ADRIAN CORTES

a_cortes@comcast.net | 215.316.1617 | Voorhees, NJ | www.linkedin.com/in/a-yo-adrian

Hello,

Early in my career, I thought great architecture was about designing exceptional buildings. Over time, I realized it was something much bigger. The most successful projects were never defined by the building itself, but by the people, processes, and collaboration that made it successful long after the doors opened.

That realization has shaped my career. For more than 20 years, I have built my experience at the intersection of Architecture, Design, Engineering, Construction, Operations, and Development. I've had the opportunity to work on both the consulting and client sides, giving me a unique perspective on what it takes to transform an idea into a successful, scalable business. I've learned that growth isn't achieved by opening more locations. It's achieved by building the systems, standards, and relationships that allow organizations to grow consistently while remaining adaptable for what's next.

Throughout my career, I've enjoyed bringing people together around a common goal. Whether working with Real Estate, Operations, Construction, Marketing, Procurement, Finance, executive leadership, or external consultants, I've found that the best solutions rarely come from one discipline alone. They come from asking the right questions, navigating difficult conversations, challenging assumptions, and creating alignment across teams with different priorities. That collaborative approach has enabled me to lead complex initiatives while earning the trust of stakeholders at every level of an organization.

At Wawa, I helped evolve the development platform supporting more than 1,150 locations by integrating prototype development, site feasibility, architecture, engineering, permitting, construction, and lifecycle reinvestment into a scalable operating model. That work contributed to growing annual openings from 46 to more than 100 stores, managing 150 to 300 concurrent projects and $300 million to $500 million in annual capital investment. Along the way, we improved on-time project delivery from 65% to 92%, reduced permitting timelines by 25%, and generated millions in capital savings through smarter standards, stronger partnerships, and continuous process improvement.

What differentiates my leadership is that I don't view Architecture and Design as isolated functions. I view them as strategic business tools that influence operations, customer experience, capital investment, speed of execution, and ultimately the success of the brand. Whether evolving prototypes, building consultant networks, strengthening governance, or mentoring teams, my focus has always been the same: create repeatable systems that allow organizations to scale intelligently while remaining flexible enough to embrace innovation and change.

Today, I'm looking for an opportunity to bring that mindset to an organization that values collaboration, continuous improvement, and thoughtful growth. I enjoy building teams as much as I enjoy building projects, and I believe the strongest organizations are those where people work together with a shared purpose and a willingness to challenge one another in pursuit of better solutions.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss how my experience and leadership approach can help your organization continue to grow, innovate, and build for the future.

With Purpose,

Adrian Cortes

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Strategic architecture, design, and construction leader with 20+ years guiding multi-unit retail, restaurant, and convenience portfolios across North America. Proven in building scalable development platforms that integrate site feasibility, design standards, permitting, construction delivery, and lifecycle reinvestment programs to accelerate speed to market while protecting brand integrity, operational performance, and capital investment. Known for bridging design vision with buildable execution. Combines architectural fluency, operational insight, and contractor collaboration to create environments that enhance customer experience while delivering disciplined capital outcomes. Experienced leading cross functional teams across real estate, operations, marketing, facilities, and construction while directing national consultant and contractor networks across portfolios exceeding 1,150 locations.

Core Leadership Strengths

Restaurant & Retail Design Strategy • Architecture & Store Design Leadership • Construction & Development Strategy • Prototype & Format Systems • Multi-Unit Rollouts (100+ Annually) • Capital Planning & Budget Oversight • Speed-to-Market Optimization • Reinvestment & Lifecycle • Programs Cross Functional Leadership • Vendor, Consultant & Contractor Networks • Lease Coordination & Site Feasibility • FF&E & Equipment Platforms • Permitting & Code Compliance • Customer & Associate Experience Integration • Team Development & Mentorship • Process Governance & KPI Performance Systems

PROFESSINAL EXPERIENCE:

