

## Michael Phinney

Founder, principal

Phinney Design Group, Saratoga Springs

Michael Phinney was 29 and working for a well-respected design firm in Albany. He was being assigned as the project architect for some of the largest building projects in the Capital Region. At home, he had just signed the papers for a mortgage.

Then he told his wife the news. He was quitting his job.

His plan: start his own architecture practice. The problem: "I had only one prospect at the time, a couple who wanted a 'green' home," he says.

That was nearly a decade ago. Today his Phinney Design Group employs 14. It is known, in part, for its focus on sustainable, eco-friendly design and has a roster of high-profile clients. And throughout the Great Recession, the firm has been steady—a feat in the industry—and is looking at big growth this year.

Phinney says he is passionate about sustainable build-

ing. In fact, that mortgage for which he had signed papers was for a green home.

"I had just worked on the first certified green building in New York, a large commercial building. But there weren't any examples of green homes in our area," he says.

His own home, he adds, would be "an example of how to build a green residential project."

It was an idea that paid off. Today, Phinney Design Group has helped produce more examples of green homes—in addition to commercial projects—as the eco-friendly building trend goes mainstream.

So where does he see himself in a decade? "Still senior principal of my design firm, but taking on more mentoring responsibilities."

Then, he'd like to have "the time and freedom to provide more pro bono work and remain active in community projects."



**Age:** 38

**Resides:** Greenfield Center

**Family:** Wife Marci, and a 1-year-old daughter Mila Quinn Phinney

**Education:** Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

**Turning points:** Gave up a college football career at RPI to focus more intently on his architecture major—a decision that led to studying abroad. "Living in Rome," he says, "changed my life and the way I look at the world."

**What colleagues would be surprised to learn:** "I was an amateur boxer for a few years and also competed in Tae Kwon Do. If Mixed Martial Arts existed in the early '90s, I probably would have been a cage fighter—for a brief period."