Julie Snow

Julie Snow isn’t big on building walls.

Snow, an architect and principal of a firm bearing her name, Julie Snow Architects Inc., designed her company’s office with no interior walls. She doesn’t have an office, and her desk is close enough so she can turn and ask one of her partners a question.

After 10 years as the sole owner of her firm, Snow recently added two partners — Linda Morrissey and Connie Lindor — which brings the total staff at the downtown Minneapolis firm to a dozen.

“I had been thinking about adding partners for a long time, knowing that it would expand what we were able to do,” she said. The partners allow her to be less constrained by the administrative tasks of running the office and let her do more design work and business development.

A Fellow of the American Institute of Architects, Snow has won dozens of awards from architecture groups for her clean and spare — yet elegant — designs of functional structures, such as light-rail train stations, plastics factories, office buildings and condos.

She was a visiting design critic at Harvard University’s Graduate School of Design this year and has given numerous lectures at institutions such as Yale University’s School of Architecture and the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C.

Her biggest project to date is a collaboration with Opus Architects & Engineers on Medtronic Inc.’s new Mounds View headquarters for its Cardiac Rhythm Management division. Other projects include two light-rail transit stations in Minneapolis, the Museum of Russian Art in Minneapolis and the Humboldt Lofts near the Minneapolis riverfront. She’s also done work for Great Plains Software, a division of Microsoft Corp., in Fargo.

Snow is kind of a rock star among architects — but she’s perhaps better known on both coasts than she is in the Twin Cities, said Tom Fisher, dean of the College of Design at the University of Minnesota.

She’s been considered a very good architect for a long time, going back to her 14 years working at Hammel Green and Abrahamson in Minneapolis.

“Early on Julie demonstrated her ability to do good design that was cost-effective,” Fisher said.

She understood that good design is not something that’s very effective if only an elite few can afford it. “It should be about making people’s everyday lives better,” he said.

Fisher was one of the contributors in a book published that shows off Snow’s work. The book is a monograph called Julie Snow Architects (New Voices in Architecture) published in 2006 by Princeton Architectural Press, New York.

The back cover of the 120-page book says, “Over the past decade, Snow has developed one of the most inventive practices anywhere in the United States. Her diverse and unique body of work ... unveils the ingenuity and beauty hidden behind conventional expectations.”

Snow is a native of Grand Rapids, Mich. She studied architecture at the University of Colorado in Boulder, which is also where she met her husband, Jack. The Snows have three grown children; the youngest is 22.

For fun she and Jack, who is a mechanical engineer, are planning to build a vacation home on the North Shore of Lake Superior.

They’ve owned the site for about two years, but the plans are still a work in progress. Snow keeps drawing different designs on various napkins.

“I have a million drawings, but they’re all 3 inches by 3 inches,” she said.