

At 101 Years: Rochester Architects... Where We Live & What Our Drafting Tables Look Like in 2020...



Introduction: Reflecting

With our Spring Survey we have attempted to thread a needle, aiming our camera from well above your desks to take a snapshot of what an architectural designer looks like in 2020 – just 101 years after the formation of AIA Rochester. You would not find any women in that 1919 founding-meeting daguerreotype and surely no nonwhite people. The influences on their designs would have been largely European. Their own surroundings primarily agricultural with farmland starting in most directions just several miles from Center City Rochester, and their “desks” would have in fact been drafting tables.

What does our own design footprint tell us about what we should be designing for clients?

1919...2020...101 years after the founding of AIA Rochester...and one year after our successful 100th Anniversary 2019 Celebration....2020 had a lyrical sound to it.

The positive connotations of clear and insightful “20-20 vision” launched a thousand graphics and clichés. Unlike the images that plagued the turning of the millennium clock from 1999 to 2000, we did not see the “gloom and internets-crashing-to-the-ground” motifs.

In fact, there was a general optimism in many of our business and social circles.

So strong that even as we moved in literally one week from “normalcy” ... to 75% staffing...to 50%.... to.... “Hey, you all need to go home”, the focus of our *Spring Survey* stayed roughly the same. Shifted. But still not about the pandemic, but about you as designers.

We wanted to take a snapshot of what it means to be a designer in upstate New York in 2020. Our goal is to take those insights and biases, share them, and next – and “next” is still to come – use that creativity and knowledge to offer the community better design services.

Consequently, these was almost a purposeful banality to *Survey #1*. We limited the number of questions to reflect our limited attention spans, and with everyone seemingly having recently received degrees in epidemiology, we limited mention of COVID-19.

We asked, “Where do you live?”; ... “Where do you work in your home? ”;.....“What is the broadband capacity there?”;.... When you are exhausted can you go for a refreshing walk?;.... And, finally, “What are your initial impressions and expectations of working remotely?” ...Frankly, we forgot – refreshingly? – to ask your gender.

We very happily received 59 responses. (For those of you who have not taken the survey, we welcome your input. It paints a better historical picture of 2020, and it will steer *Survey #2*. [TAKE SURVEY](#))

June 16th -- PLEASE MEASURE THE CURRENT WIDTH AND HEIGHT OF YOUR CURRENT WORKSPACE, AND TAKE A PHOTO TOO. Email it to lbhewitt@aiaroc.org

YOUR REFLECTIONS/OPINION:

DEMOGRAPHICS

1. Is your home in a rural, suburban, or urban setting?
Suburban – 37

Rural - 13
Urban - 9

2. Does your home/remote-work environment have a preexisting office space or area designated for work?
Yes - 38
No - 21

3. If not, where do you generally set up your workstation?
Kitchen (5)
Dining table (6)
Living room (6)
Hallway
Family room
Basement workbench

4. Do you have a reliable and robust internet connectivity?
Yes - 53
No - 3
Varies - 3

5. Is your neighborhood walkable ... and/or by car conveniently located near most necessary goods and services?
Yes - 41
No - 9
Walkable - **yes**, good/services - **no** --- 9

We have broken answers for Question #6 into the following categories: *clearly positive*, *somewhat negative*, and *neutral*.

6. What are your initial impressions and expectations of working remotely?
- Our firm has been very successful at it, and we have near full capability as compared to the office.
 - Works well actually.
 - It's not as difficult as anticipated. Wish I was better prepared.
 - If you can discipline yourself, its great!
 - This can work long term with occasional office visits to a shared workstation or mobile touch down work area. team meetings can all be handled via web-based collaboration tools
 - I have been doing it for years, so it is not a problem.
 - It turned out to be more feasible than I initially thought - mostly thanks to the technology
 - I enjoy it, the solitude and flexibility. But I do like to mix up going to the office and need to make sure to connect with people (virtually), outside of my family, on a regular basis.
 - As a service provider to essential functions and construction projects, our goal is to be able to maintain the existing level of production and service to clients with minor modifications to the mode of delivery shifting to digital (documents and meetings) Which has been the trend for transfer of information for a long time now. Working for a large firm we were setup with IT infrastructure to allow this transition to happen almost seamlessly.
 - We were prepared as a firm for this so getting set up and able to work from home was easy. Without a space for working remotely it has been a little difficult, but I do not mind working from home. I

think this has proven we are resilient, and able to adapt quickly; similar to how our job requires us to work under normal conditions.

