

## Post-ND: The Architecture Program

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Welcome back, College Bound listeners. My name is Ceci Guarnuccio and I'm a current junior here at the University of Notre Dame. We are so excited to bring you a new episode in our podcast, The Post Notre Dame Experience, a conversation with Notre Dame graduates about what their life has been like since graduating. Whether that was attending graduate school, going into the workforce or moving abroad, we are ready to share with you the endless possibilities that are at your hands when you graduate from Notre Dame.

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Last episode we were joined by Woody Northup and his granddaughter and fellow intern Meaghan, who shared his journey from his English liberal arts education to serving as the CEO of his own company. Check it out if you haven't already! Today we are joined by Rebekah Patterson, who will be sharing with us what she's been up to since graduating from Notre Dame in 2013.

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Hi, Rebekah. Thank you so much for joining us today.

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Thank you so much for having me Ceci. I appreciate you inviting me on. Of course.

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We always appreciate any time an alum is able to give to talk to us. So as all good conversations with the Notre Dame graduate start, we'd love to hear your ND intro. So that's your name, your major hometown, your dorm while you were living on campus and where you're at now and what you're doing.

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Absolutely. So my name is Rebekah Patterson, but I was Wierson back in the day when I was on campus. I am from El Paso, Texas, and while I was on campus, I lived in Pangborn, had a great time living there all four years, but I was an Arkie, so I majored in architecture, minored in Sustainability, and I loved living in Rome. That was excellent. And when I came back, I finished up one more year on campus in Pangborn and then eventually moved off campus my fifth year. And what I'm doing now, I am a licensed architect working for an architecture firm, currently a fully remote employee in Houston, Texas.

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As you kind of highlighted a little bit in your intro there, Notre Dame, you know, offers a variety of fields of studies and offers an education that's different from any other school, but particularly with the architecture program, it being a five year program, you doing your entire junior year abroad in Rome. So whether it be any of those or just any of the general coursework you did during your time at Notre Dame, how did the School of Architecture at Notre Dame maybe set you apart from other architects, whether that

be applying for jobs or your work style now? How did you see that making a difference in your career and how it helped you today?

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Oh, absolutely. I would say definitely that going to an accredited program for it being five years and getting that accreditation is so important for when you apply for jobs, but it's also important if you intend on pursuing a license. So in order for you to pursue a license, which means you get that capital A, you can say that you're an architect, you have to go to an accredited program or spend more time in additional education to to finish up your masters. So having that extra edge and immediately getting to start and try for that process just for anyone who doesn't know, it includes several exams. I think we're down to six exams now, but when I started it was more than that and a bunch of experience hours.

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But you know, mentally being able to start that right away was great, at least on a personal, professional development. That's not exactly how it worked out for me. I only got licensed in 2021. However, going to Notre Dame, being taught how to hand draft is not something that's very frequently used in the profession, but we had a professor who described it as once you sketch a building, you'll remember it forever. And it's incredibly true. You learn a lot of different details and aspects and what to pay attention to that spatial awareness when you're using it by hand and when you're sort of putting like the art in architecture, like really focusing on that aspect of design. I can walk into a room and there's just a different way that I've noticed that I treat buildings and I treat design and I understand spaces purely based on how Notre Dame taught me how to think about design.

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So everyone always recommends and recognizes that Notre Dame name and always knows, Oh, tell me more about that and I get to educate them on the type of program that we have, which is classically architectural based but doesn't limit you to classical architecture. It's pretty cool. You get to share that experience with employers whenever I talk to them.

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That's awesome. I'm a tour guide on campus and I plug it on every tour. Stalking the Notre Dame School of Architecture Instagram. The work the students do is stunning.

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Oh, absolutely. I follow them all the time. I'll say that the work that students produce is incredible and it does get recognized, but it is really, really incredible what what some students get to produce.

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Also kind of referencing back to what you mentioned, it is a pretty classical architecture education that you get here, but you also in your intro highlighted that you were a Sustainability minor, which is kind of a new and more upper coming field. So how have you seen, you know, that more modern aspect of the Notre Dame education with that Sustainability minor or maybe what you're doing now, how you were able to tie that classical education with the new?

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Absolutely. Here is an actual claim to fame. As I say it. I was the first architecture student to graduate with a minor and sustainability. The program had started while I was in school, but it was the first time you could actually graduate with that minor. And I am very proud to say that I was the first and the only in my class to take that on. It was excellent. I got to take classes across programs. I had a marketing class, I had a business class, I had a history class. It was an excellent program to sort of bridge all what I considered a really awesome education. It felt like general studies, but amazingly focused on how you can apply sustainability in more ways than one in architecture.

