Profiles in Power*

The most influential people

Photography Timothy Greenfield-Sanders
in architecture aren't necessarily practitioners.

*Where you least expect it.
Darren Walker
Vice president of foundation initiatives
The Rockefeller Foundation

THE GRANTMAKER

In March 2006, as fierce dispute—and charges of inequity—surrounded the rebuilding plans for post-Katrina New Orleans, Darren Walker did the unimaginable. A vice president of the Rockefeller Foundation, Walker transformed a top-down planning process into an inclusive one. At the behest of the Louisiana Recovery Authority and the Greater New Orleans Foundation, Walker had traveled to New Orleans to convene a meeting that would rethink the city’s course of action. He had agreed to come on one condition: that the gathering would include as many community members as possible.

“Without an appreciation of the wisdom of local knowledge, the best thinkers in urban planning will fail in the redevelopment,” Walker says today from his office in New York. The Unified New Orleans Plan, a comprehensive vision for rebuilding the city that was supported by more than $10 million from the Rockefeller Foundation, was released in March.

Walker, 47, has been an advocate for sustainable community development throughout his career. A graduate of the University of Texas at Austin and University of Texas School of Law, he left behind a private-sector job with the Union Bank of Switzerland in the mid-1990s to work for the Abyssinian Development Corp., a faith-based development group in Harlem. He helped turn around the long-disenfranchised neighborhood with affordable housing and infrastructure improvements before joining Rockefeller in 2002.

Today, Walker is responsible for overseeing the millions that the foundation gives out every year ($20 million in 2006 alone) to support sustainable built environments around the globe. He was instrumental in creating the new Jane Jacobs Medal, a $200,000 annual award honoring individuals who fulfill the principles of the famed urban theorist. (Jacobs herself received a Rockefeller grant to write her seminal book, The Death and Life of Great American Cities.)

This summer, Walker will convene another important meeting: an ambitious global urban summit to address the fact that, for the first time in history, the majority of the world’s population will reside in urban regions. “If our mission is to help build more-resilient people and communities, that means that we need more-resilient cities,” Walker says.
THE POLITICIAN

When architects want to call on a member of Congress who gets it, they go to Rep. Earl Blumenauer, a Democrat from Oregon and 11-year House veteran. Not that he’s one of them: Trained as a lawyer and elected to the Oregon State House when he was just 23 years old, Blumenauer has spent his entire adult life as a professional politician. His experience legislating in one of the country’s most environmentally conscious regions has given Blumenauer a keen understanding of the forces that shape community development today, and how both architects and politicians can make an impact.

Architects, says Blumenauer, “link the artistic expression of what people want to get out of the built environment with the requirements and realities of the governmental arena—water, air, open space, light, energy requirements, and building codes.” For that reason, the representative observes, “They are more important than they know.”

Blumenauer, 48, spent 10 years as commissioner of public works in Portland, Ore., a key post in which he oversaw the city’s famous urban growth boundary, a ring around the metropolitan area designed to promote high-density growth inside the city and prevent urban sprawl. In Washington, Blumenauer is perhaps best known for the Livable Communities Task Force, which he founded and runs. Its goal is to persuade Congress to support, through policies, communities that offer a better mix of transportation, housing, and open-space alternatives.

“I don’t think there’s anybody in the House and Senate who has been as focused. We [the task force] have made it part of our mission in Congress—for the federal government to be a better partner with architects and business,” says the perpetually bow-tied Blumenauer, who doesn’t own a car in D.C., preferring instead to pedal to work from his home near the Capitol.

With the Democrats now in control of Congress, Blumenauer is poised to come into his own. “It has been tough sledding in Congress for the last 10 years,” he says. Now, Blumenauer holds a seat on a special House committee on global warming, established by newly elected House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and on the powerful tax-writing House Committee on Ways and Means.
Frances Berwick
Executive vice president, programming and production
Bravo

THE TELEVISION PRODUCER

Week after week this spring, celebrity judges on Bravo's Top Design subjected young, nervous interior designers to cruel critics than get inflicted in most design schools. "Your rug looked like it belonged in an airport," Jonathan Adler scolded a contestant fond of swirly patterns. Of one contestant's use of tan plaid slipcovers, fellow judge Kelly Wearstler complained, "It was, like, granny."

The surprisingly bubbly, cheerful mastermind behind the harsh series is Bravo's executive vice president of programming and production, an Englishwoman named Frances Berwick. An 11-year veteran of the network, Berwick also helped realize the megahits Queer Eye for the Straight Guy and Project Runway, which brought design consciousness closer to the American mainstream.

