

AROUND OJAI

FEATURED PRO

# Steven Foster

*From the Fire, Buildings and Lives are Built*

By Sarah Howery Hart

Steven Foster, AIA – LEED, owner of Cornerstone Architects in Ojai, has many stories to tell, but sometimes they're not just about architecture, including this one: "I lost an apprentice a few years ago to an unfortunate accident," he explains, "and we were at the memorial. There were a bunch of architecture students there, and I told them 'Life's all about relationships. Buildings come and go, but at the basis of what we do, it's about the relationship.'"

Both Foster's architectural skills and his philosophy were put to the test in his community of Ojai during the Thomas Fires. "As architects, we have been able to be a part of the rebuilding process," he explains, "physically and emotionally. Being able to walk our clients through the design process has become a touchstone for them to dream

architecture was his career of choice. "My father and grandfather were contractors, so I basically grew up with that. So, it's pretty much everything I've ever known as a professional career."

However, he once briefly considering doing something else. "I think at one time I considered working on becoming a professional musician, but found architecture to be the creative outlet I needed as well as financially more dependable. Now I play for fun!" That fun includes playing the guitar, singing, and writing music.

Although he opted out of a musical career, he puts those skills to work in his designs. "There's a big correlation between architecture and music," he explains. "The basics of music are harmony and melody and theme, and those to one extent or another exist in

our various consultants and engineers as well as qualified builders who embody our values. In Cornerstone's office, now for over 13 years, my good friend Joshua Griffen understands this and has become a key player in overseeing the technical aspects as well as interfacing with our clients."

Foster brings his skills and philosophy to various other communities too, including in Mexico. "I'm associated with the Ojai Valley Community Church, and we do social outreach. We go down to Mexico and build a house every year."

He reiterates what he considers valuable. "The value of what we do is reaching out to the people. That's where our values are. Core values. Regarding the Thomas Fire, I have come to realize that these unfortunate



and think about the future in a positive way, offering them hope in the midst of trying circumstances."

It was 35 years ago that Ojai became his community, after he relocated from the San Fernando Valley. "We needed to leave the valley. We searched and searched and fell in love with Ojai. It's been a great place to raise our children and develop friendships."

It was 20 years ago that Foster opened his business in Ojai, Cornerstone Architects, and it is no surprise that

architecture as well. You have rhythm in design and spatial context. Of course, those terms are fairly abstract, but I think the music is a great inspiration for architecture. When I design in the creative mode, music goes through my head."

Foster recognizes the need for harmony throughout all of life and has found that in his workplace in Project Manager, Joshua Griffen. "It's important to understand the value of teamwork. Our office depends on the expertise of

victims have lost not only their homes and most of their belongings but have also suffered considerable emotional fallout. My takeaway from dealing with all the collateral damage from the fire is that we need to remind ourselves that these homes and structures are more than wood, stone, nuts and bolts. That these are people like ourselves; families', retirees', grandparents and children, and that one should never underestimate the value of nurturing personal relationships regardless of the circumstance."