

Senior Project Architect

Job Description

Senior project architects are responsible for project design, overseeing & assisting with construction document production, and coordination of contractors, clients, and engineers.

Projects include designing various architecture types, from public buildings, high-rise commercial buildings to affordable housing units.

Salary

Entry – \$53,000

Middle – \$75-95,000

Top – \$130,000

Core Tasks

- Discuss project progress with lead architects, project managers, engineers, & contractors
- Maintain a daily record of activities & personnel
- Ensure all materials, processes, and equipment used meet energy/safety & building codes and reflect sustainable practices
- Assist in designing and production of construction documents for projects
- Present design / construction documentation to local authorities and obtain clearances / building permits for projects

Workplace / Environment

- Work hours
Approx. 40 hours/week
(Overtime work may be required, depending on upcoming deadlines)
- Environment
Majority of work is done in the **office**
Frequent meetings with construction workers, contractors, and important stakeholders
Visits to construction sites to prepare initial drawings and review project progress
- Travel
May regularly travel to **proposed locations or construction sites.**

Education / Prerequisites

Education Level

Bachelor's degree in architecture & at least 2-5 years of architectural intern experience verified by a licensed architect

Licensing

Architectural license obtained from state after Architect Registration Examination

Pre-Job Preparation

Job shadowing through paid internships is recommended. Advanced math, physics, and art courses in high school and college are helpful

Experience

Soft skills

- Communication
- Problem solving
- Creativity
- Project management

Technical skills

- Familiarity with building/line safety codes; materials & and specification
- REVIT & SketchUp
- Hand sketching



Career Path: Susan Frieson

About Me

Senior Project Architect, Senior Associate at Weber Thompson

Bachelor of Art in Architecture from University of California, Berkeley

High School Life

“I think now there are more programs which actually make kids aware of architecture, but I wasn't aware of it. I just happened to take classes in high school that made sense for architecture.”

“I took a lot of **math** and **science**, including calculus and physics, which came in handy in architecture school for college. I also took drafting and a lot of **art** classes.”



College Choices

“When I decided to go into architecture, I went ahead and applied directly into the **architecture department** at the **University of California**. If you enter university, undeclared, it is harder to transfer into the program once you're there. That's some advice I would give—to go ahead and declare the architecture major when applying to university.”

“I received my **Bachelor's of Art in Architecture**. The University of California's architecture degree is a four plus two program. You attend four years of undergrad followed by two years for the Master's degree. I decided to start working after receiving my BA and didn't return for the last 2 years for the Master's degree. After working in the field for at least five years, I was able to sit for my licensing exam. I would suggest that if you're going into this type of program to go ahead and finish the degree and try not to delay the last 2 years. It is possible to work while attending school.”

“I took all of the classes that were required to graduate with a degree, as well as other courses within the University which were complimentary, such as a history course on American cities, and an introduction to urban planning. I also participated in the **Black Environmental Design Students Association**, within the **College of Environmental Design**. I participated in several **student organizations** because you need support. I also had an **internship** in my senior year through a design studio, with a firm in San Francisco which gave me a sense of the working world”

Into the Real World

“After graduation, I moved from California to Chicago and worked in an **engineering firm** that had a small **architecture department**. I had a mentor there, which was great. Working in the engineering firm helped me out because it made me aware of the **other disciplines** within the AEC professions.”

“I worked with some firms that designed **schools**, some firms that designed **public projects**, such as the International terminal at O’hare **airport** in Chicago.”

“I found a firm where I worked for quite a while in Southern California, as a project architect, which designs hotels including the **Bardesono Inn and Spa**, in Northern California. It is the first LEED Platinum hotel on the west coast. This was about the time when the design industry started to really get into sustainable design policies such as **LEED***. LEED was the leading edge in sustainable building design policy, and largely influences sustainable building design, while bringing to light the importance of it for the future of building and urban planning.”

“Working at **Weber Thompson** has been great because there is a big focus on sustainable design, as well as good design. The design staff here tries to push the envelope on **sustainability**. The design studios are broken up into **high rise multi-family housing**, which I’m in, mid rise housing, commercial office, and affordable housing, which can be midrise or highrise construction. Most of the housing projects are **market rate housing**.”

“So far it’s been a great learning experience, just seeing how different methods of **sustainable design** can be implemented in order to provide a more resilient finished product within the various design genres in the office.”

***LEED:** Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design; a widely used green building rating system

About My Job

“You need to know just enough about everybody else's function to bring everybody together for a common goal.”

Pros

- “You're able to use an **art background** if you have one as well. It's very artistic and scientific at the same time. It's a really good mix of both and a good jumping off point for a lot of different professions within the **design industry**”.
- “There are a lot of **possibilities** with architecture, including other types of design, such as set design, as well as policy making”
- “I feel I'm contributing to the **built environment** and influencing how good design can enhance **communities & neighborhoods.**”

Cons

- “It can be a time suck—there's a lot of **long hours** depending on the project.”
- “Architecture, I think, is the most vulnerable in an **economic crisis**. In a compromised economy, we can be the first ones within the AEC industry that can actually feel the consequences pretty strongly”
- “**Budget cuts** can lead to value engineering - or removal of materials, systems, etc. - on a project which is not always for the best”

Office Work

- “My work is **90% in the office.**”
- “We have a Friday meeting, a lunch and learn called **postcards from the field** where the construction administration staff come in and **present a problem** to the rest of the office to show examples of lessons learned during construction. Sort of a ‘you drew this, but this is what happened.’”

Fieldwork

- “For the first portion of a project you are for the most part in the office, but as soon as it goes into construction, you're going to go out quite a bit. It's interesting because that's when you're dealing with the **contractors.**”

Skills

- “There’s a lot of **coordination** between the in-house team, the clients and consultants. This is mainly with the design team, but also permitting coordination which has to go through the city for the building.”
- “There’s a lot of **collaboration**. A lot of **thinking out of the box**. We have a lot of design charrettes, in-house, for specific parts of projects, which keeps you thinking and your **creativity** going.”
- “You have to know a little bit about everybody, you have to know a lot about **architecture, design and problem solving**.”

Education/Experience

- “When you’re in school, try and find a summer **internship**. Even if you are an undergrad, and may be just answering phones in a firm, it doesn’t matter because you’re getting that **experience and exposure** to the profession.”
- “One of the most beneficial things you can do is **job shadow an architect** for a day. Maybe pick a couple of **different firms** that have a different architectural focus or product type, just to give some variety and see what the differences are.”
- “I highly recommend the ACE (architecture-construction-engineering) **high school mentorship program**.”
- “**Ask questions**, try to go to **design events** because a lot of them are free, and as much as possible to immerse yourself into it.”

The Future of **Architecture**

“Architects must engage the community they are designing for.”

“I think that, especially with what’s going on now in society and social justice, we’re starting to see that architects are realizing that there is design justice which needs to be addressed. We cannot be the elite group who just sits back, designs and expects people to accept anything that we design. We are starting to truly engage with the communities that we are serving in terms of providing better design. It is starting to really evolve into a more **community-oriented profession**.”

“We just have to realize that architecture needs to evolve in this direction; not just involving design but public policy, sustainable design, and just really taking more of an inclusive, collaborative approach and making a difference.”

“One of the things which has happened, before the unrest and COVID, is the city of Seattle has instituted the requirement now for true community engagement during the design process. Architects (and developers) must **engage the community you are designing for**. This is because environmental and neighborhood needs go together. It’s all a part of sustainability and resilience.”