

# Builder/Architect



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**Patrick Plunkett Architects**

# Patrick Plunkett Architects

By Apryl Chapman Thomas

William and Barbara Huck wanted to add 3,000 square feet to their home in Lake Geneva, WI. Sitting on three acres, the house is situated 200 feet above the lake in what William Huck describes as a “spectacular setting.” They weren’t asking for much, they just wanted the addition to blend in with the overall architecture of the house. The Hucks turned the project over to Patrick Plunkett, President of Patrick Plunkett Architectural Design, and they were glad that they did.

“He did a terrific job,” comments Huck. “The addition was completed in about three months. Patrick was really dedicated to the project and kept us involved throughout.”

It is one of the keys to Plunkett’s success and something he considers the most important part of the project — communication between him and his client.

“It’s imperative for me to make sure that the client is happy and feeling positive about the job,” he says. “I want to make sure that I am meeting their expectations. In order to grow my business, my client needs to be satisfied.”

Nearing two years on his own (after nine years with OWP/P), Plunkett begins his day checking his e-mail and messages, and then sets out to plan the rest.

“I’m typically juggling three projects that are going full force, and about five others that are in various stages,” says Plunkett.

Although he is on the go from the moment he walks into his office, he does try to fit in a midday workout, or a “stress reliever” as he refers to it, a couple days during the week.

“I really enjoy having my own firm,” says Plunkett. “Since the beginning, I have always wanted to be a part of all of the phases of the project, from the initial meetings with the clients, to completing the design drawings, all the way to construction observation.”

He admits that while he doesn’t have a favorite architect at this time, there are three different architects with similar qualities he admires.

“Rick Joy, Seven Holl and Herzog & de Meuron are three firms who generate theoretical ideas to conceptually shape their projects,” comments Plunkett. “They don’t try to use a certain historical style to define their work or projects. Their projects are a combination of simplicity of form, abstract shapes and more sculptural aspects than your typical architecture.”

He adds that these firms use a high degree of sophistication to lead to a point of purity, which, according to Plunkett, takes a lot of time, money and effort to make elements fit so well together in such a refined manner.



Lakewood single-family residence,  
interior kitchen and family room

PHOTO COURTESY OF DENNIS B. REAVIS PHOTOGRAPHY



Lakewood single-family residence

“They use materials in innovative ways to create visual interest through the materials’ natural colors, and creative use versus applied decoration. In addition, they also do a good job of integrating their architecture into the landscape and context. They provide fresh ways to solve problems and come up with creative solutions. These are some rock star architect[s] whose work may not be as desirable or appropriate for the more common Chicagoland client.”

Plunkett’s projects are mostly residential. He works with a variety of clients, some who are looking for a new home, and others who need renovations or additions to their current dwelling.

He admits that he likes the shift in focus.

“It allows me to work with the client one on one. Together, we work to identify what they want and match it to the way they live. You learn their passions and interest[s], and they become more than a spectator to the project, but an active participant generating ideas.”

His own interest in architecture began back in his high schools days when he worked in his family’s retail furniture business, helping the carpenters with building and assembling different aspects of the display rooms.

