

[NEWSMAKER]

Nader Tehrani

BY FRED A. BERNSTEIN

NADER TEHRANI was born in England to Iranian parents and raised in Pakistan, South Africa, Iran, and the United States. He studied architecture at Harvard and the Rhode Island School of Design, and in 1986 he founded the firm Office dA with Rodolphe el-Khoury in Boston; Monica Ponce de Leon joined in 1991. After El-Khoury left in the 1990s and Ponce de Leon and Tehrani dissolved their partnership, Tehrani created the Boston-based firm NADAAA, which has designed schools of architecture at the Georgia Institute of Technology, the University of Melbourne, and the University of Toronto.

But that's not his closest connection to architecture education. Last month, Tehrani, who served as head of MIT's architecture department from 2010 to 2014, was named dean of the Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture at New York's Cooper Union. The venerable institution has been in the news for its controversial decision to charge tuition for the first time in its 150-year history. New York State's Attorney General is investigating the school's financial management. But Tehrani says he plans to focus on academics. He spoke to *RECORD* by phone from Boston.

Thanks for taking the call. You're probably very busy.

No more, no less than on my regular days. **Which are like what?**

I usually get up with the sunrise, which is early this time of year. I run between 4 and 6 miles. I usually bike another 14 or 16 miles. I get into the office about 8:30. I try to block off the first two hours for working independently; then I do round-table meetings with the different teams in the office.

It sounds like NADAAA has a lot of work.

We have some very exciting projects, which have catapulted our practice from a small boutique firm to a much larger animal. But we're trying to keep it to about 40 people.

Will you continue to practice?

The premise of the appointment was to engage a dean who is trying to merge practice and pedagogy in meaningful ways. I don't mean a conventional professionalization of the curriculum, not at all; I mean looking at ways in which academic research can alter the way architects work.



I was told you won't talk about the school's financial situation.

It's not that I won't talk about it; it's just that I don't know anything about it. Simply said, it was not part of my education in the interview process. I've been in this seat for about one week. I will learn more as we go on.

Will the financial problems affect the quality of the program?

Cooper did incredibly well this year in admissions. We did not need to go into the reserve, as it were—we got the top picks that we were after. Meanwhile, there's nothing in my budget that's been compromised. If anything, we've got a healthy discretionary fund.

The incoming students should be quite excited.

What have you learned from designing architecture schools?

You learn that no two architecture schools are the same. Their cultures, their philosophies, their finances vary a great deal. In extreme circumstances, it's almost as if you're comparing a school of agriculture with a school of dentistry. Having said that, there are some common issues. One is that the ideal of one person, one desk is

showing itself to be more and more unaffordable. We're researching alternative studios where scholarship and design get blended in the library, where making and design get blended in the fabrication lab, where exhibition and design get blended in the galleries.

What have you learned from visiting the Cooper Union building?

I had never been to the building before, except for a lecture in the basement. I found it's a great environment in which to learn. The heart and soul of the school is the third-floor design studio; from first to last year, everybody's in that same space.

Is your goal to strengthen the coherence of the school?

I want to maintain the intimacy of Cooper, but I'd also like to foster the productive friction we saw at, say, the Architectural Association when Alvin Boyarsky ran it [in the 1970s and '80s].

Both your former Office dA partners have new posts as deans, El-Khoury at the University of Miami and Ponce de Leon at Princeton. What do you make of that?

It's a great coincidence. But what unites us is that we were educated on the Harvard-RISD axis. My name means "from Tehran," but if you asked me where I was from, I'd have to say I'm from Harvard and RISD. ■

noted**Gehry's Eisenhower Memorial Gets Green light**

After a four-year federal process, the National Capital Planning Commission has approved Frank Gehry's design for the Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial in Washington, D.C. The controversial \$142 million project still has no funding from Congress.

Chicago's Marina City Granted Preliminary Landmark Status

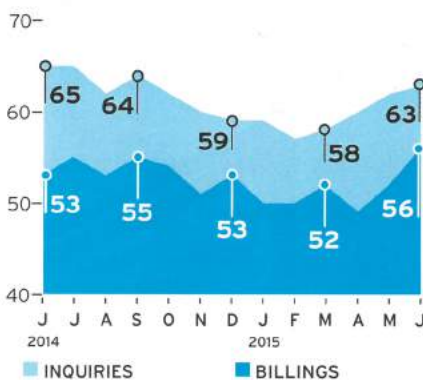
Bertrand Goldberg's iconic Marina City towers in Chicago received preliminary landmark status from the city's landmark commission July 9. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, the towers' owners need to give consent in order to attain full landmark status, protecting its exterior from alteration.

Paris Approves Herzog & de Meuron "Triangle"

Parisian officials have approved a controversial plan to construct a 42-story triangle-shaped tower in the city's Porte de Versailles area. The glass building, designed by Herzog & de Meuron, is the first tower approved in Paris in more than four decades.

Cornell Tech Breaks Ground

The first academic building at Cornell Tech, a \$2 billion campus on New York City's Roosevelt Island, broke ground June 16. The Weiss/Manfredi-designed building is one of three in Phase 1 of the construction stage expected to be completed in 2017.

**ABI Highest Since 2007**

June's Architecture Billings Index (ABI) climbed to 55.7, the highest since 2007, according to the American Institute of Architects. This is due to demand for large projects, including civic, health-care, and education buildings, according to the organization's economists. The new projects index also showed a 1.9-point improvement.