

SARA BEARDSLEY

FAIA | LEED AP

MAKING THE MOST OF OPPORTUNITIES



Sara Beardsley is an Associate Principal in SCB's Chicago office and the Director of Technical Design. She works in partnership with SCB's technical leaders to promote high performance design and quality across all SCB projects. Working domestically and internationally for over twenty years, Sara has extensive experience working with complex project requirements on challenging and unique sites. Her approach to design stems from a keen interest in livable urban environments, backed by a body of research on topics such as the decarbonization of cities, preservation and adaptive reuse of buildings, and high-performing building envelopes.

"Set the tone, lead by example, and don't lose sight of what it was like to be starting out in the profession."

HOW DID YOU DECIDE TO BECOME AN ARCHITECT?

As a child I was artistic and had solid communication and math skills so this was a profession where I could put all that together. I also grew up near Chicago and really was inspired by the skyscrapers.

HAVE YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO BE IN A LEADERSHIP POSITION OR HAS THAT CHANGED OVER TIME?

It was a natural progression as I advanced in large firms. I have always enjoyed mentoring and teaching others so that evolved into project leadership and then to being a part of firm-wide leadership.

WHO MENTORED YOU/ HELPED YOU ON YOUR PATH TO SUCCESS?

The senior technical directors at AS+GG and SOM, as well as Jane Cameron, FAIA, [my sponsor] and Patricia Saldana-Natke, FAIA and Principal of Urbanworks, my AIA Bridge Mentor.

HOW HAVE YOU WEATHERED THE CHANGING ECONOMIC CYCLES AND RECESSIONS WITHIN THE INDUSTRY?

I have always tried to keep busy, and when projects were not as busy I was heavily involved in research and publication, with the support of the firms I worked for. I was also willing to be flexible, working on a variety of project types.

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY?

Over time, I have learned to be less stressed about projects and deadlines, and to better prioritize what is most important both at work and outside of work.

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

Versatility, understanding, and communication.

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

Carol Ross Barney, FAIA, the 2023 AIA Gold Medal Winner. She is a very confident, resilient person and such a great ambassador for her work and for women in the profession.

ARE THESE ANY RESOURCES THAT YOU HAVE FOUND USEFUL REGARDING LEADERSHIP?

I participated in these mentorship programs: AIA Bridge, and Chicago Women in Architecture's "Ladders to Leadership." Both were great programs.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU WANT TO GIVE TO FUTURE LEADERS OF THE INDUSTRY?

Set the tone, lead by example, and don't lose sight of what it was like to be starting out in the profession. It is always great to be able to give a 'hand up' to someone else and it's important to be able to recognize leadership abilities in others.

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE IS THE RECIPE FOR SUCCESS?

It is important to reflect on your values and identify what you are most interested in / passionate about in the profession. Then focus on building your own personal unique path, and understanding what qualities and experience you can bring to a team. Once you know yourself it is easier to be a confident leader, but sometimes finding your path is an organic process which can take some time.

TIMELINE

- **2003**
Joined SOM
Chicago
- **2005**
Made Associate
at SOM Chicago
- **2006**
Joined AS+GG
Chicago
- **2010**
AIA Chicago
Young Architect
Award
- **2011**
AIA National
Young Architect
Award and Crain's
"40 under 40"
- **2019**
Promoted to
Director at AS+GG
- **2021**
Various
Publications
including
Supertall,
*Megatall: How
High Can We Go?*
- **2022**
Joined SCB
as Associate
Principal
- **2024**
Promoted to
Firmwide Director
of Technical
Design at SCB