

Military service inspires architectural career

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Andrew Cogar was interested in traditional architecture years before going to work for Peachtree City, Ga.-based architectural firm Historical Concepts.

The Virginia native earned his degree in architecture from the **University of Miami**, which emphasizes the traditional approach to the discipline.

But it wasn't until Cogar joined the Army and was stationed in Germany that he discovered a true taste for traditional architecture. He lived off-base in a traditional German village.

"Everything I had learned in the abstract was there," said Cogar, 43. "Being able to live it was a catalyst for me."

That inspiration led Cogar to take a job with Historical Concepts, where he has progressed from intern to partner to — as of this summer — firm president.

"Cogar's talent and creativity, combined with his vision and tenacity, embody what we care most about at Historical Concepts," said Jim Strickland, the firm's founder and senior principal. "I speak for the entire firm when I say it's an honor to be able to work with him in this new role."

Cogar, a self-described "Army brat" who moved around a lot during childhood, developed an affinity for architecture from an early age.

"I was constantly drawing as a child," he said. "I was always interested in art, engineering and science. Architecture is the perfect blend of all the above."

While enrolled in the five-year undergraduate architecture program at Miami, Cogar also signed up for ROTC, which meant putting off his professional career in order to fulfill a military commitment. But as it turned out, he learned skills during three years of active duty in Europe as a combat engineer and nine years with the National Guard that were readily transferable to architecture.

"There was a decent amount of crossover," he said. "I worked on everything from highway construction to day care facilities to airport runways. I learned a lot about being a construction manager [and] understanding



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Andrew Cogar developed an affinity for architecture at an early age, constantly drawing as a child. Architecture blends his interest in art, engineering and science.

the pressures builders face.”

Nine months of Cogar’s active-duty stint were spent in Bosnia in the aftermath of the war in the former republic of Yugoslavia.

“I ended up getting a mission taking out minefields,” he said.

Cogar said his military experience gave him a leg up when he finished active duty and went looking for a civilian job in 1999. Strickland had served in special forces.

“Of all my interviews, Jim was the only one interested in the military aspect, what I did in the military,” Cogar said. “He valued that leadership experience.”

In 2003, when Cogar was deployed to Iraq during the second Gulf War, he said Strickland was supportive.

“Jim has really paved the way for me, acting as a mentor in all areas of the business,” Cogar said.

Once again, Cogar’s military service proved useful to his professional career. He spent his time working on building projects with Iraqi civilians and foreign contractors.

“It was a lot of stress and hard work, but it was a rewarding experience,” he said.

When Cogar got back from his deployment, Strickland was starting to expand Historical Concepts from a single ownership operation into partnerships. Cogar landed one of those partnerships in 2007 and was given the task of opening an Atlanta satellite office, the firm’s first venture in setting up shop outside of Peachtree City.

“It was a perfect staging ground,” he said. “If anything went wrong with IT, being able to go 45 minutes down the road to have it fixed was perfect.”

Historical Concepts has been a natural fit for Cogar, matching his interest in traditional architecture.

“Our real focus is traditional town planning and classical architecture,” he said. “Nationally, there’s a bit of a void in that.”

Reflecting that focus, Cogar has been involved in designing such projects as a 14,000-square-foot Beaux Arts style mansion in Atlanta modeled after homes found in northern Italy and central Europe; Hampton Island in coastal Georgia, built in the Greek Revival style of an antebellum estate; and an educational campus in downtown Fairburn that houses the small Fulton County city’s administrative offices as well as the Atlanta campuses of Georgia Military College and Brenau University.

“I’m not against modernism,” Cogar said. “What I’m concerned about is how it became so singular, why most architectural schools look down on traditional classic architecture.”

Cogar is also playing a key role in Historical Concepts’ latest venture, a new office in New York City being managed by Principal Elizabeth Dillon. As co-manager of the new office, Cogar now splits his time between Atlanta and Manhattan.

He said the New York office evolved from Historical Concepts starting to land projects in the New York area.

“When we started getting referrals from local builders from Long Island, we knew we could really do something,” he said.

The New York office has been getting so much work, Cogar said, that people are starting to ask whether Historical Concepts will move its headquarters there.

"I never say 'never,'" he said. "But for right now, Atlanta's going to be our hub."

While Cogar has worked on many different projects, he said no single type of architectural design is inherently easier or more difficult to master.

"Each project has its own challenges and its own solutions," he said. "It isn't formulaic. You have to understand the community and the stakeholders."

Indeed, Cogar said, the uniqueness of each project is what keeps the work interesting.

"Architecture is a really neat profession in that it's not static," he said. "It's evolving. It's very rewarding that way."

ANDREW COGAR

Born in: Newport News, Va.

Lives in: Atlanta

Age: 43

Current job: President, Historical Concepts

Education: Bachelor of science degree in architecture, University of Miami

Family: Wife, Amanda; daughter, Edith (Edie)

Hobbies: Sketching/painting, gardening, tennis, brewing beer

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