Q&A with Mona Lemoine, MRAIC

1. Why did you decide to become an architect?

I wanted to do something creative and practical. As a practicing architect, you are always practicing architecture, however, the next project often has a new problem to solve, whether it be a different client and so on. I was also drawn to the theories and ideas that allow us to be creative in our work. The value in understanding that we never stop learning is very important. There is always something new to learn.

2. How long have you been an RAIC member and what do you see as the value of your membership?

I have been a member since 2006. My employer at the time believed it was an important membership for all his interns and architects. I have maintained my membership ever since – even paying for it personally when it wasn’t covered by my employer. I think it’s important to have an advocacy body for the profession.

3. Why do you volunteer for the RAIC?

I have volunteered for various organizations related to my interests since I was a teen. For me, it’s always been about staying connected to people, to community, ongoing learning and gaining expertise related to something I care about or have an interest in. It’s also about giving back. For example, in my teens I volunteered for the Red Cross Water Safety programs and the Life Saving Society of Canada – I was a swimming instructor and a lifeguard in those days. Now, I regularly volunteer on boards related to my community and my culture such as minority French advocacy efforts in Western Canada and / or cultural organizations – staying connected to stay close to my roots and to pass on that culture and pride to my children. It’s for similar reasons that I also volunteer for professional organizations like the RAIC. I like to give and participate in supporting the profession beyond just practicing architecture. As I mentioned above, I think it’s important to have an advocacy body for the profession.

4. What do you find most challenging about working as an architect?

We are creative systems thinkers and like to solve wicked problems. I see challenge as an opportunity. There are so many directions we can go with this profession. Perhaps the challenge is about being intentional with the direction you pick? It can also evolve over time. For example, in my case, I started my career in architectural practice, then I moved to the not-for-profit sector working in education, networking and advocacy focused on advancing sustainability in the built environment, and now I have merged those two careers into sustainability consulting in practice.
I am passionate about engaging and staying on the ever-evolving leading edge of sustainability in order to create a ripple effect through culture and practice, design approach and delivery, ultimately resulting in change within the built environment.

5. Why is this area of advocacy important to you?

The tails end of the latest Conference of Parties, COP26, and the latest IPCC report highlighted the issue that there is a code red for humanity. Working to end the climate crisis means creating a society that is going in the right direction and at the right speed by 2030, a rate of change that will lead to net zero emissions before 2050.

That means halving emissions by 2030 and then halving them again by 2040.

As practitioners in the built environment, we are empowered to create that change. We also have the moral and ethical responsibility to address this in all of our work.

The urban built environment is responsible for 75% of annual global GHG emissions: and buildings alone account for 39%. Eliminating these emissions is the key to addressing climate change and meeting Paris Climate Agreement targets.

We need to think holistically about how our work can address topics such as carbon, climate, health and social justice.

6. What do you think will most change/shape practice over the next five years?

The opportunity and responsibility we hold in addressing topics such as carbon, climate, health and social justice and how it will shape our work and the built environment.

7. What role do you see the RAIC and architects playing in terms of [climate action / TR / procurement reform / etc]

I have the honour and privilege of working with a great group of volunteers as Chair of the RAICs Committee on Regenerative Environments (CORE). I am really excited to be working on the RAIC’s Climate Action Plan (CAP) – focused on education, practice and advocacy. We need all three. There have been a number of events throughout past years to engage and educate the profession on this topic. That work will continue this year and the plan will be released later in 2022. This is also firmly entrenched in the RAICs recently released strategic plan.

8. What do you like to do outside of architecture?

I am a lifelong learner and adventurer. I love to travel - a trip near or far. I have lived, studied, and worked abroad in several countries including Venezuela, Japan, and Chile and have traveled to many more. I am fluent in three languages (French, English and Spanish) and still claim to have Japanese language survival skills. Being immersed in other cultures and languages has taught me to broaden my perspective and motivates me both personally and professionally.
I had the privilege of being an exchange student living with a family in Caracas, Venezuela after high school which kicked off 10+ years of travel and adventure in between my studies. I lived in Japan for 3 years and traveled quite a bit during that time – many trips to Asia, parts of Scandinavia and South America.

I also enjoy long walks, being on or in the water in the heat of summer and skiing in the winter.

9. What advice would you have for those looking to get more involved in advocacy causes related to architecture?

Find something you care about and jump in! Many hands make light work.