



Q&A Alex Baidjurak, Affil.AIRAH

Ecolibrium breaks bread with the reigning winner of the AIRAH Future leader Award.

Ecolibrium: When did you first decide you wanted to be a mechanical engineer, and how did you get to where you are today?

Alex Baidjurak: I grew up dreaming of designing the next red-hot sports car for Ferrari! I certainly never expected

to work in the built environment, but had come to appreciate the great opportunities out there from my job-hunting experience.

After my first internship in project management, I decided that design was still my main interest, so I searched for

the right place to work as a mechanical engineer, and that was when I landed my final internship – by approaching Arup.

In the last 10 years at Arup, I have been honing my craft in engineering as part of some world-class projects like the Kinghorn Cancer Research Institute, the ASB Bank North Wharf development and am now delivering the Quay Quarter Young and Loftus Precinct as lead mechanical engineer and multi-disciplinary design manager.

Playing to my strengths and being open to all opportunities that come my way has largely influenced where I am today.

Eco: How would you characterise your approach to work? What are the fundamentals to your philosophy and process?

AB: My approach usually involves brainstorming, research and consultation with others before setting an achievable goal. I have learned the path to success is being organised, breaking complex problems down into bite-size chunks, and allowing contingency for the unexpected.



ASB North Wharf in New Zealand is one of Alex Baidjurak's favourite projects on which he's worked.



Alex with A.G.Coombs strategic director Bryon Price, F.AIRAH, at last year's AIRAH Awards presentation dinner.

I hold a long-term focus while executing each step of my plan with unrelenting determination.

Fundamental to my philosophy is it takes the right mix of skills from a diverse team to solve complex problems, so collaboration and open communication are important to align people behind a common goal. With healthy relationships, the right resources and time, we can achieve anything.

Eco: Do you have a checklist you always follow at the start of a project?

AB: Yes, we have the Arup Intranet Project Plan and the various checklists behind this, which can be applied on almost any project. These processes actually enable us to remain commercially sustainable in order to have fun solving complex problems in the future.

Eco: Are you open to new ideas, or are the old ways the best ways?

AB: Yes, new ideas present new challenges, which is what I thrive on.

I remember early in my career people telling me, "This is the way we have done things for 30 years", while their actual results weren't very good. I remember thinking these people have not learned at all from the past, so will continue failing in the same way. Reflecting on my own failures has been important to guide me forward.

Eco: What are your favourite projects you've worked on and why?

AB: A wise man once told me that every project has its own unique challenges, which can be measured by the following three criteria:

- quality of the technical solutions



Alex developed genuine, lasting relationships from his time working in ASB North Wharf.

- the commercial sustainability of the venture for all stakeholders, and
- developing genuine, lasting relationships.

For me, the ASB North Wharf project achieved positive outcomes in all three measures, so it would be my favourite to date.

Eco: Whom do you admire and why? Do you have a mentor? Do you gain any satisfaction from mentoring others?

AB: I grew up admiring Michael Jordan's determination and work ethic, which often translated into high performance, especially in "clutch time", with his game-winning buzzer-beating shots. Later in his career, MJ became known for making his teammates better and by putting them in the best position to score, which is why I take a collaborative approach to design.

Upon becoming a graduate at Arup, I was interested to understand the business and culture better and also to ask for guidance, as making the transition from study to the workplace was quite daunting for me.

With support from an organising committee, I developed and ran a bottom-up "knowledge mentoring" program for junior staff for several years. This experience was satisfying to know