- I have been doing it for 17 years and expanded twice.
- Its fine. I have been doing it for over 5 years now...
- Disliked it at first, mainly because my 3 children are home with their schoolwork. Now I enjoy it and would prefer to work from home possibly 2 days a week.
- It has gone better than expected. I feel like I have maintained my ability to work efficiently. I think a lot of it has to do with having a separate office/workspace.
- I don't mind working from home. It was very difficult to work with my team to try to get Construction Documents out for a very large project, and I am still somewhat new to this firm. Other than that, it has been somewhat nice!
- It been great.
- More productive. Fewer interruptions
- Started off slow, taking more breaks but finding that ok and work longer.
- With corporate VPN in place, it is generally good; albeit, file transfer can be slow.
- I'm in favor of a mix of home/office environment for work.
- It's definitely doable and has its benefits. More communication and meetings with video conferencing have proved helpful.
- Easier to manage personal time and work time
- More efficient / less interruptions
- Successful and productive
- I enjoy remotely working as it gives more time with my children. There is better communication between team members using Microsoft Teams to quickly touch base with one another. Also, better concentration as I don't have the distractions around the office.
- Seem to get more done. Comfortable with virtual meetings in various platforms - actually more efficient as we can meet without driving distances to projects. After two months I have a better idea of what I need for a home office and would almost prefer splitting time with home and office
- Initially communication was slightly awkward, but through TEAM chats and phone conversations communication was better. Although it takes more intention to communicate the details because there is less in person interaction.
- My transition to working from home was seamless. I had no issues with internet connectivity or conf. call/video-call mtgs.
- I love it.
- This will get old soon.
- Many distractions/interruptions. Better snacks & music. Am using a laptop, so miss a real keyboard and 2 large monitors. Video meetings/Webex working reasonably well. Harder to mentor younger staff.

- What I thought might be somewhat difficult has become very difficult.
- I will miss the one-on-one social aspects and intensive collaboration with colleagues, and expect that my brain will slowly dissolve...
- I find it difficult due to the lack of resources and quick interaction with others.
- It has had its opportunities and its challenges. Opportunities: no commute time so can start working sooner and work later. Challenges: not having all office resources at my disposal.
- With corporate VPN in place, it is generally good; albeit, file transfer can be slow.
- Extra emphasis on communication is needed, harder to focus, miss seeing my co-workers
- I expected it to be easy – forgetting all of life’s distractions. Those midday thoughts of, "Oh I need to fix this or don't forget to do that"....and remembering to focus and prioritize on work
- Temporary
- Lack of communication, too many distractions, no commuting– time saving
- Less productive, change was bad for my mental health....like saving gas
- Challenging but workable
- I would most definitely miss the daily social 'contact' with my colleagues beyond the social-networking aspect. Additionally, I suspect that we will achieve a greater degree of maturity in our communication with one another along with a significant loss of meaningful collaboration.
- I am finding it easier than I thought with WebEx and Zoom meeting. I do miss my coworkers and the interactions of an office environment.
- Works out for the short term....need to have team together to be able to collaborate and coordinate design.
- I am self-employed, and so I have been working remotely since last year.
- I've been doing so for more than ten years. Works well with the right software.
- Aside from any added distractions, not much has changed except some variation to the processes.
- The ergonomics are worse than my office environment. I need to put more intentional thought into improving this now that my time in this location is so much higher than normal.
- It seems to be working well. Certainly, people seem more inclined to collaborate, others are more difficult to get a hold of. I do think it's ultimately unsustainable to be totally remote for our industry.
- Biggest challenge is balancing working remotely (from home) with spouse also working from home and having two young children at home.
- Isolating and difficult to sit all day, but technology has made it effective, and we have not seen much inefficiency because of it.
- It is a viable alternative.
- For me no change because I work at home, but my wife say it a lot different and somewhat inconvenient. I get more work done since less distractions than in the office.

- Prefer face-to-face, but zoom meetings work well
- Interpersonal interactions are better face-to-face