



Meis, Perkins Eastman take relationship to next level

BY BRET MCCORMICK

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The seeds for Perkins Eastman and Meis Architects to combine forces were planted in Abu Dhabi seven years ago, as famed sports venue designer Dan Meis and Perkins Eastman's Shawn Basler and Scott Schiamberg dug into a multicourse meal of spiced meat and hummus.

The two sides bid on a stadium project together in Abu Dhabi and began to pursue more work together in the years since, eventually leading to the question of whether they should join forces permanently. They did so formally last week in a merger that will see Meis remain an independent brand under the Perkins Eastman umbrella. Financial terms were not shared.

"We really enjoyed working with each other," said Basler, co-CEO of Perkins Eastman. "The other litmus test is when you travel with someone. Dan came to Abu Dhabi, and we had a lot of fun. Great interview, great meetings, some fabulous lunches and dinners, so that's when you can really tell when you get along with somebody."

Meis' relationships with Perkins Eastman's leadership assuaged his concerns about pairing with one of the world's 10 largest architecture firms. As such, no intermediaries were involved in the deal's negotiations.

"It really started as a personal thing," said Meis. "That made all the difference in the world. I would have really been afraid of this if not for the personal connections I had with everyone over there."

Meis founded the sports practice at NBBJ and designed prominent venues including Staples Center, Lincoln Financial Field and T-Mobile Park, before leaving to start his independent studio in 2007. Meis' small size was a double-edged sword. Venue owners liked the focus that the 25-person team gave to their projects, but many worried whether that attention could be maintained if another project surfaced at the same time. Limiting the number of simultaneous projects hurt Meis during the pandemic when his few projects stalled, putting the studio's bottom line at risk.

The merger with Perkins Eastman, which is active in college sports and specializes in mixed-use developments and claimed \$275 million in 2019 revenue, enables Meis to still give venue owners the personal attention they want, but the resources to work on multiple projects and not

get swamped.

Basler said his company believes in maintaining a brand's identity, which is why Meis' name will stay intact. That's not always been the case in similar sports architecture firm mergers in the past.

"They're not just trying to gobble up my skills and portfolio and make me part of the larger brand," said Meis, who is currently working on soccer stadium projects for Everton Football Club and AS Roma. "They really recognize that we are delivering something unique in sports, and they're building that rather than swallowing it."

In at least one way, the merger speaks to where the sports industry is headed.

"I don't see a single project these days that doesn't have some aspect of entertainment district, urban master planning, wider impact on the community," said Meis. "That's what these projects are now, and Perkins Eastman has that skill set and history and portfolio better than anyone. And so, the opportunity for me to bring those things together with what I do was another really important part of this."

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