



Felipe Ornelas, Senior Associate

Engberg Anderson Architects

For Felipe Ornelas, architect at Engberg Anderson Architects, his success stems from giving back to the community that gave him opportunities. Born in Mexico, Felipe's parents brought him to Milwaukee when he was just four years old. Growing up on the south side of Milwaukee, some of Felipe's earliest experiences set the course for the successful career he enjoys today.

When Felipe was twelve years old, he started bussing tables at Frank Monreal's El Matador. Soon promoted to waiter, he would work off and on for the restaurant all the way through college. Around the same time, he also started attending Milwaukee Trade Tech High School where he began to foster a love of architecture. Over the next twenty years, Milwaukee Public Schools and the Monreal family would play a role in Felipe's life that he wouldn't have expected.

While at Milwaukee Trade Tech, Felipe and his classmates had the opportunity to rehabilitate an old, run-down Victorian house into a home for a low income family. Students in the architecture program competed to see whose design would become a reality. Felipe's design was chosen. The rehabilitated family home in Walker's Point was his first lesson in using his career to give back to the community.

After graduation from Milwaukee Trade Tech High School, Felipe began working towards the associates program in architecture at Milwaukee Area Technical College. Balancing his school work load and then a brand new wife and baby, Felipe sought out work opportunities that were deeply rooted in his community. He served as a paraprofessional at the Escuela Vieau School, part of the Milwaukee Public Schools to which he owed his K-12 education. Felipe also worked for the South Community Organization managing properties for low income families. While much of the work was executing new leases and coordinating repairs, Felipe did get the opportunity to stretch his design muscles with some small multi-family redevelopments and renovations - one of the more memorable ones being an old AT&T building near 21st and Mitchell that was converted into loft apartments.

Another opportunity that came up was a chance to redesign the Monreal's booth at Summerfest. At that time, Frank Monreal knew that Felipe, his former busboy turned waiter, was pursuing an architectural degree at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee. When Frank died, the plans to renovate the booth died with him, but Felipe had shown the family his design skills. The next time Frank's wife ran across an architect acquaintance of hers, Keith Anderson, she mentioned the aspiring young architectural student her husband had been working with.

With two and a half years left in finishing his degree, Keith Anderson, founding partner of then Engberg Anderson Design Partnership, brought Felipe in for an interview. That interview turned into an internship with the architectural firm which grew into a full-time position after Felipe finished his degree. Felipe has been with Engberg Anderson ever since and had helped build communities through projects such as designing three clinics for the Sixteenth Street Community Health Center, restoring Milwaukee City Hall, 10+ housing development in Milwaukee and even designing Mis Suenos Restaurant in West Allis, the reincarnation of Frank Monreal's original El Matador.

For Felipe, a successful life means allowing those in your community to share in the ability to have a dignified life and continued opportunities throughout it. By going back to Escuela Vieau School and helping guide the middle school children with their city wide Sim City competition for Mr. Dominguez, talking and counseling at risk inner city youths on behalf of teachers and mentors, tutoring adults trying to obtain their GED/High School Equivalency Degrees and those needing help on ESL and US History who are trying to obtain their US citizenship, and also serving on the local parish board to organize the yearly festival, Felipe continues to give back to his community.

In his career, Felipe still feels the same joy in seeing a design come to life that he first glimpsed when rehabilitating that old Victorian back in high school. Today you can find Felipe working on the latest Engberg Anderson project or at home on the soccer field with ACE on Milwaukee's south side passing on to the next generation the importance of community.