

SPOTlight

April 17th



Tina Li
Bialek Environments

1. We have seen several articles in the last few weeks talking about the future of the workplace post Covid-19. They seem to focus on “elbow room” and less density.

What is your opinion about some of the solutions companies and design firms are exploring? What do you think they get right and what are they missing?

The first solution isn’t necessarily the best. Employees aren’t going to return to work just because everyone has an enforced imaginary bubble of personal space. These initial suggestions lack feasibility. The articles are evolving but still focus on less density: staggered return, working in shifts. Most point out the necessary procedural changes such as better air filtration and daily sanitizing; however, they are missing the human element. Foremost for employees is to feel safe in their workplace. In order for that to happen, people need clarity on how to prevent spread of the disease. A lot can be learned from the places in the world where coronavirus is under control and business is “as usual.” I don’t believe that the open office will die. If we have learned anything from quarantine, it’s that people want choice; even WFH is not desirable when it’s not your choice. The biggest challenge now is designing to impact behavior (i.e. respecting personal space, encouraging hygienic practices) and shifting workplace culture (i.e. stay home if you’re feeling ill, wearing masks is normal rather than a cause for anxiety). Design is iterative and I look forward to the next round of ideas to emerge.

2. What would your advice be to young designers weathering their first major financial crisis?

Use this time to hone your skillset and obtain those certifications that have been on your to-do list. These will get you in the door at new opportunities. However, even more important is your network. Stay in touch with your classmates and colleague and more importantly, even those connections from your hobbies. Human connections are what will drive us forward post #social distancing. Don’t lose sight of your passions and they will guide you to reach those career goals.

3. What is important to you at this point in your career?

Working with passionate teammates who care about each other and their work means more to me than the work itself. It’s one of the main reasons why I left my previous job. I would also like to get more involved in the community, both professionally and personally.

4. How has WFH life been for you and your family? Any tips/tricks you have for dealing with some of the struggles?

I have two boys, ages 3 and 5, so WFH life means lots of interruptions and being most productive when they’re asleep. Fact: no one is able to work full time and provide childcare simultaneously. Due to the shelter-in-place orders, we’ve added my mother-in-law to my household to help with the kids; I have to remind myself to be thankful but when it’s been a long day of tantrums, having an added guest in the house to manage makes me question my sanity. Best tip: take a personal day to just enjoy time with your kids. Your mental health will only help your family get through the storm.

5. Was your pursuit of an A&D degree and career the result of an aha moment or a gradual discovery? How did you decide to pursue a career in design?

When I was a high school senior and applying to college, I thought that Architecture would be a great combination of my interests and skills; I enjoyed art and excelled at math. UT Austin’s program builds you up from the fundamentals; I still learned how to hand draft before getting into AutoCAD. UPenn was distinctly opposite from that where we immersed into technology throughout.

I am forever grateful for my architecture education because it taught me how to problem solve and to regularly question “can something be improved?”

After you’ve been working for a while, you may lose sight of that initial fire and passion for architecture and design.

You can reach Tina on LinkedIn at:

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/tina-li-85771a30>

Tina’s work on a Bialek project for the Military Officers Association of American HQ in Alexandria, VA

