



Rensselaer



# Past. Present. Future. Mosaic Associates Architects

Partners

Nick Waer, AIA

Mike Fanning, AIA, LEED AP



## Success Magazine: How do you define success?

Nick Waer: Emotional commitment to your work, while maintaining a balance with the enjoyment of your family life; fulfilling your own potential and goals, while earning the respect of your peers and community; and having the time and the means to help co-workers, clients, and family.

Mike Fanning: I believe that success should be gauged not in one area of our lives, but in all of them. It should be viewed in terms of professional and economic achievement, but also in our contributions to family, community, and the world we all share.

## SM: Where did you grow up?

NW: I was born in New York City. We moved to Dhahran, Saudi Arabia when I was very young because my father was a corporate lawyer for the Arabian American Oil Company. We also lived outside Brussels, Belgium where I went to Kindergarten. My first Halloween was spent in Paris. In 1966, we gathered our possessions from Amsterdam and traveled by ocean liner back to New York, where we stayed until my father's work took us to Sewickley, Pennsylvania. There, in 1978, I graduated from a private day-school called the Sewickley Academy. When my father's work took my parents to Old Lyme, Connecticut that summer, I lived in a bedroom above the garage of close family friends. Little did I know how much my adopted family was reporting back to Connecticut. Thank goodness it was before email and cell phones!

MF: Until my senior year in high school I lived on the north shore of Massachusetts, mainly in a small town called Beverly Farms. I was a congressional page in Washington DC for part of my senior year. I loved growing up on the coast and whenever I visit my family there I still try to find time to be on the beach.

## SM: When was your interest in architecture sparked?

NW: As a young child I was fortunate enough to travel throughout Europe visiting such places as the Acropolis in Athens and the ruins of Rome. These experiences contrasted with the skyline of New York City, igniting a passion that would define my life.

MF: When one of my high school friends showed me a copy of the "Record Houses of the Year" issue of Architectural Record Magazine. I was always interested in designing, drawing, and creating things. My high school was one of the first in the area to offer computer courses and I loved the discipline and the freedom of programming. But once I saw that magazine, I became fascinated with architecture.

## SM: At what point did you begin to act on that interest?

NW: Back when I started playing with LEGOs, assembling scale model kits, and building tree houses and model railroads. Our house was always filled with books. At one point in my junior year, I wanted to get a degree in Civil Engineering and Architecture, but soon realized that long calculations are not my strong suit and I instead married an engineer.

MF: Sketches for the design of my "ideal" mansion were begun immediately after my interest was piqued. I learned about architects like Frank Lloyd Wright when I started taking architectural books and magazines out of the local library. Shortly after, I began looking for colleges offering architectural degrees.

## SM: Why did you choose to go to RPI?

NW: My sister was a guidance counselor at the time and she strongly recommended the school. My mom liked that it was relatively close to our home in Connecticut, so I think there was some collusion. Since I had considered Civil Engineering, the historic aspect of the university including the fact that the designer of the Brooklyn Bridge (John Roebling) went to Rensselaer appealed to me. I really liked the openness to various design approaches and the multi-discipline aspect of the School of Architecture as well as the emphasis on the spatial experience of the end user.

MF: The varied interests of its faculty and students encouraged a lot of lively debate, independent thinking, and exploration. I have grown to appreciate the education I received there more and more with time. It was an excellent choice.

## SM: What is the most important lesson you learned from your experience there?

NW: Undoubtedly, it is perseverance and working well with others by being open to their points of view.

MF: Architecture is very complex and it affects each person differently. There are numerous ways to view the success of a project, and they're all valid. Architecture encompasses the practical and the ideal, art and science, culture and technology. It engages both individuals and communities. An architect needs to balance all of these concerns.

## SM: What was your first job out of college?

NW: Draftsman for a firm in Troy.

MF: After graduating in 1982, I moved to Rochester, New York to pursue my college sweetheart, Priscilla Richards (RPI class of 1981). However, the industry was very slow then and sending resumes to every architecture firm in town yielded lots of interviews, but no offers. So I took a job in the Rochester Institute of Technology facilities department, and eventually received job offers from several firms.

