

A Collaborative Studio

by James von Klemperer, FAIA RIBA, President and Design Principal, Kohn Pedersen Fox

KPF is a collaborative studio, driven by a group of colleagues who believe that they can achieve the highest level of architecture by working together in search of the best ideas. The firm operates as a meritocracy, where innovative design comes from talented staff at all levels of experience. The wisdom of senior professionals is balanced with the enthusiasm of youth.

Our staff come from a wide variety of backgrounds, representing many cultures and 51 countries. This broadens our vision and allows us to make buildings and places that serve the diversity of the populations who use them.

The firm is committed to do its part to redress a historical gender imbalance within the profession and achieve gender equality. KPF promotes a work environment that is fully supportive of all. Such goals lead us to move beyond the concept of inclusion to the more holistic condition of belonging.

The excellence of our staff is strongly exemplified by our outstanding senior women leaders. The women profiled in this article – Jill N. Lerner, Hana Kassem, Marianne Kwok, Laura King, Rebecca Cheng, and Angela Wu – represent the highest level of talent and professionalism. They provide essential leadership for our practice across the globe. They embody the best of KPF’s culture, in their commitment to quality architecture, their dedication to improving the public realm, and their mentorship of junior staffers. I spoke with each recently about their work and career-defining projects.

About KPF.

Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates (KPF.com) is one of the world’s preeminent architecture firms, providing architecture, interior, programming and master planning services for forward-thinking clients around the world. Its extensive portfolio includes a wide range of projects from office and residential buildings to civic and cultural spaces to educational facilities. Driven by individual design solutions, rather than a pre-determined style, the mission of the firm is to create buildings and places of the utmost quality and contextual sensitivity, providing a valuable impact on the cities they inhabit.



Jill N. Lerner, FAIA, Principal, New York

Over the course of Jill’s more than 40-year career, she has developed and led KPF’s institutional practice while connecting the architecture industry with public policy. Jill’s work is characterized by

innovation in planning, environmental sustainability, and attention to craft. An advocate for the New York City design and construction community, Jill served as President of AIA New York in 2013, and is a Board Member of the Municipal Art Society, the Regional Plan Association, and the New York Building Congress. Last year, Jill was appointed to Mayor De Blasio’s Climate Advisory Board to advise city leaders on achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.

“This is a critical time to focus on research, healthcare and education. KPF’s work on campuses in New York City, the US, and abroad will help our society solve some of the most pressing global problems, from climate change to public health. Our projects, exemplary in sustainability and innovation, will serve as magnets for the world’s great emerging talents, fostering multi-disciplinary and cross-cultural collaboration and serving as catalysts for new and re-emerging city centers focused on bridging education, urban design and commercial development.”



CUNY Advanced Science Research Center at The Graduate Center of City College Center for Discovery and Innovation in New York



Hana Kassem, AIA LEED AP BD+C, Principal, New York

During her 25-year career as an architect designing projects around the world, Hana’s international background has afforded her the ability to tailor her designs to their individual cultural contexts while maintaining universal commonalities such as sustainability, wellness, and resiliency. She applies a human-centric design approach to a range of different project types and examines how we affect our environment and how, in turn, our built environment impacts us. She currently serves on the NYC Mayor’s COVID-19 Advisory Council for reopening the city as one of two architects for the Real Estate and Construction sector.

“As architects, we play a big role in shaping the built environments that the majority of the world’s population inhabits. With that privilege comes the responsibility of understanding the impact that built environments and design have on people’s and organizations’ well-being. Our work at KPF addresses these issues at varying scales, from the public to the private realms. As the Wellness trend grows, through the COVID-19 era, we are honing in on design solutions that aim at more livable and healthier buildings and cities for the future.”



NYU Shanghai

“KPF is a collaborative studio, driven by a group of colleagues who believe that they can achieve the highest level of architecture by working together in search of the best ideas.”



**Marianne Kwok, Director,
New York**

Another leader in our New York office, Marianne has been with us for more than 25 years and has deep experience in architectural design for a variety of built commercial, residential, and cultural facilities in Asia, North America, and Europe. Since joining our team, Marianne has been the Senior Designer for some of the firm’s most high-profile and complex projects, including numerous corporate headquarters, mixed-use developments, and master planning projects in the world’s major urban centers.

“It is important for me to mentor young women throughout their careers at KPF. We are fortunate that our work allows the opportunity to positively shape cities and urban experiences around the world and it is vital that many voices and different viewpoints are included and contribute to that design process. At Hudson Yards, with an amazing team, it has been a privilege to be able to reconnect New York City’s urban fabric and to make a lasting impact on the city with new workspace and active public space.”



10 & 30 Hudson Yards in New York



**Laura King, AIA, Director,
London**

Having lived and worked internationally in Asia, the U.S., and Europe for substantial periods of time, Laura has the unique ability to communicate across different cultures. This experience makes her

an ideal leader to help our global clients realize their international aspirations. Laura joined us in 2003 and has become an invaluable part of our team with key leadership skills that allow her to successfully manage and deliver projects around the world.

“During my time at KPF, it’s certainly become much easier to collaborate remotely, to the point where we were able to transition to working from home this year without missing a beat. This is especially important for our global collaborations, like One Nine Elms, with project team members located in London and New York and clients in China. In my experience, the best designs are realized with strong relationships, clear communication and close collaboration. While advances in communication technology have undoubtedly helped, I still look forward to a time when I can build relationships face-to-face again; real-time human interaction is so critical to building real trust between people.”



**Rebecca Cheng, HKIA
RIBA, Principal, Shanghai**

Rebecca joined our firm’s Shanghai office in 2004 and brought with her substantial design and project administration experience in many sectors, including commercial,

residential and leisure developments in Asia. Rebecca oversees KPF’s local operations, liaising with clients and coordinating with consultants for projects throughout China.

“As business in China has been an important part of KPF’s work, we value our reputation and trust from our clients and city governments here. At KPF, my duty is to oversee the operation of our Shanghai office, to make sure we are unified in approach towards our global vision as a whole, which requires adequate empathy, observing, and connecting. Our practice in China has been strong for over 30 years and we strive to bring the best design result to the Chinese cities through working closely with local and international collaborators accustomed to our design process and local needs. Our firm is fully embedded in the culture and social dynamics of the various cities where we are working. Communication and collaboration are always emphasized.”



**Angela Wu, AIA, Director,
San Francisco**

Angela joined our firm most recently and heads up our operations in San Francisco, leading all of KPF’s on-the-ground project coordination up and down the West Coast.

Meeting regularly with clients, Angela provides seamless communication and a streamlined approach to project management. She brings more than 20 years of architecture experience and has led a variety of projects in terms of both type and scale, ranging from singular residential, office, retail and institutional buildings to large-scale, mixed-program, multi-building complexes.

“KPF is a place where you truly feel equal with your peers regardless of age, gender, or cultural background. My personal motto has always been, ‘On our way to great architecture, people are our greatest assets.’ It’s so important in today’s world that we, as leaders, create a positive and encouraging culture that fosters collaboration and equality between genders. As women leaders, it’s especially important for us to serve as a reflection for the next generation of women to be thoughtful leaders who are unafraid to speak their minds and who are to create great architecture for the people.” ●