Wawa, Inc. – Wawa, PA
Sr. Mgr, Architectural Design & Formats | Manager Store Design | Store Design Project Manager | 2013 – 2025
$18B+ Foodservice & Convenience Retailer with 1,150+ Multi-State Locations

Directed enterprise architecture, design, and construction strategy supporting national store growth, prototype evolution, and reinvestment programs. Led cross functional collaboration across real estate, construction, operations, facilities, marketing, and procurement to deliver scalable, operationally efficient environments while managing significant capital investment. Key leadership role connecting design vision, development strategy, and construction execution across a rapidly expanding multi-state portfolio.

- Scaled annual store openings from 46 to more than 100 locations per year by aligning design standards, permitting strategy, and construction execution across multi-state development markets.
- Directed 150–300 concurrent development projects annually, including 20–25 active construction sites, ensuring predictable delivery across aggressive growth cycles.
- Managed $300M–$500M in annual construction value with typical project costs ranging from $2M–$6M per location.
- Built and led the internal Store Design department, mentoring architects, designers, and project managers while establishing governance and delivery frameworks for new builds, remodels, and special projects.
- Led multi-year prototype and format evolution, integrating digital ordering, equipment platforms, labor-efficient layouts, and customer journey improvements that increased NPS by 10% and improved labor utilization by 15%.

- Owned development of national architectural, interior, signage, and environmental branding standards ensuring consistent brand expression across new builds and reinvestment programs.
- Delivered $1.9M in capital savings (2025) with $2.3M forecast (2026) through value engineering, specification optimization, and permitting alignment.
- Implemented KPI performance dashboards tracking schedule, contractor performance, cost control, and bid efficiency, improving on-time delivery from 65% to 92%.
- Streamlined development workflows and permitting coordination, reducing approval timelines by 25% across multi-state jurisdictions.
- Led sourcing strategies for FF&E, building materials, and prefabrication systems, reducing costs approximately 20% while improving supply chain reliability.
- Built and managed national networks of architects, engineers, fabricators, and general contractors supporting expansion across the Mid Atlantic, Southeast, and Midwest.
- Guided development projects from site feasibility and lease evaluation through design, permitting, construction, commissioning, and store turnover, ensuring operational readiness at opening.

The Design Collaborative, Architects and Planners, P.A – Cape May Court House, NJ
Senior Designer | Project Manager | Studio/CAD Manager | 2002-2013
Full-Service Architecture & Planning firm | $500K–$34M projects, $100M annual portfolio

Led architecture, interior design, and construction administration for multi-unit retail and hospitality clients while coordinating owners, engineers, contractors, and municipalities to deliver projects from concept through occupancy and closeout.

- Managed 70–120 projects annually across portfolios exceeding $100M in construction value.
- Developed prototype systems and scalable design frameworks supporting multi-unit restaurant and retail growth.
- Directed consultant coordination, scheduling, and project delivery from concept through construction completion.
- Conducted site visits, construction inspections, and reviews of RFIs, submittals, and change orders to ensure design intent and build quality were maintained.
- Strengthened collaboration between architects, contractors, and engineers to resolve constructability challenges before impacting cost or schedule.
- Produced construction documentation, specifications, and finish schedules ensuring code compliance and operational functionality.
- Led feasibility studies, site test fits, lease exhibits, and construction criteria supporting real estate negotiations.
- Mentored designers and project managers while managing studio CAD standards and production workflows.

EDUCATION:

- Pennco Tech, Blackwood, NJ – Architectural/Electro-Mechanical Drafting Certificate
- Camden County College, Blackwood, NJ – Engineering Science

TECHNICAL and PROFESSIONAL SKILLS:

AutoCAD • Revit • SketchUp • Enscape • Adobe Creative Suite • Bluebeam • Procore • Smartsheets • Prototype Development • Store Planning & Architecture • Multi-State Permitting & Codes • CapEx Forcasting & Budget Planning

Who I Am

A builder of brands, environments, teams, and systems. For more than 20 years, I've delivered end-to-end development programs across retail, QSR, convenience, hospitality, and specialty environments. My work sits at the intersection of creativity, technical execution, operational strategy, and large-scale delivery.

