

Georgios Gialouris-Tsivikas

Georgios Gialouris-Tsivikas, 22, worked for 12 months for Perkins&Will in Toronto from Sept. 2023 to Sept. 2024.

What did you do to find the placement?

It was a very long process, primarily following a self-directed approach. I started in January 2023, cold emailing, and spent around eight months applying to over 130 jobs. I knew exactly what kind of work I wanted to be doing, and really had my head set on a list of non-negotiables, which extended my search. At first, I struggled to find something that spoke to me and my career goals. I was faced with rejection after rejection, but after eight months of relentless applications and searching, I found a posting for Perkins&Will that was the one for me.

I really wanted to work in a design-forward firm, that had a defined identity in the grander context of the architectural practice. I was looking for an office with the type of portfolio I pictured myself to have in the future, which emphasized sustainability and the design of public spaces, work I had already some studio experience in.

In addition, while browsing job postings, it was important for me to find an office that wanted to mentor, and not just train.

I'm still defining my career goals, but I am now definitely going to continue in architecture. I'm curious about work that involves public spaces, spaces of learning and activity, cultural spaces, to name a few. I want to make sure I design with compassion and intent, and there's no better place to learn than from the people already doing it.

Initially, I really wanted to work abroad and spent a lot of time molding my portfolio and applying to jobs in Europe and the UK. While it was great to get exposed to a different market, I ultimately was not ready for that sort of change and decided to shift my scope to more local firms. Toronto ended up as being the perfect choice, as it allowed me to move back in with my parents and live in a big city again, which I really missed.

What exactly did you do in the office?

In the beginning, I was supporting the office with Rhino and Adobe illustrator, Photoshop, InDesign. I started at a larger scale, working on a K-12 school masterplan, and then transitioning to the urban design team to assist in the creation of a Secondary Plan and various Metrolinx GO Station masterplans. After I got used to the flow of the workspace and built my skills in Revit, about four months in, my work shifted focus to the sports,

recreation and entertainment sector, where I got the chance to work on design development for a community arena and pool in Northern Ontario.

What was it like?

Incredible. I really felt like I belonged at Perkins&Will. Each person treated me with so much care and understanding, empathizing with my student experience while validating my place in the office and helping grow my confidence as I navigate this new career. I got the chance to work with a variety of different designers, and really let the knowledge and creativity flowing around me soak in.

What specifically did you learn?

My co-op work experience at Perkins&Will provided a practical extension of my academic studies. The theoretical, “textbook” knowledge gained in the classroom was applied in real-world scenarios, allowing me to connect theory with practice. I had the opportunity to contribute to active projects, applying the design and sustainability principles I learned, understanding client needs, and navigating the complexities of project implementation. Working in a professional setting enhanced my understanding of architectural practice and contextualized my learning. Essentially, I got a better idea of what architecture actually is, experiencing firsthand how different disciplines, such as engineering and project management, intersect with architecture, the collaboration involved in the process, and the real-life stakes and consequences.

What did you gain from the experience?

I find everything I’ve gotten a chance to soak up so far, even the little details, to be immensely valuable. To love architecture, and to experience its inception, is an amazing experience. I have so much insight now, not just about architecture, but about myself too, and the steps I need to follow toward furthering my place in this career. I extended my term to now work part-time in the Ottawa office.

What was the most fun?

I have built some incredible connections and relationships with my amazing colleagues. Getting to know them was the most fun. I have felt mentored, supported, and appreciated, and ultimately, I am most grateful for the opportunity to surround myself with such inspiring people. Not only do I have people I can look up to professionally, but a community that I know has my back.

What was the least fun?

Saying goodbye! After a whole year, it was hard to leave behind an office full of people I enjoy working with, and work I love doing.

What surprised you?

I am continually surprised by the cost of architecture. Not just the cost of materials and components, but the cost of labour, marketing, accounting, tax, legal fees, licensure, etc. I think the legal and economic side of this career is very interesting. The value of our work, and how that is measured, billed, and expensed.

What's the biggest thing you learned that you didn't know going in?

Integrating all phases and disciplines and design and thinking of the work in both lateral and linear lenses. This holistic view has reinforced the importance of continuity and iteration in design, and how each phase is an opportunity to refine and improve upon the previous work. It has also taught me the value of collaboration, as these phases often require input from various team members with different expertise, external consultants, clients, and stakeholders.

Have your feelings or ambitions for architecture changed as a result?

I am so certain now that this is the right thing for me. Not only can I do it, but I can succeed in it. As someone who's struggled with imposter syndrome since I began this degree, it is a big relief to finally find some confidence.

How do you feel returning to school after co-op?

A little excited, a little restless. I miss my teams and my projects. I almost feel some FOMO watching them move on without me. That said, I am still riding the wave of energy and motivation entering the field brought me, and I am trying to channel that momentum into school and studio.

What advice would you give students thinking about doing co-op?

Do not give up, and do not settle. Every closed door leads to opportunity.