

Executive of the Month

IS PASSIONATE ABOUT HIS FIRM, ITS FUTURE AND WHAT IT BRINGS TO THE INDUSTRY

Soames, principal of Ryan Soames Engineering: New MEP firm is all about client relationships

Paul Soames



NEW YORK, NY *The New York Real Estate Journal* recently sat down with its executive of the month, Paul Soames, a principal at Ryan Soames Engineering, for a question and answer session.

Q: So, you're from the UK?

A: Yep. South London. My parents raised me (I'm an only child) in Brixton until we moved to Croydon. I then lived in South Croydon until I moved to New York in 2004. My parents retired and moved to Pagham in West Sussex. Before retiring my dad was a printer in the newspaper business and my mum ran a payroll and pension department for a contracting firm. London is a great place to visit for me now – I still consider it home, but I see it now through the eyes of a tourist. Like most New Yorkers who haven't been to the top of the Empire State Building, there was a lot I didn't do in London when I lived there. It took taking my brother-in-law to London for his first time in 2016 for me to go to the Winston Churchill War Rooms – I used to work three blocks away. I also worked at the Palace of Westminster for a while working on a major refurbishment of one of the parliamentary buildings. Our office was in the attic of the building we were working on. Out of one window we saw Big Ben and out of the other we saw the River Thames and we watched the construction and erection of the Millennium wheel – pretty impressive seeing all its parts brought in by boat and raised from the river.

Q: How'd you get started in engineering?

A: Up until the age of 19, I was convinced I was going to be a professional soccer player. I was signed with Crystal Palace F.C. was going to go pro...until an injury took me out of the game. As soon as that happened, I knew I wasn't going to make it. I played some semi-pro soccer for a while and worked here and there on construction sites and ended up with an HVAC contractor installing pipework and then sitting at a drawing

board. My boss at the time told me I should become an engineer rather than a contractor, so I took his advice and put myself through college one day a week for four years and then took a job with WS Atkins in the UK as an engineering technician. WS Atkins took over my education and sent me to South Bank University one day a week for four years. I got a first-class BEng (Hons) Energy Engineering degree in 2000 and became a chartered engineer in the UK in 2003. I also hung up my soccer boots in 2003 and started playing rugby only to receive more injuries than I ever had playing soccer!

Q: How did you end up in New York?

A: I had visited often for long weekends, with my first visit being in 1996. I fell in love with the place. It's not that different to my hometown London but it's different enough. We are, after all, two nations divided by the same language! After I finished my degree, I was looking for opportunities to travel with work and only managed to get gigs in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Dubai – all great experiences but nowhere I actually wanted to spend real time in. Especially, as I got shot at in Egypt! In 2002, I visited New York to watch my cousin run the NYC Marathon and I showed him and his wife around with my cousin saying, "I don't know why you don't live here." In 2003, I went to Australia to watch the Rugby World Cup and toured around for a couple of months and I recall landing back in London in February, sitting at a desk two days later and remembering what my cousin had said so I looked into working in New York. I was lucky (and grateful) enough to meet Arthur Metzler of AMA Consulting Engineers at Heathrow Airport and he offered me a job. In November 2004, I ran the NYC Marathon and started working at AMA two weeks later.

Q: Tell us about Ryan Soames Engineering?

A: We are a full-service MEP engineering firm, founded in September 2017, led by myself, Bob Ryan and Keith Moorhouse. We are having a great time! The fortunate thing about our experiences is that we know how not to run a firm and have made some bold choices for ourselves, the staff and the clients we choose to work with. Working with Bob and Keith has been a breath of fresh air for me. We share the same ideas and values and it's refreshing to see that we are all pulling the cart in the same direction. I have worked for six companies including Ryan Soames during my career, large and small, and I like the small and dedicated model. Working for the larger firms I have had great opportunities and traveled and seen some amazing sights, but I was also

often denied access and a personal relationship with the actual client and end user. At Ryan Soames it's all about relationships, dedication to the client's goal and understanding what's needed. We also understand what our staff needs for their career and life outside of the office. We promote flexibility and remote working and if I can work on my laptop at the beach so can anyone of the staff. Meeting deadlines and delivering great work doesn't need to come from having too few staff working long hours to turn a profit. We enjoy what we do, and our clients see it.