## SM: How did your previous work experience help to lead you down a successful path?

NW: Exposure to different building types led to a keen interest and specialization in educational facilities design. I truly enjoy designing learning environments because of the impact these facilities have on many students at such a vital time in their lives. The facilities are often the largest community gathering spots and the largest employers in the area.

MF: Every architect has their own approach to design and everyone that you meet has unique strengths. I've tried to learn something from each of the architects, engineers, contractors and clients that I've worked with and I continue to do so. I've learned a lot from my colleagues in Mosaic, both our partners and our staff.

## SM: How many partners do you currently have?

NW & MF: There are four of us: Our senior partner, Martin Weber, AIA; Nicholas Waer, AIA; Hana Panek, AIA LEED AP; and Michael Fanning, AIA LEED AP. We all have unique strengths and viewpoints to contribute to Mosaic, and it is a successful partnership.

## SM: Your company has been in business for over a century. To what do you attribute the longevity of your success?

NW: A tremendously successful history (please be sure to read about it on our website, www.mosaicaa.com) which results in a handed down body of knowledge from partner to partner, generation to generation. We are not a single star architectural firm, we are a cosmos! We are constantly striving to better the firm for the future partners.

MF: Since it's founding in the 1860's many things have changed in our firm and our profession. We've continued to evolve with advancing technology and new trends in society. But Mosaic's success is also about our core values that have remained constant. It's about understanding our clients and what's needed for success in their projects. It's how we respect individuals and communities, and how we bring people with different talents together to do their best work. It's about valuing quality over growth as a firm.

## SM: When did you make the switch from Dodge Chamberlin Luzine Weber Associates to Mosaic?

**“The image of a mosaic describes how each project is created by individuals working together, combining their diverse talents to create successful architecture.”**

NW: We spent one year exploring and planning our rebranding effort and launched our new name, logo, and website (mosaicaa.com) at the Albany Lakehouse on September 25, 2008. J. Russell White, an esteemed partner, designed the spanish revival public building in 1929. The City of Albany gave us special permission to use the Lakehouse (which is only opened for non-profits) partly because we were so persistent and also because we had such obvious affection for the building and a traceable connection. We could not think of anywhere better to rename the firm. Thank you again, City of Albany!



## Main Office

73 Troy Road  
East Greenbush, NY  
12061  
T 518.479.4000  
1.877.479.3744  
F 518.477.1356

MF: Mosaic became our new name in September 2008. Our name had changed many times before as different architects formed our partnership. Rather than changing the firm's name to a list of the current partners (Weber, Waer, Panek and Fanning) we decided to adopt a more symbolic name that reflects our values. The image of a mosaic describes how each project is cre-



ated by individuals working together, combining their diverse talents to create successful architecture.

## SM: Just as you strive to achieve balance in architecture, you must find a balance in life. Have you found this middle ground?

NW: I believe I have, since our office historically has always placed an emphasis on family life. I also get to sneak in a day off when schools are not in session.

MF: I've managed to balance my work life and my personal life fairly well. It's not always perfect due to occasional scheduling conflicts, but it generally works. I'm working on adding community service to the mix as well.

## SM: What are some of your favorite ways to spend your free time?

NW: Nesting at home, outdoor activities, traveling, ice climbing, reading non-fiction, and watching fiction.

MF: Kayaking, hiking, cross country skiing, mountain biking, visiting art museums and galleries, reading on the beach, watching films, and preparing a meal and enjoying it with good friends and family.

## SM: What are your goals for the future of Mosaic Associates?

NW: To always become better—not necessarily bigger, and for our entire staff to feel that we are one firm in this together for the long haul.

MF: To maintain our core values of collaboration, respect for people, and balance in design. To constantly improve in every sense—as a great firm to hire and a great place to work. We just had our annual retreat and I'm very excited for the positive changes it will bring to Mosaic.