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DESIGNER CAREERS

A degree in architecture doesn't necessarily mean you will end up designing buildings, **John Dagge** writes.

THINK Sydney, and the Opera House springs to mind. Paris can't be separated from the Eiffel Tower and New York has long been defined by the Empire State Building. These structures not only instantly identify the city but also sum up its mood, energy and lifestyle. They're some of the more famous examples of the influence an architect can exert over the look and feel of a city or town.

In ancient Greek times an architect was a master mason, charged primarily with the divine responsibility of constructing great temples for the Greek gods.

Today an architect's focus is on problem-solving, combining the arts, sciences, technology and environmental factors to plan and design intelligent living and working spaces.

"It's a very exciting field to work in," architect Caroline Pidcock said. "I think it's particularly so as we move to address the environmental issues facing us. As we demand solutions for those sorts of issues the role of the architect is going to become even more important."

Continued page 2

Designer careers

From page 1

Pidcock, who also heads the NSW chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, has worked in the profession for 16 years. It appealed to her as a way of combining her artistic interests with a mathematical and scientific background.

"No day has ever been the same, that's what I like about the job," she said. "No one design problem is the same as the next. I love seeing lots of different things and issues and solving them."

"I enjoy working with clients and getting their feedback and it's very rewarding to satisfy them – and to see your designs realised."

Completing a degree in architecture, however, by no means confines you to a mainstream practice.

Architects are increasingly sought after in fields as diverse as urban planning, asset management, environmental design, heritage conservation or even disaster relief programs.

"There is a huge range of the types of careers you can pursue," Pidcock said. "If you spoke to 10 different architects they'd have 10 different backgrounds and stories to tell."

Stephanie Barker is one of those who opted not to limit herself to designing buildings.

She chose to map out entire suburbs instead.

After completing an architecture degree at Sydney University and working in inner-city redevelopments, Barker returned to university to complete her masters in Urban and Regional Planning.

She is now a senior urban planner in the metropolitan development program team for Planning NSW.

"I liked designing houses but I really like designing suburbs," Barker said. "My real agenda is urban sprawl. As an architect I couldn't get involved in that. There is a human service side to this job. With architecture you're often designing buildings as sculpture, as an end in itself, but urban planning is about society, how people live, how they get to and from work."

"I like to be part of the solution rather than the problem. I like having the community as a client and then

you can work for the greater good, whereas if you're working for a corporate client, you're working for the almighty dollar."

With 89,000 new homes to be planned for Sydney over the next 15 years, demand for urban planners is high.

"There is a massive amount of work to be done for the right people," Barker said. "The profession is becoming more valued because people realise you need it. You don't notice urban planning when it is done well, but boy, you notice it when it's done badly."

After Matthew Palavidis finished his architecture studies, which included advanced study in auditory design, he gained work with a Sydney acoustic director.

"Basically my job [as an acoustic consultant] involves all aspects of dealing with noises and vibrations in the building industry and the environmental applications certain developments, such as the construction of a third runway, create," he said.

Palavidis co-founded Acoustic Logic Consultancy eight years ago and has worked on developments including the Woolloomooloo wharf and Bennelong apartments, the CitiBank building and the new Australian Stock Exchange.

"It's a very good field for those with an architectural background to enter because they are used to thinking laterally and it really is an area where architects can apply their design training as well," he said.

Job prospects are also likely to remain strong for some years.

"Acoustic consultancy has been around for a long time, but it is a growing area," Palavidis said. "There is a real shortage of people."

Where to study: The University of Canberra, University of NSW, University of Newcastle, University of Sydney, University of Technology, Sydney all offer degrees in architecture.

Course duration: Architecture degrees involve five years of study.

Other requirements: Graduates must complete two years' on-the-job work experience before they can apply to become a registered architect.