What I Bring

- *Multi-disciplinary expertise across the entire development lifecycle including architecture, engineering, concept design, prototyping, feasibility, real estate partnership, construction, and turnover.*
- *A track record of scaling store develop**ment** from 46 to over 100 openings annually while overseeing **1,100+ remodels** with measurable improvements in efficiency, cost, and brand consistency.*
- *Deep experience building **playbooks, standards, and vendor networks** that create clarity, speed, and repeatability across diverse markets and complex conditions.*

Core Strengths

- ***Systems + Process Leadership:** Franchise-ready standards, consultant networks, and execution models that simplify growth across real estate, permitting, engineering, design, and construction.*
- ***People-First Thinking:** Early operations experience ensures every environment supports workflow, team experience, and customer connection.*
- ***Project & Program Management Discipline:** Full lifecycle ownership from project origination to closeout, balancing resources, budgets, scheduling, bidding, and real-time feasibility.*
- ***Cross-Functional Influence:** A connector who aligns design, engineering, construction, real estate, merchandising, operations, and brand teams behind a single vision.*

How I Lead

I listen first, clarify the why, define the what, and guide teams confidently into the how. I mentor with intention, encourage thoughtful collaboration, and bring a bit of humor to keep the work human. Because at the end of the day, buildings don't thrive—people do.

Why Me

I bring the rare ability to unite creativity, technical expertise, operational clarity, and disciplined execution. I build environments, teams, and systems that not only perform but inspire. I am the leader you want when your organization is growing, evolving, innovating, or preparing for its next chapter.

My Career Journey

My career began in 1996 at Wawa, where I worked my way up to management while pursuing my education. Those early years shaped my foundation in leadership, operations, and the customer experience skills that have guided me throughout my professional path.

From there, I transitioned into Architecture and Design at The Design Collaborative, a small but mighty firm where I had the opportunity to immerse myself in every aspect of the built environment Architecture, Engineering, Construction, and Project Management. I gained hands-on experience across a wide spectrum of industries including Retail, Education, Industrial, Government, Institutional, Grocery, and Restaurant/Hospitality. This chapter gave me a holistic understanding of how thoughtful design can shape human experience.

With a desire to merge my operational roots with my construction and design expertise, I returned to the Wawa flock this time, not as a store operator, but as a designer helping shape the very stores, I once worked in. Over the past decade, I have played a role in transforming an iconic convenience store brand into a modern, hospitality-driven experience, with food and beverage at its heart.

The work has been like weaving together the essence of Starbucks, Dunkin', Smoothie King, Dairy Queen, McDonald's, and Domino's all within the footprint of a convenience store. The result: an elevated, guest-centered environment that redefines what a C-Store can be oh and happen to offer gas and EV.

I've had the privilege of enabling strategic ideas in innovative formats that are now embedded in the brand's growth for the next decade. Together with an incredible team, we built an adaptable prototype portfolio that includes Travel Centers a large-format design, the dominant NEXT GEN Prototype with the NEXT 10 Kitchen, Car Wash, and Wawa's version of the QSR DriveThru—the "FlyThru." These innovations now extend into BOPIS and Phygital store experiences, ensuring the brand remains ahead of customer expectations.

With the team now set up for success and equipped with these forward-thinking platforms, I feel it's the right moment to seek the next journey and chapter in my career one where I can bring my experience, passion, and vision to create impact on an even broader scale.

