



2021 Ones to Watch: Diego Rivera, LERA Consulting Structural Engineers

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Name: Diego Rivera

Title: Design Engineer

Company Name: LERA Consulting Structural Engineers

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

Recently, I was awarded the prestigious Hangai Prize by the International Association for Shell and Spatial Structures (IASS) for my most recent research paper on structural optimization, and I was given the honor of presenting my paper at this year's IASS Conference, hosted by the University of Surrey. After some unfortunate delays over the past year due to the pandemic, it was great to finally share my work and my accomplishment with such intelligent individuals from all over the world with similar passions as myself. Importantly, I was so thankful to be a part of the IASS and listen to and connect with such esteemed engineers and researchers that have been so inspiring for me over the past several years. Not only was the conference a rewarding experience in terms of the accomplishment, but it was also a motivational event for my career moving forward.

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

One of my most influential mentors was Dr. Garrett Hall from my alma mater Cal Poly. He helped me understand the vast opportunities within structural engineering and gave me confidence as a young engineer. His encouragements and openness to talk certainly played a key role in helping to get me to the position I am in today.

How do you contribute to your community or your profession? I think different forms of mentorship are essential, especially for those new to an industry. As a first-generation college graduate, I personally benefitted immensely from the guidance of many mentor figures over the past several years, so while I only have very limited experience, I am trying to serve as a mentor for a student with a similar background at Cal Poly. Already, staying connected with him and passing on the lessons I have learned have been incredibly rewarding, so I hope to continue taking mentorship positions as I gain more experience and continue to get more involved in the industry.

What did you want to be when you grew up? I used to dream of working alongside my dad in the kitchen of our family restaurant, The Hungry Fisherman in Morro Bay, Ca. This restaurant was like a second home for me growing up. I aspired to be just like my dad, envisioning a father-son duo in the

kitchen, but obviously, I eventually decided to diversify the family talents. We're very fortunate to have the restaurant still up and running, despite the difficulties the pandemic has brought many of us.

What led you to your current profession? I always enjoyed math and science, so engineering seemed like the natural career choice. I gravitated toward structural engineering, specifically, because I liked the idea of working on large scale projects with immediate, physical impacts on the public. My passion for structural engineering only strengthened as I grew more interested in structure, architecture, and sculpture as significant influences on the quality of our daily lives and as I learned more about pioneers in the structural engineering community, such as Peter Rice and Ted Happold. Among many other things, I find it so fascinating to work on projects of such scale and see how components sometimes come together so intricately and so elegantly. I remember reading a paper, "The Folly of Structures: An Apology for Rigidity" by Bernard Vaudeville, in which man-made structures are described almost like delicate and fragile constructions realized only by calculation (as opposed to the massive stability of a mountain). It's a concept, that I feel, contrasts the more common impression of structure as a giant hunk of concrete and steel, and it is a concept that has kept me intrigued on the design of buildings. It's really all a matter of scale. I am glad to have the opportunity at LERA to work on a variety of exciting projects.

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