

MEET THE TEAM

JONO MUSK

As a 17-year-old building apprentice in Australia, Jono Musk became fascinated with architectural drawings and with the support of his boss, studied for a degree in architecture.

After graduating and moving to the UK two years ago, Jono joined Beam as a Design Manager and has been a key part of our team ever since. Here, he explains what he loves about his job and working on construction projects in the UK.

Q: What first inspired you to pursue a career in construction?

A: I worked for a builder, who was a family friend, over the school holidays to earn some extra money and enjoyed the problem-solving aspect of construction. There are so many issues to solve before you can reach the end-result and there's a tangible reality to what you're doing; you're not just sitting by and watching it happen.

Q: What was your first job and what led you to study for a degree in architecture?

A: After finishing school at 17, I started as a building apprentice in Queensland and trained in carpentry. I loved construction, but was frustrated with the disconnect I could see between the architectural drawings we were working with and what was being built. Having knowledge of building allowed me to address the 'knowledge gap' to some extent, but I wanted to learn more and this is what led me to go into architecture.

My first boss loved the idea of a builder becoming an architect and encouraged me to go to university and study for a degree. At the same time, I was training to be a carpenter. It took four years of studying, but I enjoyed the challenge and was committed to getting my degree.

Q: How did your career progress from there and what prompted your move to the UK?

A: After graduating, I decided it was time to move on. All my construction experience had been with timber, which is the main building material back home, but there were so many other beautiful alternatives, like brick, that I wanted to work with. I just needed to move country!

Q: What does your day-to-day job involve?

A: As Beam's Design Manager, I look after the architectural drawings and project data, and the bulk of what I do involves making decisions on how to execute our projects.

Every house is designed differently, and architects convey these differences in different ways. My job is to create an 'eco-system' for each project, using the architectural drawings and working with the clients' architects to understand their designs. Overseeing the evolution of their drawings into the built design is one of the most enjoyable aspects of my work.

Q: What other aspects of your work do you enjoy most and why?

A: I love working through all aspects of building, architecture and drawing and making a programme of work to put all the different trades together so there's the right chemistry on-site for them to build it.

In construction you're always under pressure; you can't pick work up and put it down, you need to build it! There are so many trades and different parties involved with projects, so I have to be resourceful and plan how to get the best out of the team. Managing the people aspects is essential to our work and it's an element that I really enjoy.

Q: How does working in the UK compare with Australia?

A: There can be huge variance between the different London areas our projects are situated and the people involved.

Generally, when you're on a construction site in Australia, everyone in the team is Australian. However, in London, you'll hear multiple languages and different regional accents on-site. There's a beauty to this; it's reflective of London itself and the deep level of multi-culturalism which permeates the city. I love this aspect of living and working here.

Moving to London also made me more appreciative of just how lucky we are in Australia. There is so much more support for people with less fortunate backgrounds back home. Coming to the UK was a bit of a wake-up call for me.

Q: How has your career developed so far and what do you like most about working for Beam?

A: Coming from Queensland to the UK was a good move and I feel lucky to have found a company like Beam where I can progress my career and work at the intersection of architecture and construction.

At Beam, upholding relationships is very important and there's a high level of care and consideration for our clients, which is not always the case in our industry. The thought and consideration we put into creating the right 'ecosystem' for each project and the high quality of our work are fundamental to this.

Very rarely, we've taken on a project partway through construction, where there's been a breakdown of communication between the previous builder and the client. Sadly, our industry is so price-focussed that firms forget about the people aspects, which are vitally important in our experience.

Q: What aspects of starting a project do you look forward to most?

A: There's huge change when starting a project. You're working with a new client, new architects and designers, and there aren't many elements that stay the same. There can be a dramatic shift in a new client's expectations and the information they are looking to see, for example. Understanding these new elements really adds to the beauty of a project and its built fabric.

Q: Where would you like to take your career in the future?

A: Alongside developing my career as a design manager, I have a particular interest in public spaces and creating communal areas where people can come together and interact. I love the word 'habitus' and the theory that the habitat you are in can shape, even enhance, how you respond to the people around you in that environment.

As a society, we are more separated nowadays because of technology and there's more segregation between the generations, so the idea of creating shared spaces is even more important. These can be calm places, such as public parks, where people, young and old can sit alongside each other. Even if they're not talking, they are still interacting. There are some beautiful examples of these community spaces in the old towns of Albania and Eastern Europe, which I would love to help create in cities like London.

Q: If you could choose any period property, what would it be and why?

A: In my view, no single building style is better than all the others. For a building to be successful, it needs to have the right vernacular and respond to the space it's in. For example, as much as I love Australian houses, I wouldn't want to build one in Islington! It wouldn't suit the climate or the urban architecture surrounding it.

Q: What interests do you have outside of work?

A: I love keeping fit and learning and reading about architecture. I'm also developing a theory about public spaces and journaling this in my spare time.

Q: What advice would you give to anyone thinking about a career in construction?

A: If you don't love it, don't do it! You really need to enjoy working in the construction industry, along with the challenges and physical work that comes with it. If you want to be an apprentice, you need to be good at whatever trade you decide to go into, but you should also consider the future and whether you may want to move into other areas, like project management, later in your career. Whether you're hammering nails or involved on the business side, it's always a good idea to be building new skills.

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STAFF Q&A**