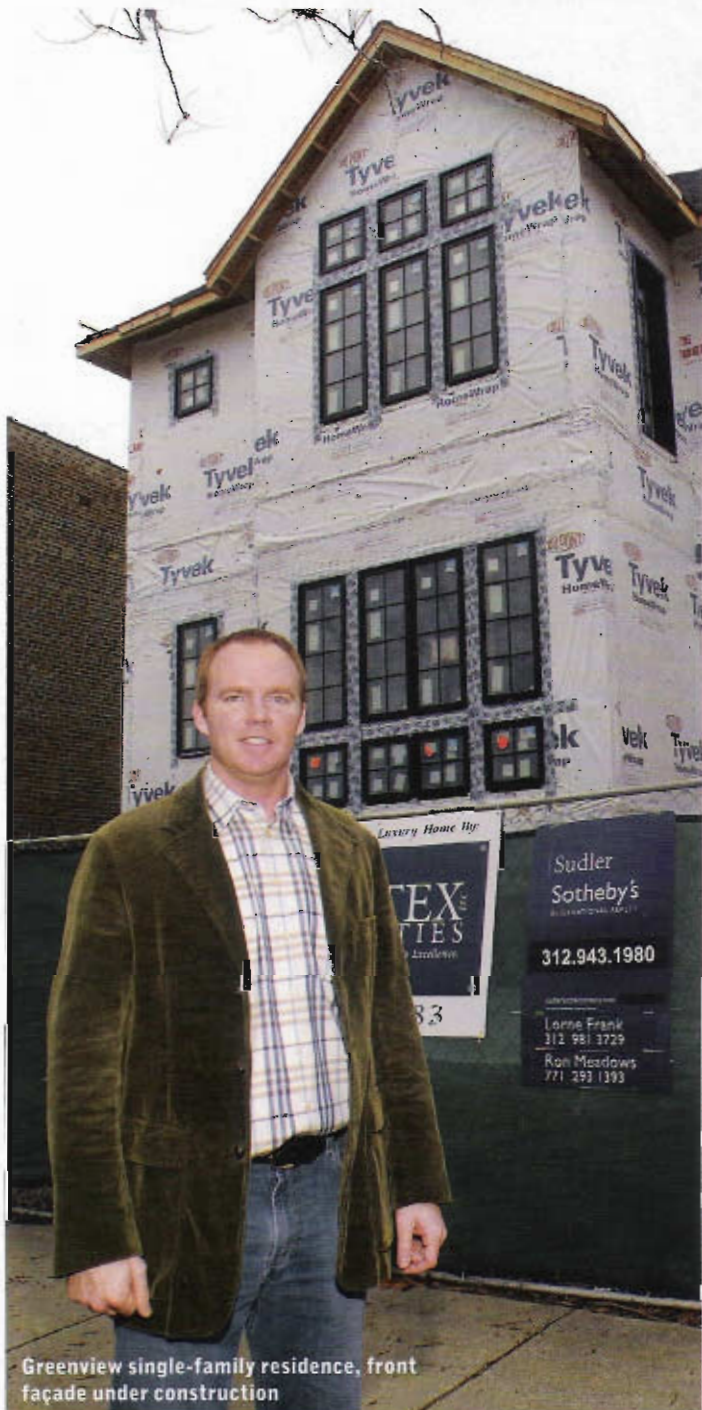
It wasn’t until he went off to the University of Colorado that his interest deepened. Unsure of his future, whether he would return to the family business or go directly into architecture, he elected a dual degree in business and environmental design.

After college, Plunkett was tempted to work in one of the Colorado ski towns; however, he took a more career-oriented path and headed to Chicago (“big contrast from Colorado”) to the Illinois Institute of Technology for his master’s in architecture. Having grown up in the northern suburbs of Chicago, he knew that he would most likely return to work in the Chicago area and that IIT was an excellent architecture school, as well as an ample avenue to meet people in the architectural community.

“I knew at the time that many young people were moving into the



Greenview single-family residence, interior under construction



Greenview single-family residence, front façade under construction

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DEANIS R. BEAVIS, PHOTOGRAPHY

Webster Street building renovation plus  
Furla retail store interior design



PHOTO COURTESY OF DENNIS R. REAVIS PHOTOGRAPHY

city and were creating a fresh neighborhood residential atmosphere," Plunkett recalls. "This would lead to a need for new infrastructure, creating good opportunities for young architects.

The first project that he worked on after graduating from IIT was a two-story 50,000-square-foot precast concrete office building for United Airlines Employees Credit Union.

"It was a good size project just being out of school," he remembers. "There was a team of about five people: a project manager, project design[er], project architect (technical person), interior designer and me. The project architect and I were the main people full time on the project. I did the majority of the construction drawings on computer since, for the most part, that was my role. I learned a lot, and had the ability to be involved in many aspects of the project."

However, being on his own does have its stressful points as well.

"My business seemed to slowly build from a family room addition or second floor addition for a relative or friend into one of their friend's projects," says Plunkett. "Suddenly, I was becoming more concerned about whether the buildings would fall down and where my next pay check is going to come from versus am I going to make associate this year, or is Johnny going to take my spot and be Bjorn, the designer's right hand man, on that new project."

He adds that he is happier carrying out this dream, yet the stress level is higher.

"I am grateful to have some of the stresses I do as a business owner. I did relearn that it is important to be good at every aspect of your job as an architect to succeed, and have a high degree of integrity on each project.

"There is definitely more responsibility and more challenges. Some of these challenges can alter/change course on projects."

One of the larger challenges that Plunkett faces is becoming a name in the industry.

"You want to get to a point in your business where people can call on you because they know your work," he says. "One of my main goals is getting people in the industry to know my reputation. I work on making those connections every day."

