

Meet Richard

Making an Architect, designing a career.



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Richard Dougherty attended Mary Hare School from 1990 to 1997. He studied Maths, Computer Studies and Art in 6th Form, went on to Queen’s University, Belfast to study architecture and then became an Architect. Answering the question of what exactly an Architect does is difficult. And an even more frequently asked question is why would someone want to pursue a career as an Architect. We let Richard tell us a bit more.

Why an Architect?

Being born profoundly deaf had a significant bearing on my decision to become an Architect. Not able to access sound clearly meant that I grew up looking for other ways to process and relay information such as reading books, sketching or simply exploring the world in a very visual way.

As I got older, I naturally became interested in how the buildings we live in affect the way we live, our mood and behaviour. For example, I remember the profound sense of isolation whenever there was a power outage in my rural childhood home.

Not being able to see or hear very well was a frightening experience but we would gather around the fire so that I could understand, through clear facial expressions and lip-reading, what was going on.

This experience taught me how spaces can have a profound effect on the way we live our lives so it seems that architecture would become a natural fit for me.

What influence did your time at Mary Hare school have on your career choice?

It was Miss McKenna - a wonderful Art teacher - who introduced me to the world of architecture during our Art A-level trip to Florence, Italy. An experience that I will never forget.

I remember on one occasion after wandering around in the crowded streets in distress (hearing aids were soaked and it was getting dark), I stumbled across the most beautiful square I have ever seen, the Piazza del Duomo, alongside three magnificent buildings, the Florence Baptistry, the Cathedral and Giotto’s Tower. I couldn’t hear a single thing but I have never felt so alive at that moment. It was then when I knew that I wanted to become an Architect.

Tell us about your first job as an Architect.

Shortly after that school trip, I wanted the experience of working in an architect’s office, so I went on to work for a well-known company in Belfast. The first few days were nerve-racking but I was enthralled by the huge number of white drawing boards in the office where every single drawing was done by hand. Remember this was long before the internet age!

Where do you get your inspiration from?

Every architect has a different approach, but I tend to be influenced by art such as paintings, sculptures and even musical scores as a source of inspiration.

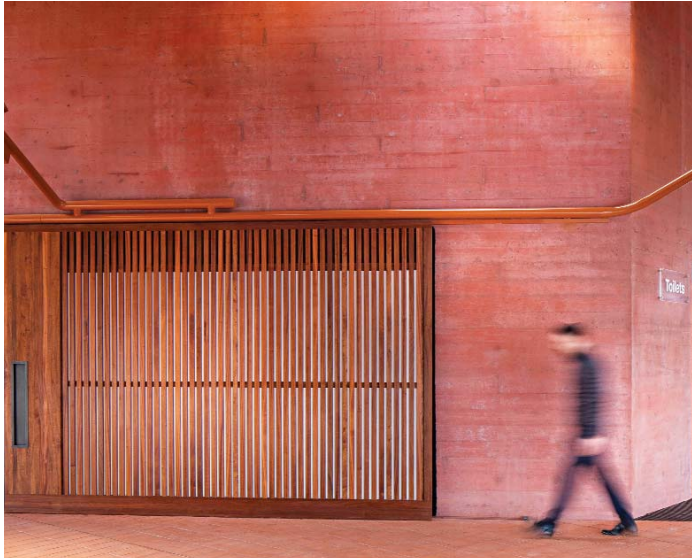
Is sketching an integral part of the process or is it mainly computer based?

For me sketching is the most powerful tool for discovering and communicating the best ideas and solutions to a design problem. There is nothing more personal than sketching out your ideas on a back of a napkin somewhere.

I do remember at a very young age my father talking to his friend who was an architect and I struggled to understand what was being said but once the architect started sketching things out on a piece of paper I was transfixed! Sketching is a such powerful medium to convey ideas and meaning - it's a universal form of communication.

Tell us about the best parts of your job.

Everyday is different! Architecture is one of the professions that is never static (from working with constantly evolving materials and construction methods to dealing with new planning regulations) which makes it so enjoyable but the best thing for me is the capacity to have a positive impact on peoples lives.



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What sort of projects have you worked on and do you have a favourite?

After graduating from Queen’s University, Belfast in 2003, I worked for a local firm on a social housing project before moving to Australia to travel (and participate in the Deaflympics Games for Ireland in Melbourne). I initially took up a post with Melbourne City Council’s Urban Design Department and latterly was with an award-winning sustainable architecture firm working on eco-friendly homes.

I returned home to Belfast in 2006 and have been working with Hall McKnight ever since. I have worked on a wide range of projects including a new Transport Hub for Belfast, (which I won Project Architect of the Year in a recent award ceremony), a stone dwelling on the Mourne Mountains foothills and a high-end residential development in Prague.

My favourite project is the one that I’m currently project managing which is a new campus building and public realm works for the prestigious Gallaudet University for the Deaf in Washington D.C. I’m extremely fortunate to be working with a wonderful client board who are all very passionate about Deaf Culture.

What does the future hold for your career?

I would love to be in a position to run my own design practice one day where signing is the dominant language in the office. There isn’t a language out there more suitable than sign language to be able communicate tricky architectural lexicon.

Away from the office, I enjoy participating in research and recently presented a piece at the European Society for Mental Health and Deafness Congress in Wales.

Is there any advice or any tips that you would like to give someone thinking of becoming an Architect?

It takes a lot of commitment and desire to become an architect but if you are passionate about design and have the right creative and scientific skills then architecture could be a good choice for you.

Being an architect is a high-pressure role that carries a significant amount of responsibility but seeing the buildings or spaces you have helped create can be incredibly rewarding.



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