Professional Experience

- Led prototype innovation initiatives such as NEXT 10 (future-focused store platform), FlyThru (digital-forward service model), and Travel Centers efforts comparable to multi-brand retail innovation and omnichannel integration.
- Led creation of 4+ new formats and pilots, blending storytelling (brand positioning, guest experience) with execution (architecture, construction, engineering, permitting) to ensure concepts could scale; successful pilots now represent 80% of long-range new builds.
- Directed FlyThru mobile-first prototype, connecting consumer insights with engineering feasibility and permitting strategy transforming an innovative idea into a functional service model in a C-store offering blending QSR model.
- Championed reinvestment design strategy, developing a “kit-of-parts” approach to back-port innovation into existing stores; ensured operational impact was addressed while aligning architecture, construction, and cost-efficiency.
- Streamlined construction document workflow, reducing site approval-to-permit timelines by 25% through process improvements ensuring design intent was not just visionary but also executable at scale.
- Partnered with Insights, Operations, and Marketing to translate customer feedback into prototype evolutions, using qualitative and quantitative research to guide design direction while balancing creativity and execution.
- Mentored and developed a high-performing design team, fostering a culture of creativity, accountability, and collaboration while positioning team members for future leadership roles.
- Championed value engineering initiatives, achieving over $1.9mm in capital savings in 2025 with projected $2.3mm for 2026, while preserving both aesthetic intent and functional requirements of Wawa’s Programs and Prototypes
- Directed creation of optimizing construction documentation and permitting workflows and rollout of performance dashboards and KPIs across design teams, increasing on-time deliverables from 65% to 92% within 18 months.

Prototype Strategy & Execution: *Led national store format development incorporating operational modeling, guest behavior insights, and service innovations to enable growth across legacy and emerging markets. Oversaw the development of scalable site-adaptable prototypes across 100+ projects annually.*

Cross-Functional Leadership: *Acted as the connective tissue across real estate, construction, marketing, operations, and innovation teams to align design strategy with brand goals, development schedules, and budget targets.*

External Partner Oversight: *Directed multiple A/E firms and consultants to ensure accountability, design quality, and cost control. Created drawing standards and QA processes, improving first-pass plan approval rates and permitting timelines.*

New Channel & Format Innovation: *Guided mobile-format and alternative footprint designs that addressed real estate constraints and evolving customer expectations. Led hybrid coffee programs blending automation and thermal platforms to meet varied operational needs.*

Team Development: *Built and coached high-performing teams with a strong emphasis on ownership, growth, and cross-discipline collaboration. Created performance metrics and implemented tools that improved design-to-deployment timelines and deliverable accuracy.*

Building a Brand

"Leading the creation of formats, prototypes, and design innovation—embracing failure along the way to drive smarter, scalable solutions."

Building a Brand

NEXT10

Wawa @ V

Wawa FlyThru

Wawa CarWash

“Redefining Convenience for Over a Decade—Creating Elevated Hospitality and Modernized an Iconic Brand.”

THE DESIGN COLLABORATIVE ARCHITECTS AND PLANNERS

Atlantic County Institute of Technology

Mays Landing, New Jersey

The Atlantic County Institute of Technology was a part-time vocational high school with three separate buildings on the main campus in Mays Landing, New Jersey. The buildings were separated by distance and elevation making it cumbersome to comfortably travel throughout the facility during school. The 91,500 S.F. additions included a new gymnasium, fitness center, locker rooms, physical education office, storage, classrooms, auditorium, administrative offices, library media center, café and science laboratories. Rehabilitation consists of relocating the main entry vestibule and main office area for security lockdown that will restrict public access to the building. Energy saving measures and sustainable design were one of many over-riding factors in the final design. The concept to in fill the existing gaps and changes in grade between the existing buildings included utilizing the new additions. A new entry and "main street" became the core with critical core components situated along the new center of the facility. The library media center was a focal point of this project to reinforce the importance of the program for the school. The overall construction cost was $33,000,000.00.

