



2021 Women in Building Services: Amy Swift, EverGreene Architectural Arts

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Name: Amy Swift

Title: Business Development Executive

Company Name: EverGreene Architectural Arts

Real estate associations or organizations that you are currently a member of: Association for Preservation Technology (APT); American Institute for Conservation (AIC); National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC)

How do you contribute to your community or profession?

I am a big advocate of building better pathways for women to get involved in the trades. Representation is important. I'm very petite, and when I was young I didn't see many (or any?) women in construction. I applied for an estimator job with a painting contractor after I graduated high school. He told me to go to college and find a husband, and that construction wasn't for women. Not seeing women like me in the profession, I went on to study architecture, thinking that was the only way I could work with buildings. Over the years I found my way back to the construction side, but it was through good mentors and meeting other women doing the work that got me here.

What books or social media influencers would you recommend to other women?

I've recently been rereading "Primal Leadership: Unleashing the Power of Emotional Intelligence." Too often women are denigrated as being "too emotional" for leadership roles, but emotional intelligence is actually an incredibly powerful skill to hone. I also recently read "The Color of Law" by Richard Rothstein.

Women are a minority in construction, and I think it is fundamentally important to build allyship with other underrepresented groups in our field. As for social media, Sarah Marsom (@sarahmarsom) is a Heritage Resource Consultant shaking things up with her @tinyactivistproject, #dismantlepreservation initiative, and labor equity advocacy. She also posts pics of charming vernacular architecture, and sews cute and colorful banners.

What did you want to be when you grew up?

I was fortunate enough to travel to Italy when I was 13 and see first hand the power of historic places. Being from a small town in Michigan comprised of strip malls and housing developments, that trip really opened my eyes to the world of architecture and great buildings. I've been obsessed with buildings ever since—how they represent our shared cultural heritage, how to adapt them, how to conserve them. My first job in the field was drawing plot plans for a civil engineer in high school, and pounding stakes with their surveying crew. My career has taken lots of turns since then, but the one thing that has remained constant is my focus on and love of buildings.

What led you to your current profession?

Looking back, every step that I have taken in my professional career, no matter how out of place it seemed at the time, has led to where I am now. Currently my role at EverGreene Architectural Arts is business development executive. I love the upfront aspect—working with clients, architects, and GCs to develop and strategize scopes, and win the work for our specialized team of experts to perform. Previously I owned and managed a historic window restoration company in Detroit. My favorite aspect of owning that company was the business end as well. I'm really fortunate that I've found a place where I can focus on the components I really enjoy, in a field that I am passionate about.

In the past year, what project, transaction or accomplishment are you most proud of?

For nearly 10 years I operated my business in Detroit under the vacant husk of the Michigan Central Station. I always viewed the building as a motivational source to inspire and drive the preservation and advocacy work I did in the city. Ford Motor Co. purchased and began renovating the building a few years back, which has been a huge deal in Detroit. EverGreene is restoring 56,000 s/f of decorative plaster work in the lobby, and I recently was able to tour the site and see the amazing work we're doing. I am so excited to be contributing to a company that performs such skilled work, and proud we are a part of so many important building transformations like this all over the U.S!

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

I have been blessed with so many important mentors over the years, but the one that sticks out is Ron Staley, senior VP at The Christman Co. We met 10 years ago when I was a student scholar presenting my Columbia University thesis case study at APT's Victoria Conference. As executive director of Christman's Historic Preservation Group, his guidance and support helped me understand the construction side of preservation. He was a constant supporter of me and my business, and a trusted advisor while that business grew. We even worked on the Michigan State Capitol and Ford Fairlane together. EverGreene has a long history of working with Christman, and I look forward to working with Ron and his team for many more years to come.

What trends will dominate your industry in the coming months?

The uptick in construction activity has definitely put a strain on the field's capacity to execute. I think,

and I hope, this will amplify the efforts and financial support given to recruit and train more young people in construction, especially skilled historic trades. The construction field is a great opportunity to find meaningful and well-paid work, and there are avenues within the field to pursue really niche, skilled trades—like the decorative painting and plaster work we perform at EverGreene, for instance.

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