On Plunkett's project front, he is currently working on a Gold Coast gut renovation of a landmark residence that he finds very interesting.

"Not only do you get to see how people lived 100 years ago and convert it to present day lifestyle, [but] I am working on a contrast between clean modern elements as well as keeping some of the heavy ornate details of the past."

The project is a gray stone/brick single-family home on the south side of the street in the Astor district of the Gold Coast. Purchased by Bob Loquerico, owner of Elgin Toyota, and his fiancé, Dr. Alyson Koslow, the home is approximately 6,500 square feet.

"We intend to completely restore the façade and the first floor parlor and dining area to its original design," says Loquerico. "Patrick has created a concept of modernizing the entire remaining parts of the house. He has designed a four-bedroom five-bath home that includes a downstairs nanny's apartment with private front entrance. It has two fireplaces and dramatic, high ceilings, as well as a living space on the second floor including the master suite with a library/study/office."

The third floor includes two additional bedrooms and bathrooms, along with a media room with another powder room.

Loquerico and Koslow interviewed four architects before selecting Plunkett's services.



"We learned about Patrick through a friend whose house he designed in Lincoln Park, Mike McGrath Jr.," he says. "Mike's house had a lot of the amenities we were looking for in our project, but more importantly, the design of the McGrath project was warm and inviting, yet classic."

He adds that they are "having a great time working with Patrick."

"His ideas are innovative, and he works well with our contractor and our interior designer, Paul Klug, who has worked with us on [our] last two homes and on our Florida house."

Plunkett enjoys working with them, adding that they are very en-



thusiastic about the project.

“With this enthusiasm, it will create a more exciting project and one that has a strong personality that fits their character.”

Another project in Lincoln Park has him starting from scratch on a new single-family home. A speculative development, the developers and Plunkett are not sure exactly who the actual buyer will be, but the buyer type has been profiled through extensive market research.

“The house has an elegant, classic front façade of brick and limestone,” says Plunkett. “I have a good relationship with the developers and have a sense of what [they] are looking for to have a successful end project.”

“These types of developments are [a] combination of typical and unique features. The house will have what the consumer is looking for in regards to bedrooms and bathrooms. However, it is the finishing touches [that] will create the home’s unique character. These touches are what will differentiate it from other homes.”

Plunkett adds that given how competitive the real estate market currently is, he believes that more developers are beginning to understand the importance of design.

“It’s one of the key factors that can make a difference in selling the house faster. Nowadays, it’s about more than the price and location of [a] home. While design has always been important, it’s more so now.”

He enjoys clients that present him with a challenge.

“I am always looking for exciting and innovative ideas to present to my clients,” comment Plunkett. “There is nothing that compares to the feeling when you walk through a house and your senses are invigorated with the materials, natural light and the proportion of the room.”

Plunkett does point out that there are many misconceptions out there, although “it depends who you ask or who you’re talking to.”

“Some of the misconceptions are that architects increase your construction budget and they’re not necessary,” he says. “It all depends on the individual projects, but hopefully we are adding elements into the

project through experience to increase the client’s satisfaction and not just adding dollars, as well as increasing the amount of information in an effort to ensure a well-built, coordinated high-quality end result.”

Of course, he wouldn’t be as driven and successful as he is today without a group of mentors.

“The most influential mentor was my father for his enormous work ethic, drive and entrepreneurial spirit. He instilled [in me] the idea that if you work your butt off, you won’t fail,” Plunkett says. “I also have a brother-in-law who has his own successful architectural practice in the northwest suburbs. I call upon him from time to time, especially when I was first about to break out on my own, and ask for his opinion or guidance on different subjects.”

When Plunkett was at OWP/P, he recalls that they had many talented architects, who usually had a strength they concentrated on, like project designer, manager or technical person.

“I tried to learn as much as possible from all of them. Looking back, I believed that to be great at one, you have to be good at the others,” he says. “For example, a great designer needs to know the technical aspects of how to put a building together, as well as manage the project in an efficient manner. At that time, I knew if I ever wanted to go out on my own, it was important to know all aspects to be an entrepreneur.”

He adds that he also couldn’t have gone out on his own without his wife’s encouragement and support to start his own business.

When asked where he sees himself in five years, he is quick to answer, “Having that name recognition in the trade.” He also expects to take on more projects that are a bit larger in scale. He predicts slow, yet steady growth.

“My future plans are more about succeeding,” Plunkett comments. “My goals are about having a good, strong business with high quality projects.

“I am living the dream today, and continue to do better.” ■