"We bring people a practical look at what they might have considered 'high design,' something inaccessible to them," Berwick says. "What the designers say always encapsulates a lot of tips, good takeaways, that people could use to get their own 'wow factor' at home." Plus, she adds, "It's fascinating to watch designers agonize."

Berwick, a Yorkshire native and a graduate of the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, worked as a fund-raiser for the London theater Sadler's Wells before moving to New York in 1996 to climb the TV production ladder. At the time, Bravo was a rather frumpy, classical music-dominated network. Nbc bought Bravo in 2002 for $1 billion and has pumped up production and marketing budgets.

Many other networks run unscripted home-design reality shows, but Bravo has taken the upscale path with high-profile hosts and judges, such as model Heidi Klum and designer Todd Oldham. Berwick's shows have also made stars out of the contestants: Laura Bennett, an architect best known for designing gowns with plunging necklines on Project Runway, has become a regular Bravo commentator.

The audience members, Berwick reports, send e-mails about what they're working on at home, in emulation of the broadcast projects. "There's a play-along component," she says, "which we never envisioned."
THE MATERIALS ENGINEER

When architects at Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) were sitting down to work on design development for the Sears Tower in the late 1960s, they collaborated with another, smaller operation that has been largely lost to the history books. In a temporary drafting studio in the corner of the corporate offices of the United States Gypsum Co., two staff engineers, two architects from SOM, and four contractors sat, churning out stacks of drawings of all of the building’s partition details, making careful calculations to account for building drift—calculated as 1 foot at the summit.

Those were the early days of what was to become a full division of the company now known as USG: architectural and technical solutions, currently headed by Robert Grupe, Jr. A self-proclaimed “generational anomaly,” Grupe has worked at USG for 35 of his 54 years. He started with the company as a researcher in 1972, right after graduating from the Illinois Institute of Technology with a B.S. in civil engineering. He became involved with new products as they were developed, then sent out the door, and was “really impressed with the process, from a technical standpoint.”

So impressed that he has stayed with USG for more than three decades, holding a series of positions on the technical-support side of the business. The team that he now oversees is made up of registered architects and engineers who specialize in the building science of walls and ceilings. Grupe explains: “I manage an in-house consulting firm, and our clients are architects, contractors, building officials, and even other people at USG.” Together, they still serve largely the same purpose those two USG engineers did on the Sears Tower: to help architects navigate the problems that come up in the course of a design as they use various USG products.

That is no small feat, given the ubiquity of those products. The Chicago-based ceiling, floor, and gypsum-wallboard manufacturer—founded in 1902 by a group of 30 independent gypsum rock and plaster manufacturing companies—had 2006 revenue of $5.81 billion, making it one of the largest building-product manufacturers in the world. Drywall may be background material, but it’s everywhere. Grupe is as close as most architects will ever get to the source.
Tom Wolfe, the chief lobbyist for the American Institute of Architects (AIA), is not an architect himself—and he thinks that’s a good thing.

“Architects make terrible lobbyists,” says Wolfe, a 59-year-old lawyer and engineer who has been the AIA’s top Washington lobbyist for the past three years. “They have their head in the clouds. All they care about is their art.”

Wolfe has had a varied career. Before joining the AIA in 2004, he represented the American Chemistry Council and Waste Management Inc., among other clients. He spent 11 years honing his lobbying skills at the Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries and a decade at the U.S. Department of Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency, where he got an inside view of two of the federal agencies he now seeks to influence.

Lobbying for the AIA falls into two basic divisions: There are practice-related issues, like taxes, liability, and health care, and there are value issues, like sustainability, energy efficiency, and green infrastructure (some issues, such as affordable housing, cross into both categories). Wolfe and two of his colleagues, Andrew Goldberg and Tom Bergan, cover the House, Senate, and federal agencies, pushing a host of laws that are helpful—and sometimes essential—to the profession.

Last year, the team was the lead lobbyist on a successful bid to add $400 million to a massive spending bill that would try out several housing alternatives to the trailers normally used by the Federal Emergency Management Agency in disaster-affected communities.

Environmental and sustainability issues—redeveloping brownfield sites, energy efficiency, and green infrastructure (which uses technologies like permeable pavements to force more rainwater into the ground, not sewers)—are important to him, Wolfe says. “The big sustainability issue this year is a federal statutory requirement that federal buildings meet a graduated series of caps on energy efficiency,” he says.

And why should architects take note? “They go through periods of intellectual ferment over particular schools of thought,” he explains. “It was Modernism in the ’20s and ’30s. Now people have seized on sustainability.”
THE CONSTRUCTION CEO

It's no wonder that Peter Marchetto, who heads operations in the Americas for construction giant Bovis Lend Lease, knows how to incorporate architects in the building process. He grew up with one.