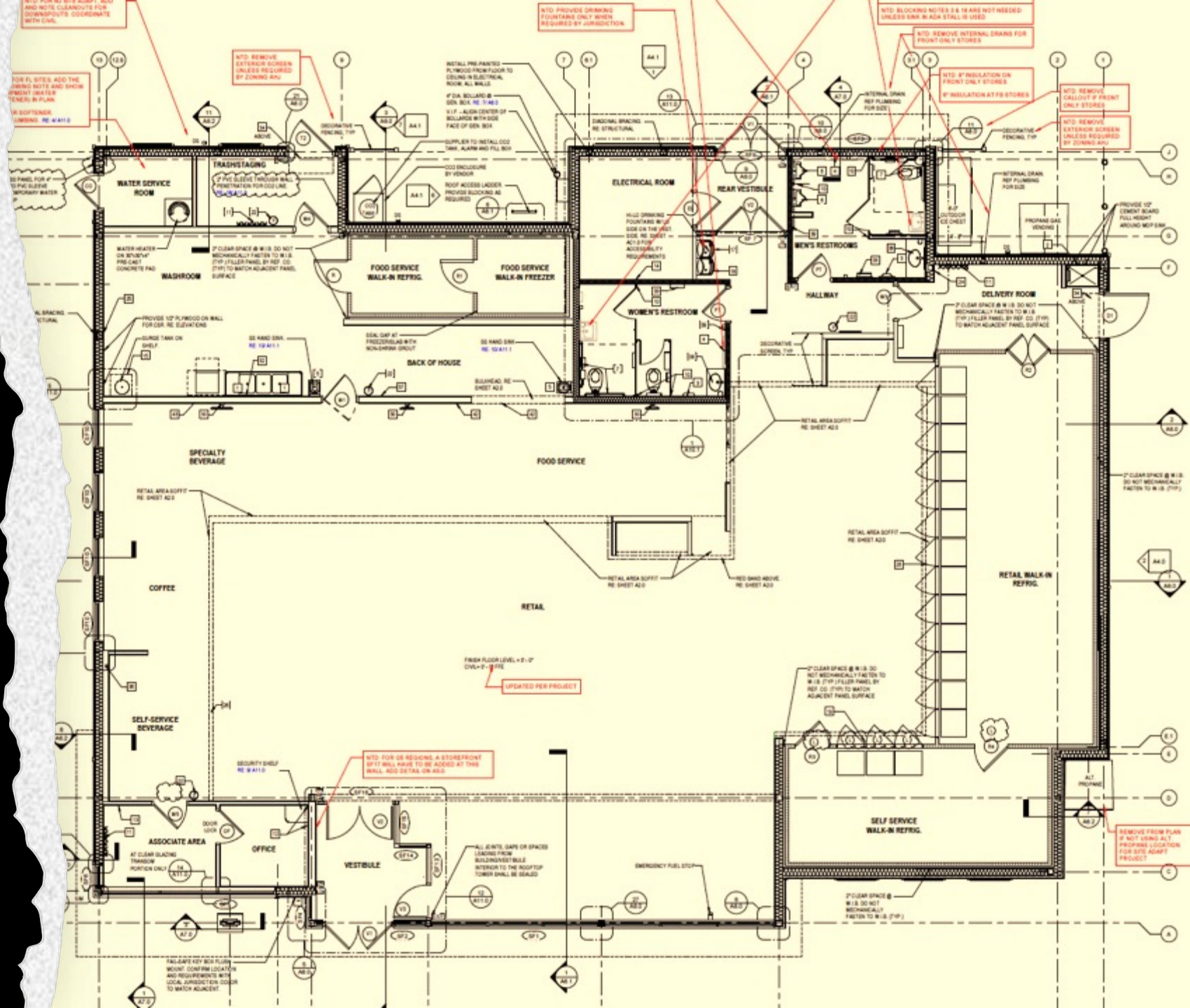
Avalon Community School Additions and Renovations

Avalon, New Jersey

Project gave the existing school a total make-over. It included 29,000 S.F. of additions to core spaces, including a gymnasium, library/media center, art and music rooms, small group instruction and administrative office, and 18,000 S.F. of renovations throughout the existing elementary school.

