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Business

How I Made It: Dan Meis



Karen Tapia-Andersen / Los Angeles Times

ADVICE: "Be willing to take some risks because breaks don't just happen," says Dan Meis, who hopes to build an NFL arena in L.A.

The stadium architect, who was the leading designer of the Staples Center, says it's crucial to be constantly innovative, sharp and fresh. He aims to be 'Apple rather than Microsoft.'

By Conor L. Sanchez, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

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The gig: Stadium architect Dan Meis, the lead designer of the Staples Center, is working with billionaire developer Ed Roski to draft a proposal for an NFL arena in Los Angeles. Meis, now managing director of the Los Angeles office of international architectural firm Aedas, has had a successful career designing sports complexes, including Seattle's Safeco Field and Cincinnati's Paul Brown Stadium.

His background: Grew up north of Denver in the small town of Windsor, population 3,000, where his parents owned the only restaurant.

First job: Busing tables at the family restaurant and laying concrete foundations for homes.

Personal: Meis, 47, lives in Los Angeles with his wife and two children, Max, 14, and Sophie, 9 months.

Education: Attended the University of Colorado at Boulder for two years before transferring to the University of Illinois at Chicago, where he graduated with a degree in architecture.

Big break: In 1992, a friend suggested that he move to Kansas City to work at a sports arena architectural firm, where he stood a better chance of seeing his designs put into action. At the expense of leaving a higher-paying job in Washington, D.C., Meis took the risk. After spending 18 months in Kansas City, he moved to L.A.

Big mistake: Being reluctant to move on to the next opportunity when there was some risk involved.

Advice: "Be willing to take some risks, because breaks don't just happen," Meis said. "But be ready and brave enough to know it could fail too."

His inspiration: Meis says he keeps his mind sharp and fresh by traveling as much as he can. He also peruses the shelves of his personal library, which includes thousands of books on architecture and art. In the past, he has taken an abstract piece of artwork and turned it into a ceiling or staircase. In design, Meis says, it's crucial to have the structure say something provocative. And to do that, he must be constantly innovative. "I've always aimed to be Apple rather than Microsoft," he said.

His favorite work so far: Meis says the Staples Center will always remain close to his heart because it's in the city where he lives. But if he and Roski are successful, the Los Angeles NFL stadium could eclipse anything he's done to date because of the challenge it represents.

His escape: Photography. Meis just purchased a Leica digital camera to add to his collection of Polaroid and pinhole cameras as well as a Nikon D300, which he takes with him everywhere he travels. "It's my way of capturing the world in another way," he said.

conor.sanchez@latimes.com

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