

SUZANNE THORPE

BE A GOOD TEAM PLAYER



Suzanne Thorpe joined WJE in 2002 and has more than twenty years of experience in building enclosure consulting services, including building enclosure condition assessments of both new and historically significant buildings, investigation of enclosure performance issues related to air leakage, water infiltration and thermal performance, rehabilitation design and implementation, and design review of existing and new construction projects. Ms. Thorpe has worked on hundreds of projects in the Washington DC region and beyond involving the investigation, rehabilitation, and/or new construction of numerous exterior building enclosure components and systems. These include steel, concrete, timber, brick masonry mass and cavity walls, terra cotta, cast stone, precast, exterior insulation finishing system (EIFS), metal panel rainscreens, windows and curtain wall, and various roofing and above- and below-grade waterproofing systems.

HOW DID YOU DECIDE TO BECOME AN ARCHITECT?

I am not an architect; I am a licensed Professional Engineer that practices as an Architectural Engineering consultant, specializing in building enclosure design. Throughout school I was always drawn to mechanical and architectural design classes and loved the technical challenges of advanced mathematics and physics.

I pursued an engineering degree in civil and environmental engineering with a specialty in structural engineering. When I began practicing engineering, I was lucky enough to be able to put together my love of architecture and my engineering education.

CAN YOU TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR CAREER PATH AND THE POSITIONS YOU HAVE HELD?

I have been with Wiss, Janney, Elstner for over 21 years. I started as a summer intern while I was working on my masters degree. I took a full time job as an entry level associate/engineer as soon as I graduated with my masters

and have been here at WJE ever since! I have worked my way up from intern to principal in the firm (the twelfth female awarded the principal title).

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

I never set out to be “a leader” but that came about organically as I grew in my firm and became a project manager and mentor. I don’t look at myself as a leader, but as a team members on my projects!

HOW HAVE YOU WEATHERED THE CHANGING ECONOMICS AND RECESSIONS WITHIN THE INDUSTRY?

I am extremely lucky that my line of work is both problem avoidance in new construction and problem solving for existing structures. My practice area is built on forensic work where we investigate a problem, develop a solution, and implement a repair. If the new construction market (where I practice 95% of the time) slows, there are always existing buildings and structures that will require maintenance and restoration... my workload shifts to follow market cycles.

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

I was very fortunate to have had several mentors in my career at WJE. I learned so much from Dan Lemieux about fenestration assemblies, project management, and most importantly client relations. Martina Driscoll and Fiona Aldous were also two very important female mentors for me in the building enclosure consulting world, teaching me various enclosure systems and construction techniques, while navigating a very male dominated career in the construction industry.

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY?

I can honestly say no. I have enjoyed my career at WJE practicing forensic engineer and creating my own niche of architectural consulting in the new construction market. I love design reviews and working with architects to design the best building enclosure we can for a project and then seeing the design come to life in the field... I am always learning new materials and construction techniques. Every job I complete, I add new knowledge to my "toolbox" for the next one.

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

Desire to be a "lifelong learner."

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

I look up to my unit manager Martina Driscoll as a great role model and leader. She is thoughtful and compassionate in her management of our office. She seeks opinions and advice from those around her and fosters a collaborative work environment that allows our staff to flourish in the areas where they are passionate and most valuable. She is a great team leader.

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

I love to attend webinars/conferences/seminars, etc. and learn new things or hear someone else's perspective on an industry topic. WJE has internal technical resource groups and employee networks that allow for collaboration and knowledge sharing that I have found to be extremely helpful in expanding my career; they allow me to surround myself with colleagues experiencing similar technical or career issues as me (you are never too old to be mentored by someone!)

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

Never stop learning new things. Listen to others in industry with a different approach or perspective than you because you can help one another solve the problem together. I am a firm believer in collaboration.

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE IS THE RECIPE FOR SUCCESS?

Don't take yourself too seriously, have fun at your job, and really listen to what others are saying. You can learn a lot from other people with more (or less) experience than you. Always be willing to admit a mistake and grow!

TIMELINE

○ 2002
Masters Degree

○ 2007
Professional
Engineering
License

○ 2009
Senior Associate,
WJE

○ 2021
Principal,
WJE