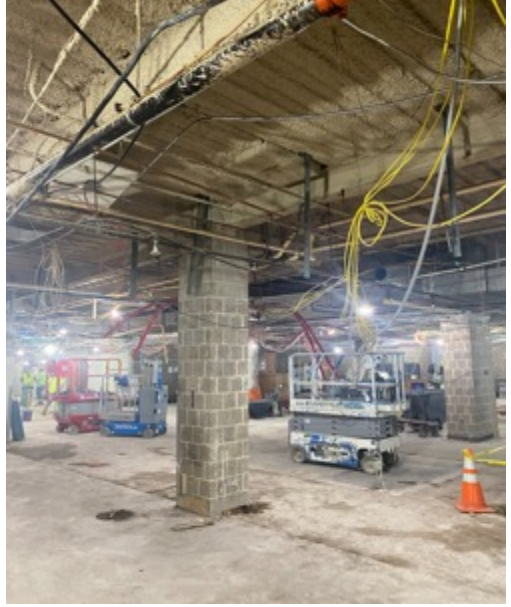
I am more than just Design…
Think scale and lifecycle…
Standards, but with Flexibility..

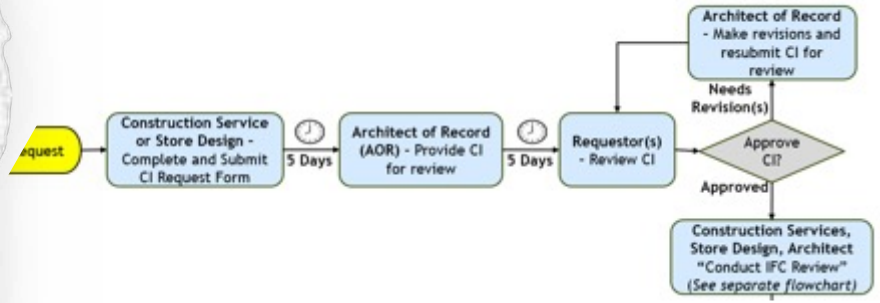
"My career has been built on more than design it's about taking concepts and turning them into scalable, operationally sound realities. With over 20 years of experience in architecture, engineering, construction, and store operations, I bridge creative vision with the technical precision and execution strategies needed for commercialization. Whether it's a new prototype, a remodel strategy, or an emerging format, I focus on aligning design intent with business needs ensuring every concept not only looks good, but works, scales, and drives results."

