New Leadership at SERA Architects Brings Fresh Perspective to a Firm Nearly Six Decades in the Making

Three women bring new energy and a shared leadership model to one of the Pacific Northwest's most established architecture firms

PORTLAND, Ore. — November 19, 2026 — SERA Architects, one of the Pacific Northwest's most established and respected firms, has been designing buildings since 1968. Now, three women have taken the helm in a transition that goes well beyond a change at the top. They are redesigning how an architecture firm is run. In place of SERA's traditional principal-led structure, they have built a shared leadership model that brings design, operations and finance into decision-making.

A new generation now leads SERA, bringing fresh perspective and distinct expertise in operations, design and finance:

Allison Hanley, President, draws on her expertise in risk management, operational oversight and corporate governance to lead the firm's strategic direction and growth.

Suzanne Blair, Vice President, leads SERA's design practice. Her focus on sustainable, human-centric design inspires clients and empowers the SERA team to create transformative places.

Jennifer Joyner, Director of Finance & Accounting, oversees the firm's financial strategy using a data-driven approach that supports its long-term viability.

The three began this transition in late 2024, at a time when revenue at architecture firms nationwide was falling. Since then, the value of the company has increased by close to 25% under their leadership and SERA's profitability is up 135%.

Their leadership is driven by three commitments: bringing different perspectives to the table, empowering people throughout the firm and investing in the next generation of leaders. They also build on the contributions of those who have shaped SERA and its legacy of design excellence, sustainability and community engagement.

"SERA has a remarkable history, and we honor it completely," said Hanley. "We believe an established firm stays great by being curious and pushing the edges of convention."

A New Approach to the Business of Architecture

SERA's shared leadership model prioritizes organizational adaptability over the principal-led structure that has traditionally guided architecture firms. It draws design, operations and financial perspectives into the decision-making process and mirrors the

collaborative, interdisciplinary approach SERA brings to its work with complex, high-performing clients.

Leadership at SERA also extends beyond the executive team. People closest to the work are empowered to contribute their expertise and make informed decisions, and that autonomy is paired with accountability. The result is a culture in which empowerment is a core business and workforce strategy — one that strengthens creativity and collaboration and supports the design excellence for which SERA is known.

“The best design comes from bringing the right perspectives together early and trusting the people doing the work,” said Blair. “When our designers, project leaders and business leaders share ownership of decisions, the work gets better, and so does the experience for the people who ultimately use the spaces we create.”

Cultivating the Next Generation

Hanley, Blair and Joyner view leadership development as essential to SERA’s long-term success and its ability to keep evolving.

Employees at every stage of their careers have opportunities to contribute, take ownership and develop as leaders. Leadership can emerge from any discipline, background or area of expertise, an approach that strengthens continuity from one generation to the next.

“We think of leadership as something you pass forward,” said Joyner. “Sound financial discipline gives us the stability to invest in our people, from competitive compensation packages to hands-on project leadership. That investment is what keeps a firm strong over the long term.”

Strategic Direction and Growth

SERA’s leadership team is positioning the firm for steady, sustainable growth by building long-term partnerships with clients who share its values, in the markets and geographies where its expertise is strongest.

Key areas of opportunity include advanced technology, urban design, mixed-use development, housing, workplace and public spaces. Across each, the firm pairs financial discipline with a design approach centered on the user experience.

As part of that strategy, SERA is expanding its presence in the San Francisco Bay Area, where demand aligns with the firm’s track record of delivering innovative, complex projects. That work includes 1265 Borregas, where SERA is the interior architect and the architect of record for Google’s first ground-up mass-timber office — a LEED

Platinum workplace advancing low-carbon, high-performance design. SERA's work for Silicon Valley Clean Energy further demonstrates the firm's experience designing workplaces for mission-driven organizations.

"For us, growth means pursuing the right work with the right partners and doing it exceptionally well," said Hanley. "It also means leaving SERA in a better place for future generations of leaders."

About SERA Architects

Founded in 1968, SERA Architects is a Portland-based architecture and design firm whose work spans advanced technology, urban design, mixed-use development, housing, workplace and public spaces. The firm is known for design excellence, sustainability and community engagement, and for a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach to work for complex, high-performing organizations. SERA operates under a shared leadership model that brings design, operations and finance together in decision-making. Learn more at seradesign.com.

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