

Anthony Morena Completes First Architect-as-Developer Lab, Applications Open for Second Cohort

Eight architects from six states completed the inaugural cohort of Morena's practice-based program; applications are now open for the second.

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EINPresswire.com/ -- [Mortar Group](#),
the New York-based architect led real estate investment firm, has completed the inaugural cohort of its [Architect-as-Developer Lab](#), a practice based program for architects moving from traditional practice into development and ownership. Applications are now open for a second cohort beginning this winter.



Anthony Morena

The Lab grew out of [Anthony Morena's](#) more than two decades building an architect-led development practice in New York.

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Someone in the first group asked whether this was a sales pitch or a way to raise capital. Fair question. The answer was none of the above - I wanted to see if architects still cared about this.”

Anthony Morena

The first group came together from very different points in their careers - sole practitioners, principals of established firms, and architects who had already executed one or two projects of their own. Sessions covered the architect-as-developer model and how it changes conventional practice; real estate finance and pro forma modeling; site identification through a design-driven investment lens; the architect's role in managing risk, capital and construction; and case studies in small-scale urban development.

The larger question running through the sessions was how a first project becomes a practice rather than a one-time venture. Having watched development

efforts come and go over the years, Morena wanted the group to examine what it takes to build a business that keeps finding opportunities, attracting capital and managing risk across market cycles.

Participants worked on their own sites, business models and financing structures rather than hypotheticals.

"Why Would You Do This for Free?"

Early in the first cohort, a participant emailed Morena to ask what the program was actually for. Morena circulated his answer to the entire group.

"The simple answer is that I've reached a point in my career where I'm interested in sharing what I've learned and seeing where the conversation goes," Morena said. "There's no shortage of people offering opinions today, particularly through social media, but there's a difference between talking about development and actually doing it. I wanted the Lab grounded in practical experience - making decisions, making mistakes and living with the consequences of both.

"It's less a course than a working forum. It's about building our sub-culture, and if that proves useful to other architects and the conversation continues to evolve, that's enough of a reason to keep doing it."

Influences

The Lab reflects two influences on Morena's own path. The first is Joseph Pell Lombardi, the New York architect and developer in whose office Morena began his career. Lombardi had already spent decades serving as both architect and principal on his own projects, giving Morena early exposure to a model in which the architect moves beyond client services into development and ownership.

The second is Jonathan Segal, FAIA, the San Diego architect and developer whose work Morena followed closely and greatly admired. Although the two have never met, Segal's lectures and body of work became an important reference point for Morena; demonstrating, as Morena describes it, that architect-led development need not be a one-off venture but could become the foundation of a sustained practice.

Second Cohort: Winter 2026–27

Applications are now open for the second Architect-as-Developer Lab, a four-session program running through January and February 2027. As with the inaugural group, participation will be limited to preserve the working-session format and allow participants to discuss their own businesses, sites, financing strategies and active projects in detail.

The Lab is intended for practicing architects who have already made some move toward development and ownership, or who are close to it - whether that means a completed project, a site under consideration, or an existing practice being built toward development work. It is not an introductory course for students or those seeking a credential.

Applications should include a short professional background and a note on why you want to join. Submissions will be accepted through December 15, 2026, at info@mortargroup.com.

About the Architect-as-Developer Lab

The Architect as Developer Lab is a free, non-commercial educational initiative created by architect-developer Anthony Morena, founder of Mortar Group. The Lab is not affiliated with any Mortar Group investment offering.

About Mortar Group

Founded in 2001 by Anthony Morena, Mortar Group is a vertically integrated boutique New York firm operating across architecture, development, construction, investment and property management. Now in its 25th year, the firm has completed more than 40 projects in New York, applying an approach that combines design, asset management, investments and long-term ownership.

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