Q: Do you consider yourself an entrepreneur?

A: Absolutely.

Q: What have you learned from being an entrepreneur?

A: What haven't I learned? I'm still learning. Being an entrepreneur is working 100 hours a week for yourself so that you don't have to work 40 hours a week for someone else. Not everyone can do it and not everyone wants to do it. I wanted my own firm since before I graduated from South Bank University and I used to think about what I would call it instead of studying! I have learned that it's not for everyone. It's challenging to say the least. It is also very humbling with no guarantees.

I parted ways with my previous partners relatively abruptly. What had been the focus of my life for eight years was changed in an instant. But I wouldn't change a thing. In the space of 24 hours of our separation I went from shock to despair to devastation, went to the beach (the advantage of all of this going down while on vacation) and then won a project with a client that wanted to stick with me. Being able to reassess and be given the opportunity to create Ryan Soames Engineering with two people I admire has been the defining moment in my life. I'm reminded of my soccer career and the injury that changed my path. Not everything can be controlled. Have faith and integrity, believe in your abilities, be confident and humble with a little humility and be patient.

Q: Who inspires you?

A: My wife. With dyslexia she obtained a doctorate in Education from Columbia University and specializes in special needs education, working at a school in Manhattan. She was also a Ford model, a child actor and is a member of SAG!

Q: How do you unwind?

A: Given that we started in September, I am always working but heading down to our house at the Jersey Shore soothes my soul. I am fortunate enough to be able to work within reason from anywhere and my laptop works on the beach. I have also



One of Ryan Soames Engineering's newest projects: a movie studio in Georgia.

taken up boxing – something I haven't done since I was a teenager. My knees are shot from running and soccer but going to town on a heavy bag each night really gets the adrenaline out for a good night's sleep.

Q: Recommended reading?

A: "The second coming of Steve Jobs" by Alan Deutschman and "Make Your Bed: Little Things That Can Change Your Life...and Maybe the World" by Admiral William H. McRaven.

Q: If you weren't an engineer?

A: A good friend of mine is in a band – and you all know the band. They are huge. I have designed MEP systems for two of his houses. He gave up pre-med to go to Juilliard, and he gave up Juilliard to join the band. When I talk to him about his fame and success, he's extremely humble and quick to change the subject – but what exudes is his passion for music. I once compared my job with his, asked if he ever has days where he did not like it and the honest answer was "no." Whether he is playing at Wembley, Giants Stadium, his house in front of his friends or being asked to join the band in a bar for a jam session, he truly gives 100% effort all of the time. He's also a nerd and enjoys getting involved in what I do when I worked on his houses. I recall one time he took a break from recording

their new album to ask me about VRV condensers!

So, for me to answer this question I need to ask myself what I'm passionate about? I can't sing or play an instrument, by the way. Outside of family, I'm passionate about Ryan Soames Engineering and its future and what it brings to the industry. If I weren't an engineer I would become one. Engineering is fun. Buildings are cool. NYC is one of the greatest cities in the world and being successful here takes passion.

Q: What's next?

A: There are a number of initiatives we plan to fulfill in 2018. We plan to build on our strong start in the industry and NYC and to secure a number of exciting bids for hotel, commercial and restaurant work here as well as residential and restaurant projects in Florida and retail projects in California. We are going to focus on our services and our staff to build a culture that people want to be part of, including our clients. Repeat business will be key.

I plan to take my wife to Aruba in April. The past 12 months have been exciting for us with a Doctorate graduation and both starting new positions in our career. We went to Aruba for our honeymoon but with time restraints so this time we will do it right – and I will leave the laptop at home.