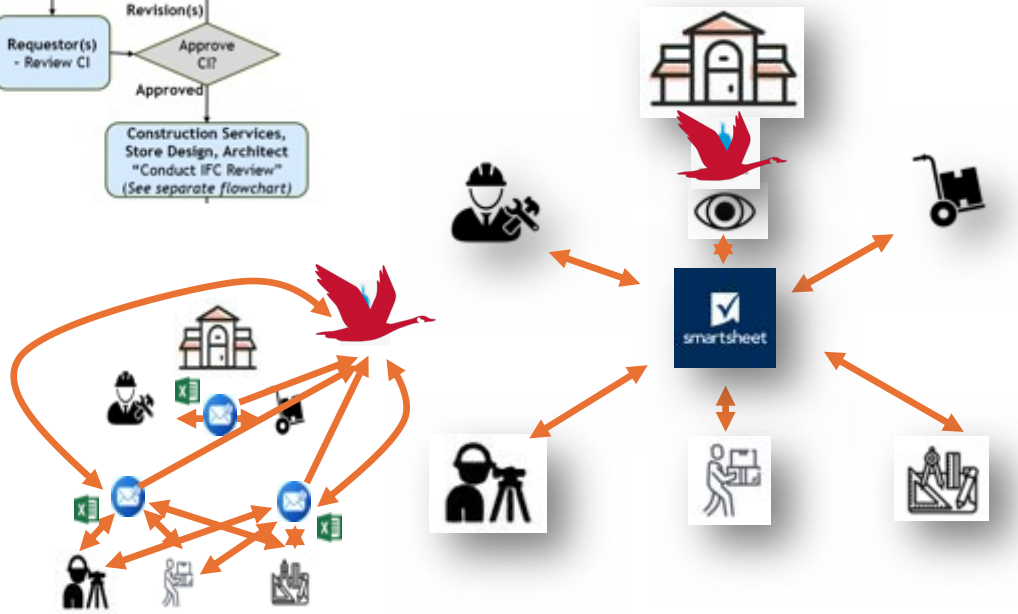


Turning complexity into clarity and ideas into scalable realities.

"I bring broad experience across Tenant Fit-Outs, conversions, ground-ups from 1,200 to 100,000+ square feet, mobile ventures, and prefabricated buildings. I connect design, construction, and operations to ensure concepts align with scale, budget, and schedule. By replacing fragmented trackers with centralized systems, I create a single source of truth that streamlines communication and accelerates delivery. I focus on flexible, scalable solutions that support growth, enable change, and promote agile thinking—because if you're not thinking change, you remain the same. My goal is to help teams work smarter and turn ideas into built environments that deliver clarity, consistency, and results at scale.







Project Example

Wawa's prototype portfolio had reached capacity and was limiting product evolution and multi-market growth. I led a cross-functional team to redefine the design strategy, enabling the brand to scale its food, beverage, and fueling offer. This approach now supports 100+ new store constructions annually and 50 remodels per year, positioning Wawa for sustained growth.

It all starts with building a Great Team, Project Structure, and Establishing Roles. Kick-off the "Why" so that all can figure out the "What" and solve the "How"… Give a Vision and frame the strategic intent..

Research — Industry Trends and Consumer Trends

Food Focused

62%

Of young adults said they'd be motivated to buy a product or service if it helps them achieve a sense of community belonging. (Horizon, 2023)

Digitally Driven

71%

Of consumers expect companies to personalize interactions (McKinsey & Company, 2023)

Community Centric

88%

Of consumers feel the experience a brand provides is just as important as its product (Insider Intelligence, 2023)

Research — Understand the Digital Landscape

NEXT10

Understand the Data

Customer Journey

Simulate

Time Study

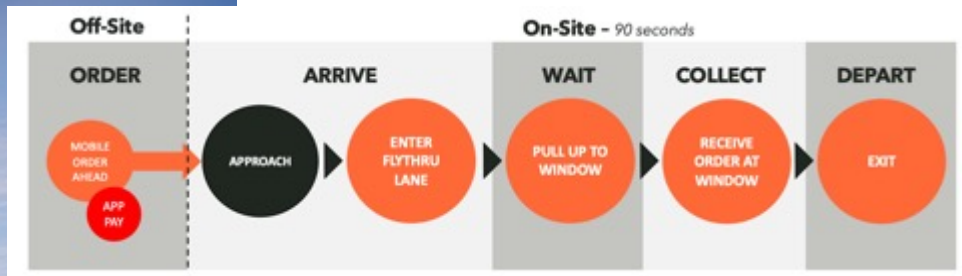
- Order Accuracy
- Pick-up Confusion
- Menu Availability
- Balancing On- vs Off-Prem Orders
- Manual + Inefficient Picking / Packing

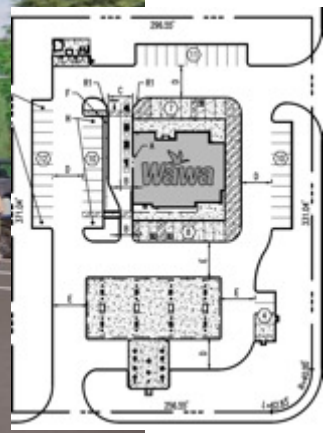
Understand top Points-of-Pain

What to Solve….