Marchetto's older brother, Dean, is principal of his own firm in Hoboken, N.J., and both Marchettos learned about construction from their father, a contractor. His lessons on teamwork obviously sank in, because his CEO son preaches collaboration both inside and outside of Bovis. Before each big project, Marchetto will bring in all the key players to talk. While the meetings last for up to two days, he considers it time well spent.

"Everybody talks about what we need to do to make the project successful," Marchetto says. "We don't go eight months and find out that the owner was interested in one thing, and the design team was going in another direction."

Ranked the nation's No. 2 construction company on Building Design + Construction's annual "Giants 300" list, Bovis had 2005 revenue of more than $6.6 billion. Yet despite its huge size, the company prides itself on a personal, collaborative way of doing business.

"There's a lot of two-way communication between the designer and the development team, and they have a great preconstruction program where they work with the architect up front," says Dean Marchetto, who has worked with his younger sibling on two projects in New Jersey.

Having your older brother as an advocate is one thing. Having Donald Trump funnel business in your direction is another. After winning a contest held by the New York real estate developer in the 1990s, Bovis built eight buildings for Trump at Riverside South in Manhattan and later constructed Trump World Tower. It has also done work in Chicago for the star of The Apprentice.

Eighty-five percent of Bovis' work comes from repeat customers. "We don't want to build one job for Donald Trump or any developer we work with," Marchetto says. "We want to build a relationship so that the owner thinks of Bovis as they're building for the future."
Jay Bhatt
Senior vice president, architecture, engineering, and construction solutions
Autodesk

Text Les Shaver

THE SOFTWARE EXECUTIVE

It's no surprise that Jay Bhatt sees the future through a global lens. After spending childhood summers in India, he now has a front-row seat on the massive construction efforts taking place in developing countries, thanks to his role as vice president of the architecture, engineering, and construction solutions division of Autodesk, the global leader in 2-D and 3-D design software.

"I'm very passionate about globalization," Bhatt says. "It's fascinating how these cultures are coming to work together on products. In the past, you would have never seen an Indian architect and a Chinese engineer working together."

If Bhatt has his way, that architect and that engineer will be sending their drawings back and forth via Revit Architecture, an Autodesk product he champions. Bhatt feels strongly that Revit can not only facilitate globalization, it will help produce more energy-efficient buildings.

Only about 5 percent of architects, Bhatt estimates, currently use building information modeling (BIM), which is the central characteristic of Revit. With BIM, building professionals put all of the variables in building design into a database. This information can be used for design decision-making, producing high-quality construction documents, predicting performance, cost-estimating, and construction planning—and, later in the building's life cycle, for managing and operating the facility.

In short, BIM has the potential to streamline the building process, which would be an invaluable asset to developing countries as they embark on a construction boom. BIM can also act as a catalyst for sustainable design, Bhatt contends. "With a database-oriented system, you can do a solar analysis and do energy analysis," he says. "We need to compute the environmentally insensitive behavior of a building and make changes and provide dynamic results."

Is Bhatt idealistic in thinking that Revit and BIM will soon make buildings greener around the world? Maybe not: Autodesk already has one product that dominates the market. "It's pretty much the language in which architecture is spoken," says Roopinder Tara, editor of Tenlinks.com, a website for technical professionals. "If architects want to communicate their design, they will use AutoCAD."
THE FINANCIER

Many lenders focus on generating new business. MetLife wants to keep the clients it already has. The numbers say the New York–based insurer is doing just that. The company is the nation’s third biggest lender and top insurance company, according to American Banker. Eighty percent of its commercial real estate business is from repeat customers.

“We have grown because we’re focusing on customer service,” says Robert R. Merck, senior managing director and head of agricultural and real estate investments at MetLife. “We have a very loyal group of borrowers.”

MetLife has a very successful group of borrowers, as well. “We deal with major players,” says Merck, who piloted the company to the No. 3 spot on the American Banker list. “We’re investing in high-quality assets.”

MetLife knows good real estate because it’s also an owner, with about $8 billion in equity investments. In October of last year, MetLife sold a major property—Peter Cooper Village and Stuyvesant Town, an 11,000-unit, 80-acre apartment complex in Manhattan—to Tishman Speyer, in a joint venture with BlackRock Realty, the real estate arm of BlackRock Inc., for $5.4 billion. MetLife estimates its earnings on the sale at $3 billion, more or less.

