.

While teaching, I continued to work at firms doing institutional work to advance my knowledge. In 2003 I formed my own

practice and retired from my tenured position at UMD to become a Clinical Professor. Elevated to Fellow in the AIA in 2015, in my practice. I continue to advance my focus on putting ideas born in the academic setting into practice.

HAVE YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO BE A LEADER?

I have always wanted to follow my own "road less traveled by" and follow my own light. Sharing my experiences in a leadership role, in the realms of both teaching and practice, followed suit.

HOW HAVE YOU WEATHERED THE CHANGING ECONOMIC CYCLES?

Having two full time jobs has been at times useful.

WHO MENTORED YOU?

I look for mentors wherever I can find them, to this day. My adoption of mentors spans 360 degrees and across disciplines. However, the heart of my belief system is still a touchstone born of my work in graduate school, and the particular debt of gratitude I owe my thesis advisor.

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY?

If I had all the time in the world, I would have:

- Pursued an advanced degree in structural engineering
- Worked for Renzo Piano for a year in Paris during the first five years after graduation
- Written a book on French architecture and building craft

When I set up my practice, I believe I had my finger on the pulse of what was happening in practice and the world regarding the importance of advocating for and practicing a more sustainable-minded model, but I could have been more intentional about setting up the structure of a successful practice earlier on, for instance with a more defined business plan, a more finely tuned awareness of the importance of location.

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT QUALITIES AN ARCHITECT SHOULD HAVE?

To check if I was being trite in my response here, I began by ChatGPT-ing this question. ChaptGPT offered that one needs to be creative, with strong technical, communication, organizational, and problem solving skills. One also needs to have a passion for the subject, a strong attention to detail, ability to work under pressure, and strong interpersonal skills. I'd like to say I could do better, but will have to settle for these thoughts. One should be willing and able to:

- Think both conceptually & practically
- Be a nimble thinker, willing to seriously entertain alternative and possibly opposing points of view
- Be knowledgeable about the history and theories of the discipline AND the practice of architecture
- Continuously adapt to changing frameworks - whether technical, design-related, or cultural.

ARE THERE ANY RESOURCES THAT YOU HAVE FOUND USEFUL?

I have found over the years, without fail, that talking with colleagues of all disciplines and job descriptions, from sales reps to journeymen, scholars to students, building scientists to structural engineers, has made all the difference to my exposure to, and engagement with the architecture discipline.

TIMELINE

- **1985**
UVA Graduate Program, Masters of Architecture
- **1987**
Registered Architect, DC
- **1996**
Associate Professor with Tenure, UMD
- **2003**
Formed Gardner Mohr Architects LLC
- **2007**
Second Place for LEAFHouse - US Dept of Energy Solar Decathlon
- **2011**
First Place for WaterShed - US Dept of Energy Solar Decathlon
- **2013**
Clinical Professor, UMD
- **2015**
Formed Gardner Architects LLC
- **2015**
AIA Fellow