



Rada Doytcheva Interviewed by ONE WORLD Magazine, Independent International News Magazine, publication in English language, highlighting the achievements of notable Bulgarians living in the US and around the world

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**Question 1: Rada, you “inherited” the architecture profession from your father, but is there more to it?**

Still, my main reason for becoming an architect remains my father arch. Kiril Doytchev, HFAIA. In my memories as a child and adolescent I recall watching him travel for hospital projects throughout the country and even outside the country – as far as Vietnam during the war, to build hospitals. I was watching him being the respected man in the center of large groups of people talking about projects. I was witnessing his tenacity – at tough presentations where his big ideas were challenged and defended. And his tenacity to be out there, in the field, building these projects, resolving design and construction problems, forging ahead to serve people as an architect. When he walked into a room, people would stand up. Government officials would invite us in respect and tour us around. It was a very inspiring time.

Another reason for me to become an architect – was the love for travel, history and seeing the world, and architecture plays a main part of it, goes hand in hand.

**Question 2: Rada, you live and work in Chicago, well known “capital” of architecture. Do you have a favorite building or structure?**

I will have a never ending love affair with Chicago. I can talk for hours about buildings, neighborhoods, the modern movement, and the development of the city after the war, the revival we are experiencing in the last 20 years, etc, etc... But my biggest fascination is with the modern movement – with Mies van der Rohe’s work – before the war in Europe and after the war, him coming to the US as a messenger of modernity. His story rings a bell with my father’s history of an architect who studied in Germany during the war, but came back to Bulgaria where he did some of the first International Style buildings after the war, and later in the 70ies – the first modern UNESCO funded Research Complex in Sofia.

So Chicago’s Mies van der Rohe’s buildings are my favorites – starting with IBM plaza (where RADA Architects first office was located). A quick second best for me is the Bertrand Goldberg Marina City, just steps away from IBM building - a majestic landmark on the river, a monument to the power of city living (was the first building in the 60ies to bring high rise living to the otherwise mostly administrative downtown).

**Question 3: Dr. Doytcheva, what is the most enjoyable and what is the most challenging part of your work?**

The best part of my work is that it is creative – from dealing with the smallest detail to designing for the big picture. It is contagious with the feeling of fulfilment - when solving problems, and continuously inspiring, as it gives more people better opportunities.

The most challenging part of my work as an architect in the US is that it comes with a lot of time spent on preparing excessive documentation and time consuming project management. In the last decades of architecture

practice in the US, the architect's traditional role as a leader and best advisor to the client/owner has been eroded. I am spending a lot of time in the last years to lead change in this regard.

**Question 4: What inspires you and how do you find inspiration every day - for project after project?**

My inspiration comes with my methodology, with the nature of my approach to assignments, dry as it may sound. Exploring the site conditions, the adjacent buildings and spaces, the neighborhood, the people that will occupy the building, the history of the area – all of this shapes where I go from there. For instance, at Chicago State University– the Childcare Education Building I designed has an open door and orientation to the neighborhood more, than to the campus. It is just one “pawn”, building block in the chessboard of the campus, but a game changer for the local community.

As every project has different environment and givens, it is easy to find inspiration for each one. There is plenty of inspiration, especially as you move away from the mere project technical aspect, but dig into the human part of it.

Another “inspiration” booster is the relentless drive to bring an idea or a project to closure, so that the documents can be developed. And it is tough, as there are a lot of people involved to move forward together. Also the architect has to defend an idea, and has to be able to make it feasible to execute and be built within a reasonable budget.

**Question 5: Tell us about your recent work, what is “on the boards” now and in the nearest future?**

Most of my work now is concerned with the “Public Good: the improvement of life for communities, connecting people and neighborhoods, bringing opportunities where there were none before - hence our firm's motto: BETTER LIVES, BY DESIGN.

A good part of my current work deals with improvement of workplace environment - in the Cook County Administrative buildings. Cook County is one of the largest in the US (and home to Chicago). The ability to bring standardization to the variety of work settings translates into efficiency. The overhaul of old thinking – the change from numerous offices and cubicles – to open, filled with light work spaces – all of this stimulates and empowers.

Another project that would affect people's daily life is the Illinois Medical District Pedestrian Bridge Building. In an “up and coming” urban area, home to massive hospital institutions and colleges of the West side – my project will create the missing link. The million plus visitors a year will be able to connect across the expressway in a semi covered bridge, full of shops and gardens – where they can be protected from the weather, but also meet with other people and connect to the transit system. One of my inspirations for this project was the covered Bridge in Lovech in Bulgaria, as well as the Ponte Vecchio in Florence.

Improving people's lives in medical facilities has sometimes stopped at perfecting the patients' environment. But there are hundreds of thousands of doctors, nurses and other staff whose working conditions have historically taken a back seat to the design goals of architects. My work for Toledo ProMedica Hospital Heart Rhythm Center makes this evident – the medical environment needs to be stimulating and be “humanized” for staff as well. Similar would be the effect at the University Hospital for University of Illinois, where I am completing a project right at this moment – creating a new setting for the public and workspaces for visitors, patients and staff.

What is coming up for the year ahead are also a series of projects for improving other spheres of urban environment: the overhaul of high rise residences for elderly people – a part of a massive program done by the Chicago Housing Authority; bringing new life to an Urban Park Field/Community House - McGuane Park in Bridgeport; completing in construction laboratory projects for Superior Graphite, a multinational company stationed in Chicago; redesigning public spaces in several Chicago downtown high-rise buildings - bringing modernity and more opportunity for community life. Continuing is the work (now for 17 years) at Chicago O'Hare Airport on improving structures around the airport for sound insulation, as the airport traffic (and noise) is growing every year.