“They’re well known, and they own high-profile buildings,” says J. Murry Bowden, chairman and CEO of The Hanover Cos. in Houston, one of MetLife’s partners on deals. “From a lending standpoint, they’ve financed some of the premier real estate in this country.” A case in point: In April, MetLife announced a deal with Daniel Corp. and Selig Enterprises to develop a 2.5-million-square-foot mixed-use complex in Atlanta, called 12th & Midtown.

Merck’s focus on high-quality assets means that he passes on a lot of deals that cross his desk. He estimates that the company only lends on one of every 100 transactions it evaluates. “We focus on the major markets and are well diversified around the country and internationally,” he says. The commercial real estate group has eight domestic offices and three international offices.

Many competitors sell loans after closing, but Merck can assure borrowers that MetLife will hold onto their loan throughout its lifetime. “Our long-term perspective distinguishes us from other lenders,” Merck says. “Our clients know we have the financial strength and capacity to weather the market cycles.”
Joe Frank
Director of advance planning
City of Fort Collins, Colo.

Text Margot Carmichael
Lester

THE PLANNER

Just an hour north of the Boulder/Denver area, Fort Collins, Colo., is bounded by grasslands and Rocky Mountain National Park. A college town (Colorado State University is located here), it's an intellectually and physically active mix of students, academics, hikers, mountain bikers, and nature lovers.

As a maturing city, Fort Collins aims to keep its downtown core vital while managing against sprawl from new suburban development. Successfully balancing those challenges requires solid growth management and a clear vision from the city planning team. "An effective city planner needs to be a gatekeeper, negotiator, and advocate for community values that have been identified by the appointed and elected bodies," says local architect Paul Trento, principal of 02 Architecture.

Fort Collins planning director Joe Frank is all of the above. On the job for 28 years, he came to town from Illinois, where he worked with the City of Naperville and, prior to that, studied at the University of Illinois and Southern Illinois University. Of the department he leads in his adopted hometown, Frank says that in recent years, "we have reinvented ourselves" in order to navigate population growth and the need for more developable land.

"Our previous focus had mostly been on growth management and neighborhoods, and we have a solid foundation of planning and implementation as a result," Frank explains. "Now, we have adjusted our focus on areas of existing and future economic growth — downtown, underutilized shopping centers and strips, and greenfield opportunities." That means doing more-detailed predevelopment plans, creating incentives and tax-increment financing, and working with property owners and business people.

Frank's strategy seems to be working: Last year, Money magazine voted Fort Collins the best place to live in the United States, and the year before, Outside magazine counted the 128,000-resident town among the country's New American Dream Towns. In 2006, Frank was elected a fellow by the American Institute of Certified Planners.

Frank eschews too much praise, boiling his success down to a mantra: "Stay cool. Stay current. Stay flexible."
Architectural competitions easily run aground. Vague briefs can attract piles of unworkable proposals, and overeager clients, though they use the contests to generate publicity, haven’t necessarily raised enough money and momentum to realize the winning designs. But Casey L. Jones, if hired in advance, can make competitions lead smoothly to built work.

The most prominent of the country’s half-dozen professional advisers to architectural competitions, Jones works out of New Orleans in partnership with Reed Kroloff, the dean of Tulane University’s architecture school. After just a few years of full-time advising, Jones, 40, is watching his competitions’ winning designs move toward construction, from Pennsylvania’s Lehigh Valley (the Rockwell Group’s SteelStax cultural center in Bethlehem) to back home in New Orleans (Global Green’s housing complex by Workshop/apd).

Before clients even decide to launch competitions, Jones says, “We make sure that they’ve adjusted their expectations. If they’re proposing a cultural center for a few million dollars, we tell them, ‘You may not get someone like Richard Rogers to enter. But you might well get the next Richard Rogers.’”

Jones sympathizes with architects partly because he trained as one (B.S., University of Virginia; M.Arch., University of Michigan), then practiced for a few years (Cooper Lecky in Washington, D.C., and Goshow Associates in New York). In the late 1990s, as associate director of the Van Alen Institute in New York, he coordinated ideas competitions for Governors Island and the East River’s banks.

Working for the General Services Administration’s Design Excellence Program in the early 2000s, Jones saw the process from the other side, serving as client to architects such as Antoine Predock and Robert A.M. Stern. “I’ve looked at thousands of proposals; I’ve learned how firms are organized, what they’ve achieved, and how they present themselves,” he explains.

So he knows how to sift hype from truth when Jones/Kroloff clients—including Motown Records, the Pentagon, and the Whitney Museum—start hunting for architects. Perhaps only a third of the clients, in the end, decide to host competitions. “Juries can be fun to watch, but the standard selection process is fun to watch, too,” Jones says.