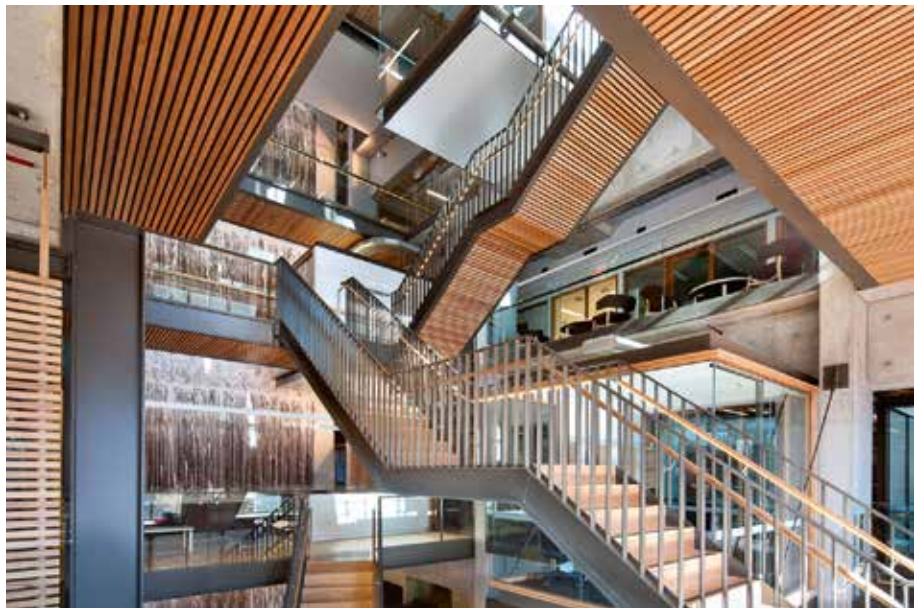
I could make a positive contribution to Arup by delivering on an initiative.

Mentoring remains a staple of the Arup culture in various forms, with a formal top-down program. I have a number of mentors around the industry and within Arup. Learning from experienced people is always interesting, and provides an opportunity to get a second opinion on all sorts of issues such as career development.

I also mentor junior staff, as it is satisfying sharing my experience with others, being a sounding board for their ideas and seeing them develop.

Eco: Are there interesting, funny or quirky facts you could share with us about your work and what you do?

AB: Our Sydney office has recently been refurbished, so we now have a collaborative Lego pit table within our café. Staff are encouraged to have meetings there and use Lego



Alex worked on the world-class Kinghorn Cancer Research Institute.

as a visioning tool, not just to harness fidgeting power. Personally, I like to escape to the Lego pit with my afternoon

coffee sometimes simply to free my mind while my I am probably working out real design challenges in my subconscious.

Eco: What advice do you have for emerging engineers who wish to follow in your path?

Ab: Try to understand who you are, your values and what you enjoy doing. This may not be all apparent at first, but keep an open mind and you will know in time. Then, the easy part is finding somewhere you can do it and get on with it.

Eco: What's the most important lesson you've learned working at Arup?

AB: As the path to success relies on teamwork, relationships are as important as the technical solutions to make the journey enjoyable and rewarding for all.

Eco: What's next for you, and what are your goals for the future?

AB: In the short term, I am focused on the successful delivery of my current projects. I have some ideas that I would like to explore in developing the Arup business. I will continue to take on big challenges, with an open mind and determination to succeed.

Eco: Describe yourself. What are your defining characteristics?

AB: I like to dream big and enjoy developing strategies for success first.



His dream growing up was to design Ferraris. Rather, Alex has turned his hand to high-performing buildings.

Collaborating with a good team to get things done in an organised, efficient way is satisfying. While planning and being organised is important, it's the results I am after that energise me.

Eco: If I wasn't a mechanical engineer, I'd be a ...

AB: Some kind of entrepreneur.

Eco: Do you have hobbies or diversions?

AB: I play indoor volleyball competitively for my club, and beach volleyball on the weekends.

Eco: My most valued possession is ...

AB: I value experiences and memories more than anything tangible, so I would say memories of a week in Paris with my wife and our wedding day would be up there.

Eco: Tell us something about yourself others might not know.

AB: I love painting and drawing, so when people visit our place they often don't believe I created all the artwork.

Eco: In five years I'd like to be ...

AB: A part of some ground-breaking scientific or healthcare project that really makes a positive difference in the world. ■



Memories of his Paris honeymoon are something Alex values highly.

Would you like to know more?

The AIRAH Future Leader Award is sponsored by A.G. Coombs.

Nominations for the 2015 AIRAH Awards open June 29.

For more info, go to www.airah.org.au