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And I'll say that it was definitely modern. It highlighted things and issues that I just had not really thought of. Yes, so it is a traditional program that we draft and we water color. We use that sort of art and artistic ability, but seeing and really being able to dive into that Sustainability minor and pairing it together, I used my Sustainability minor and that Capstone Project to explain why I designed the building and used that program. So it was a super cool exercise and I'd say that professionally it was a great precursor to being able to not really just put the blinders on and design one thing at a time. One decision can impact a multitude of things going on in the building and how users use it and how the owner wants to use a building. I'm so glad that that program has taken off because it was an excellent, an excellent opportunity and I really, really enjoyed it.

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So what skills have you learned at Notre Dame that you're seeing in your work, whether that be technical and the type of buildings you're designing now? Or it could be general soft skills. How do you feel that Notre Dame really prepared you to work where you are now?

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Absolutely. So I have taken a very interesting path career wise, which I'm sure that we'll go over, but it's been a good, a lovely direct path. But if you believe it or not, I am currently now working on restaurants, which is not something that we quite touch upon. I will say that a fun thing is that I do get to have the honor of working with Chick fil A. So that is that's the client. But being able to to work in groups, so thinking about my education, while I'm not handcrafting and I'm not watercoloring every skill on evaluating the building space, setting timelines, it really is kind of like building upon those soft skills.

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Yes, I'm not watercoloring and okay, maybe things are a little bit different. However, I'm still getting a prompt. I have very clear directions from the client on what I can and cannot do. I have rules and it's a puzzle that I have to solve and I really treat a design prompts even in studio as, okay, this is the problem and I just have to find a solution. I'm very logical and I'm artistic in some sense, but I was not creating those beautiful images that the School of Architecture posts online. But I was in my mind creating things that were logical and make sense and, you know, honors function and beauty. And so I was really was using the skills that Notre Dame taught me on here's an issue, there are very strict rules and what is the solution? And that is the exact same format that I use every time I get a new project or a request from my client. It's here's the problem, but I have a bunch of rules. How can I creatively solve this problem? Because you can't just always say no, you have to find an answer. And so being being forced to sort of go

through that repeatedly and say, here's the problem, here's the question and then looking at how everybody else answered that same question, it was just a really good exercise, and in, you know, thinking outside the box and being able to solve problems for clients.

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So you've highlighted how maybe Notre Dame helped you with the skills. Did you have maybe any experiences, internships or things along those lines during your time at college that have kind of helped prepare you? Did Notre Dame help prepare you for those internships? I know internships with architecture sometimes vary across the board of how those work. So I'd love to hear a little bit about your experience there.

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Architecture internships are definitely difficult. And there's been ebbs and flows when it comes to when firms can even afford to pick up an intern. The days of unpaid internships are over. You know, you can't just not pay people. You have to bring them on as part time team members or full time team members. But I was lucky enough to get an internship when after my Rome year. So my third, fourth and fourth year, I did get to intern with a firm back in my hometown. And I'll say that it's using that, you know, not really the Notre Dame connections, but also the connections that you have.

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It's always someone that knows someone, being able to talk about Notre Dame, and everybody is so fascinated by that name. We recently bought a house and the owner was an architect and I told him where I went to school and he says, Wow, there's not a lot of you. It's pretty incredible that I got to meet another architect from Notre Dame. We are so small and I'm lucky that our name carries so much name. I'm also lucky to be good at what I do, but it does help that I've been able to go to where I got to go and, you know, the internships that I had, they prepare me in different ways. While I wasn't producing construction documents and helping these people go to permit. And I wasn't, you know, designing necessarily, but my responsibilities was very tailored on the business end. So I got to understand how you put proposals together. What experience would it be more important for when you submit for proposals for certain organizations? And so for me, being organizationally focused and loving that type of stuff, I was able to enjoy looking at designs and maybe we really need to use this photo and describe the project in this way because it caters to the work we want to do for this client.

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So college and using those internships while I was learning the design and how to put buildings together at school, I was learning the business side in my internship. So by the time I graduated, I had a very clear understanding of, okay, this is the fun stuff and this is other fun stuff, but it's, you know, owning a firm is very different. I would have not known as a 17 year old going into college, what it took to work in an architecture firm. But I was able to pull pieces from that internship and what I was learning at Notre Dame to eventually figure it out.

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Kind of touched on this one, which will bring us to one of more more final ish questions here. You're 17 year old thinking about going to college or maybe you are one of our admitted students coming to Notre

Dame as an intended Architecture major. What advice would you have for someone who's coming to Notre Dame or applying to Notre Dame as an Architecture major?

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I will preface by saying that I had no idea that I wanted fully 100% was going to commit as an architecture student. I wanted to go to Notre Dame so badly that I said, I will figure it out. But I loved architecture and I loved buildings and I loved drawing and I loved being creative. So I had a feeling that it could fit. And credit to Father Bulleen, who gave the presentation, as a first year, you get to tour all the schools and listen to the talks. And I was sitting there with my parents and he says, Listen, it's okay that you might not know all of this and I was like raising my hand really mentally because I'm thinking, I only picked a famous architect that I knew because I wasn't trained as an architecture before. So immediately my fear of not knowing anything was completely subsided because he told us that we can teach you all of this. You just have to commit to doing the work. I had different focuses because Notre Dame is truly an experience. Now the education competes with the best of the best, so that's a given.

