



## 2021 Ones to Watch: Wendi Shafran, FXCollaborative

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Name: Wendi Shafran

Title: Principal

Company Name: FXCollaborative

Real estate associations or organizations that you are currently a member of:

American Institute of Architects (AIA), New York Housing Conference (NYHC), New York State Association for Affordable Housing (NYSFAH)

How do you keep your team motivated despite conflicts and obstacles?

When juggling multiple projects under tight deadlines, it can be easy to get caught up in the challenges of the day-to-day details and to lose a sense of perspective. Making time to take a step back, acknowledge our achievements, and celebrate our accomplishments as a team can help ground our efforts within a broader context. A little humor can also go a long way.

Who was/is your mentor and how did s/he influence/help you in your career?

My first mentor was my high school art teacher. I grew up in an insular religious community, and while I dreamt of being an architect, I had assumed that I would follow a more traditional career path. She introduced me to conceptual art, sculpture, and abstract thinking—and opened my eyes to the world of possibilities. Her encouragement and support helped me realize that architecture was a career path that could be attainable to me.

Favorite quote:

“Fight for the things you care about. But do it in a way that will lead others to join you.” – Ruth Bader Ginsburg

What recent project, transaction or accomplishment are you most proud of?

2020 has been a challenging year, and one which has highlighted some fundamental inequities in our country. At FXCollaborative, our practice has been considering how the events of the past year should inform our design thinking moving forward. We recently completed design proposals for several large-scale affordable housing developments in NYC that have high aspirations and were heavily influenced by the social and health challenges that we as a society are facing. As a lifelong New Yorker, I am deeply invested in our city’s recovery. I am proud of our efforts to further the

dialogue of what it means to design for equity, and of our commitment to re-evaluating past assumptions with the goal of shaping a better future.

How do you contribute to your community or your profession?

Over the past few months, something I have thought a lot about is: As individuals and as part of a collaborative design practice, what is our role as architects in shaping a more equitable future? And how can we leverage our expertise as designers to create spaces which are more inclusive? Aside from the project-based work in our practice, I am actively involved in several industry associations with a focus on housing policy, advocacy, and thought leadership. Our efforts focus on collaborations with stakeholders, government agencies, and communities to raise awareness and formulate a framework for creating high quality affordable housing and thoughtful land use development.

What led you to your current profession?

I've always loved building things—from blocks and Lego to treehouses and snow forts. I began my studies not quite sure what an architect did, but somehow intuitively knowing that I wanted to be one. I grew up in the Hudson River Valley, and like many previous generations of artists, I found inspiration in the majestic landscape of rivers, forests, and mountains. Storm King, an outdoor sculpture park in the area, was a favorite weekend spot. As I wandered around the various installations, I gained an appreciation for some of the more intangible aspects of experiencing a space; scale, site, and relationship to nature—all factors which still inform my approach to design.

Top three things on your bucket list:

I am an avid reader and enthusiastic traveler, and my bucket list includes journeys inspired by a few of my favorite books. Crossing the Drake Passage is high up on the list. I have always been fascinated with Antarctica—its beauty, remoteness, and captivating landscape. There is something about making oneself vulnerable to nature that helps put things in perspective. A visit to the “Middle Earth” of New Zealand and hiking the Appalachian Trail are two others.

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