

AIA Film Challenge judges share their Advice

“ Making a film about architecture allows it to travel beyond its site and to be experienced by anyone, no matter where they are located. ”

– *Joseph Kosinski*

Director of *Top Gun: Maverick*
and AIA Film Challenge judge



We sat down with three of this year's judges to discuss the AIA Film Challenge and what the convergence of architecture and film means to them.

Meet the judges

- **Joseph Kosinski** is currently directing his fourth feature film *Top Gun: Maverick*, for Paramount Pictures and Skydance Media.
- **Karen Braitmayer, FAIA**, is the founder and managing principal of accessibility consulting firm Studio Pacifica.
- **Wanda Lau** is an award-winning editor and writer who oversees tech, practice, and product coverage at ARCHITECT magazine.
- **Jimmie Tucker, FAIA**, is a co-founder of Memphis based Self + Tucker Architects and an adjunct professor at the University of Memphis.
- **Ian Harris**, an award-winning architectural filmmaker, media producer, and adjunct professor.

Here's what the judges had to say.

What inspires you about the AIA Film Challenge?

Joseph Kosinski: I got my start by entering my short film in a film festival in 2001. I look forward to seeing how the AIA Film Challenge inspires a new generation of architects/filmmakers.

Karen Braitmayer: The potential for a rich exchange of medium and vision. Film brings a dynamic of movement and three-dimensional perception that transports the viewer into the story or site.

Wanda Lau: Along with shining a light on community impact, the AIA Film Challenge requires participants to show how architecture is relevant and necessary to tackling social issues. This hopefully inspires more practitioners to act in their communities and improves the public's understanding of what architecture comprises.

Jimmie Tucker: The AIA Film Challenge inspires me because it connects architects and filmmakers to tell positive stories, through a powerful medium, about how architects and communities can work together to change our cities. Describing projects to viewers also helps people better understand what we do as architects and how our work impacts their lives.

What was the most impactful project that you have worked on recently?

JK: In 2017 I made a film about wildland firefighters called “Only the Brave.” It opened my eyes to the heroism and sacrifice that first responders make every single day, often far from the public eye.

KB: The renovation of the historic Space Needle project with Olson Kundig as design lead. The renovation pared down the experience to make it all about the view and the drama of that height.

JT: The Revitalization of the Universal Life Insurance Building, which chronicled the audacious rise and success of the Universal Life Insurance Company, a major African American corporation. By sharing this story, we showcased the rich history of our city and also the caliber, determination, and grit of our city’s past and the aspiration of current entrepreneurs, community leaders, and residents.

Tell us about your experience at the intersection of architecture and storytelling. How do you see the two as being complementary?

JK: I feel very lucky to have gone to architecture school. My education served as a unique foundation to my career as a filmmaker.

KB: Architecture is about storytelling, about creating a rich experience with a beginning, middle, and end as you enter, participate, and leave a building.

WL: Good architecture and good storytelling can evoke similar reactions: A sense of belonging, understanding, and empathy; a feeling of awe and inspiration; and a surge of excitement for what will happen in the next room or frame. When architecture is designed well or a story is told with authenticity, it transports people to another time and place—physical or emotional—in their lives and lingers in their memories.

JT: After working with the filmmaking team, I better understand that on-screen architecture is a part of every cinematic scene. The filmmaker is always aware of it because the right architecture can enhance storytelling, and the wrong architecture can be extremely distracting.

Creating a film let us to delve into dimensions of an architectural project that we had not had a chance to explore or share with others. Perhaps most importantly, our film presented the divergent streams of history, culture, and architectural accomplishments in a way that captured new audiences and exponentially expanded our impact as mentors and role models.

What can architects learn from working with filmmakers, and vice versa?

JK: Storytelling is a craft that any architect can use both in representing their work and in the work itself.

KB: Filmmakers can create environments that can defy natural laws or become anything they envision. Architects work on projects with real-life constraints. Filmmakers can open our eyes to bigger ideas.

WL: Regardless of the field, a project you have worked on from day one can understandably become precious and deeply personal. This is both a strength and a weakness. When architects work with filmmakers, they can learn how someone outside their architecture bubble views their work, experiences their spaces, and gauges success. They may also see their work in a new lens and discover new perspectives from which to view their work, as well as shortcomings to improve upon in the future. Filmmakers can learn from architects the technical and design justifications behind a building design or master plan, whether it be the orientation of a site, a care for preserving a sense of scale, or the detailing behind a material intersection.

JT: Both architects and filmmakers depend on their sight and imagination to make sense of the world. A filmmaker can learn what design thinking means and how to craft a solution-based approach to a problem. Architects can learn how to better communicate the aspiration of architectural projects and to engage a broader audience through effective storytelling. As a

judge, I will be looking most closely at how architects and filmmakers work together to build a story within their respective mediums.

Why should architects participate in this year's challenge?

JK: One of architecture's inherent limitations is that it does not travel well; to experience it you must go to it. Film, on the other hand, is transient and can exist almost anywhere you want it to. Making a film about architecture allows it to travel beyond its site and to be experienced by anyone, no matter where they are located.

KB: For the sheer fun of it and for the ability to share your passion with a larger audience!

WL: To publicize the meaningful work of their clients and collaborators, to test their projects' ability to speak to a wide audience, and to encapsulate their projects' stories in a medium that can be readily shared and remembered.

JT: This is a tremendous opportunity for architects to share their work in all its richness, complexity, and impact. Film is highly effective in demystifying the profession and increasing public awareness of what we do as architects and how we can positively change the world when we work together with our clients and the broader community.



What advice would you give amateur filmmakers about producing a successful film?

JK: Find inspiration in another art form. Tell a story in a way that only you can tell it.