

MEET PETER FINSEN

Marketing design

Kat Friedrich



Peter Finsen retired in 2021 after 20 years as executive director of Georgia/C Carolinas PCI and 45 years in the design and construction industry. He refers to himself as a recovering architect and sees his career as a trilogy: architectural design, business development in program and construction management, and marketing the precast concrete industry.

Finsen attended Lake Forest College in Lake Forest, Ill., where he was inspired to study architecture under Franz Schulze, *Chicago Sun-Times* art and architecture critic. He later earned his master's degree in architecture from the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, interning at firms in Philadelphia and at Perkins+Will in Chicago, Ill.

He took time off from grad school to ski in Aspen, Colo., and returned after school to work for the architectural firm Copeland Hagman Yaw. His first project there involved designing a 3000 ft² (280 m²) passive solar addition to John Denver's home. During this time, he volunteered with an energy design cooperative and helped organize the Aspen Energy Conference, where he met professors from a new degree program at Arizona State University in Tempe, where he pursued a master's degree in environmental planning in solar design.

His professor, Jeffrey Cook, considered grandfather of passive solar design, was hired by the chief architect of the Tennessee Valley Authority on a six-month contract to start a solar design and outreach program when TVA was named Solar Showcase for Federal Agencies during the Carter administration. Cook invited Finsen to join him in this contract. In 1978, Finsen joined the TVA to work on solar design and outreach and conducted seminars in energy design. He developed solar energy programs, helped with TVA exhibits at the 1982 World's Fair in Knoxville, and conducted climatic research that led to the publication of the TVA Climatic Data Base, a graphic design tool for nine cities in the Tennessee Valley region that was later adapted by the AIA Research Corp. He also coordinated the TVA Art in Architecture program and taught passive solar design at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.

Finsen moved to Atlanta, Ga., in 1988 to work at Heery International, where he learned the business side of commercial marketing in the architecture and engineering industry. He advanced to senior vice president at 3D/International, then at Jacobs Facilities. While negotiating a position with a joint venture partner firm, he resigned on the morning of 9/11.

The architecture, engineering, and construction industry dramatically changed overnight, and Finsen found himself jobless.

He did some consulting, and at the end of 2001, he became executive director of Georgia/C Carolinas PCI, expecting it to be a short-term position. He stayed 20 years, shaping the marketing and promotion of precast concrete in the region, developing programs such as Precast 101 and collaborating with PCI national. Finsen also helped build a strong network across various organizations.

Initially, Finsen says, he was anxious about the transportation side of the role. "But a 20-year relationship with the likes of Dr. Reid Castrodale and bridge committee chairs like Sherry Jones, Richard Potts, and Jeff White, made for some of the more successful and fondest experiences." Support from PCI's transportation systems managing director, William Nickas, and his predecessor, John Dick, helped the region create strong relationships with the state departments of transportation.

A key initiative during his tenure was the establishment of the Georgia/C Carolinas PCI Prestressed Concrete Economical Fabrication Committee, which brought together industry stakeholders and government representatives to improve the regional precast concrete industry. Finsen was also active with the PCI Foundation, coordinating fundraising events, lecturing at universities, and helping develop grants and curriculum for regional schools, including University of North Carolina at Charlotte, North Carolina State University, Clemson University, the Georgia Institute of Technology, and Kennesaw State University. He was awarded several honors, including PCI Foundation Partner Award, PCI Fellow, and PCI Life Member status.

In 2021, Finsen retired with emeritus status from Georgia/C Carolinas PCI. He and his wife Myrna now live in Rio Verde, Ariz., with views of the Tonto National Forest. **▮**