

## **Al York, FAIA, Principal, McKinney York Architects, Austin**

Al York is a fellow of the American Institute of Architects. He graduated magna cum laude with a BArch from Auburn University and, after a brief internship in Baltimore, continued his education at Cornell University (MArch), where he studied with many of the legendary Texas Rangers. York arrived in Texas in 1992 to teach architecture design and theory on the faculty of Texas Tech University, and in 1995, he moved to Austin and joined the office of Heather McKinney, FAIA, becoming a partner in 1998. York is married to preservation architect Sharon Fleming, AIA, and has three teenage boys. When he's able, he enjoys sketching the architecture of the places he visits.

McKinney York Architects is a concept-driven design practice committed to creating architecture with economy, restraint, and a thoughtful consideration for context, all in a culture of equity, curiosity and collaboration. Now in their 37th year, McKinney York was the Texas Society of Architect's 2013 Firm of the Year. Over the past few years, their work has received awards from AIA's Architect Magazine, the Brick Industry Association, the Texas Society of Architects, the Texas chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architecture, AIA Austin, Preservation Austin, and Preservation Texas.

The 27 employees of McKinney York have been working remotely since Friday, March 13.

Below, York shares some tips and lessons learned for remote officing.

**Which videoconferencing platforms are you using?** We are using both Zoom and GoToMeeting. We are getting very comfortable with these platforms after hosting several meetings a day over the past week.

**How are you maintaining communication with your staff and your clients?** To communicate with our staff, we are using Slack and Zoom, texts, phone calls, conference calls, and of course, emails. The ability to reach out and share a screen with a colleague using the capabilities of these platforms is really efficient. Bluebeam Studio has also been an excellent tool for collaboration.

To communicate with our clients, we are using phone calls/conference calls, Zoom, emails, and texts.

**What do you feel is working well?** We've had few, if no, problems with our IT and remote work. Our remote desktop Revit server combined with BIM 360 has allowed us to work remotely as if we were at our desks. Everyone in our office was already on a laptop powerful enough to run the software they regularly use. Many have found that when they connect to their home routers through a direct ethernet connection rather than their home Wi-Fi, the VPN connection to the office server is effectively instantaneous. Saving time not having to make the morning/evening commute or travel to meetings has also been a real plus for me personally.

**What are your biggest challenges while working remotely?** Our biggest challenge remains the same as before we went remote, and that is, nurturing and maintaining a vibrant and rewarding office culture. We are continuing our regular Monday office meeting via Zoom. We are continuing our 'lunch and sketch' and 'design flex' happenings, also via videoconferencing. Another surprising challenge is receiving mail and package deliveries. We have a hold on most deliveries, but so many businesses have done the same that UPS has been unable to locate our packages when we've gone to pick them up. Finally, many of our employees have added responsibilities caring for children who are at home while schools and daycares are closed. Finding flexible solutions for each person's unique situations will be a focus for us over the next few days and weeks.

**What advice would you share with colleagues during these unusual times?** Maintain as normal a routine as possible and go out of your way to make connections to people — your office colleagues, consultants, clients, and contractors. Also, realize that many are likely feeling anxious. Patience and understanding will serve us all well over the coming weeks and months.