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My advice is don't let that fear of not knowing a lot about your field stop you because here I am an architect who's worked for great firms. Really, they're great work and wide variety, and I have no idea about anything related to the field of architecture, when I was 17 years old, nothing. I had never set foot in an architecture firm. You know, you can learn it all, so don't let that fear stop you. And if you're worried about going to Notre Dame and you're worried about being far from home, you know, as a Hispanic, it was tough to leave home. We grew up in the desert, there's, it's just very different. You're going to Notre Dame, but you can find what you love to do, think about what you love to do, and you will find people who also like to do those things.

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You can make it whatever you want it to be. I can't play an instrument very well, but I love the band, so I the first opportunity I saw to be a band manager, I took it. And I loved football and I loved going to games, and so I got in my mind a perfect holistic experience of being able to enjoy football games, but being to being able to go to practice with a band. I had such a great time that I got to do homework while listening to them practice halftime. It was just an absolutely excellent experience. And then I got to go to Rome.

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So don't be afraid that you don't know everything going into. Everybody else might know everything, but don't look at them. Don't worry about them. You'll you can learn it. You. You'll be able they'll give you all the tools. They have everything. Ask questions and just like go for it. Because I wanted to go to Notre Dame and I thought architecture would be kind of cool. And it's completely, absolutely worked out. I was interested in it and they taught me everything that I needed or gave me the tools to ask those questions when I got into the professional world and really, I was not stressed at all that I was in the wrong place. I didn't think I was in the wrong place and I never thought that I had picked the wrong major because I they just did an excellent job and I found, you know, my people. It's been great.

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One final question for you. You've now come to Notre Dame. You're here. You're in your third, fourth, fifth year of the architecture program. What advice would you have for those current students who are maybe getting close to their own post-graduate life?

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Oh, it's it's coming. There's nothing you can do. As much as I wanted to stay on campus and go to a dining hall and have, you know, just such an awesome schedule. It was a shock. I you know, I was able to move back home. I didn't have a job. I will say that I did not have a job offer when I graduated. It took me four months to find a job, but I wanted to be in my hometown. And it worked out that I, I found a position there. You know, it's it's definitely daunting. It's also scary. You're surrounded by people who are incredibly talented, and it doesn't mean that you're not talented, it's just, you know, you look to your left and there's the valedictorian. You look to your right and they have a 3.9. And I'm like, That's not me.

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But hey, you did everything that they did. And you have to just tell yourself, you just have to think about what it is that you like to do, what your strengths are. It sounds so almost cliché to be like, think about, you know, evaluate yourself. But really, you know, think about the work that you want to do and don't don't get too overwhelmed by everybody else's path because everyone is going to get to a different spot. Two of you aren't going to have the same job. So you really just focus on what is it you want to do. It will eventually work itself out, but spend some time thinking about the type of work you want to do. Not everybody is going to go into high end residential homes and take that awesome job in New York. Not everyone's going to do that. A few of you all might, but don't get too overwhelmed by other people's path. Listen to people getting job offers and being like, Gosh, that's cool. Maybe talk to them about how an interview went for your own experience.

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But I was not the one with the most job interviews. I was certainly not the ones with any offers When I graduated. Four months after that, I did get a job offer, worked well, and I had another job and I've moved cities a couple of times and everything has gotten better. Every move has gotten better. So don't get too stressed out. You know, look at your neighbor and say, all right, they're doing great. Ask them questions about their interview, but don't don't look in the mirror and be like, how come I don't have an interview? You're going to find that you're going to find that niche. You just have to think about what it is that you want to do.

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So don't don't stress too hard about it. It is very stressful. But just knowing that everyone else feels that pressure, even the person with three job offers, just there's you know, there's solidarity in everybody feeling overwhelmed. But there is a path and you're going to figure it out and use use that Notre Dame alumni if you have questions. I'm always open for people to ask questions because I did not take a very traditional Notre Dame student path after graduation, in my opinion. And I'm still an architect and I still still got it done. I'm still licensed and things are going really well. So graduating is a big enough accomplishment. Don't don't brush that one off because completing your degree is still pretty cool.

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Well, that's all the time that we have for today. Thank you so much, Rebekah, for your time. And thank you, listeners, for joining us today for another episode of College Bound. We hope you've enjoyed getting to hear just one of the many perspectives about what your time at Notre Dame could look like. Come back next week for another insightful experience from a Notre Dame alum and make sure you listen to all past episodes of college bound on Spotify, Apple, or wherever you listen to your podcast.

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That's all for today, Go Irish and see you next time.