NEXT10

I led the team through a structured approach grounding our work in data, assessing operations, and mapping both customer and associate experiences to uncover critical points of pain. Together, we simulated, tested, and evaluated solutions to ensure alignment with our goals. With these insights established, the team is now positioned to advance into the next phase: developing a NEXT Gen prototype and design concepts that bring these solutions to life.

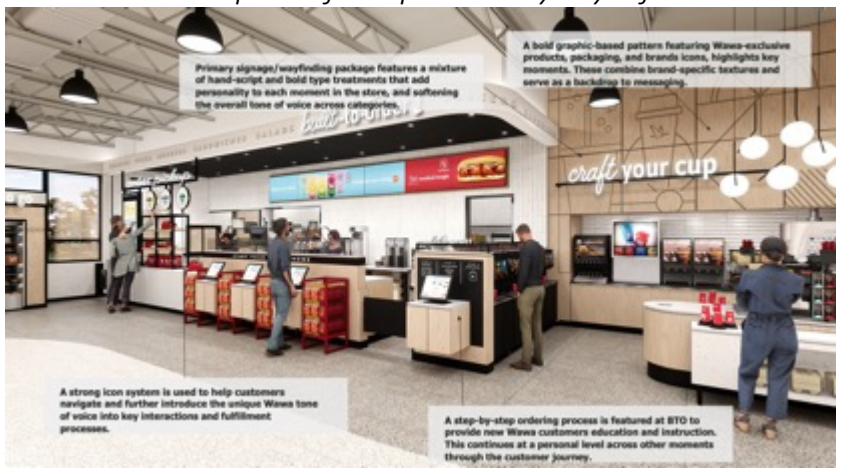




Step into **Cortado**. The atmosphere hums with the **buzz of daily life** and aromas ignite your senses with anticipation. Neutral tones, warm woods, and earthy elements evoke a **sense of familiarity**, while natural light casts a **glow of comfort**. Textures and patterns are punctuated with intentional pops of red to add a subtle **touch of play**. Soft edges and organic forms create **casual charm**, while a conversational tone of voice guides you through your morning routine with a friendly demeanor. Technology seamlessly supports the experience, never overshadowing the **human connection** at heart. Food takes center stage where **quality and craft** are observed and displays of desirable treats allure you to indulge. Every visit is an invitation to savor the moment and embrace the joy of everyday delights.

NEXT10 | NEXT GEN Prototype

It's about Building a Brand that comes part of People's Everyday Life…



"By creating a new approach to prototype development—shifting mindset, fostering innovation, and leveraging persuasion and business acumen—led a cross-functional team of internal and external experts to deliver Wawa's Next-Gen Prototype. Through servant leadership, clear processes, and collaborative alignment platforms, we transformed store operations and customer experience, enabling sustainable growth for the next decade while seamlessly integrating into the existing portfolio."

Building Process | Leverage Analytics | Leadership

"Skilled in identifying business opportunities and developing scalable processes by gathering metrics and defining KPIs to track performance. Adept at leveraging both qualitative and quantitative research using analytics to inform design strategies that elevate customer experience, align with expectations, and respond to evolving need states. I believe in balancing data-driven insights with operational context and strategic intent to guide, but not dictate, design direction."

"I believe great leadership is rooted in mentorship creating space for others to grow, feel empowered, and take ownership of their work. I strive to build strong, accountable teams by offering clear guidance, open dialogue, and honest feedback celebrating strengths while constructively identifying areas for development. A strong leader listens first, digests thoughtfully, and provides direction that enables both individual and collective success. My goal is to develop the next generation of leaders by fostering a culture of trust, growth, and shared purpose."

A Little About Me….

Born and Raised South Jersey

https://americanbuildersquarterly.com/2026/adrian-cortes-wawa-archtectural-design/

https://americanbuildersquarterly.com/2024/adrian-cortes-wawa/

The Family..

Married 19 Yrs..

Fun Fact

Retired Professional DJ

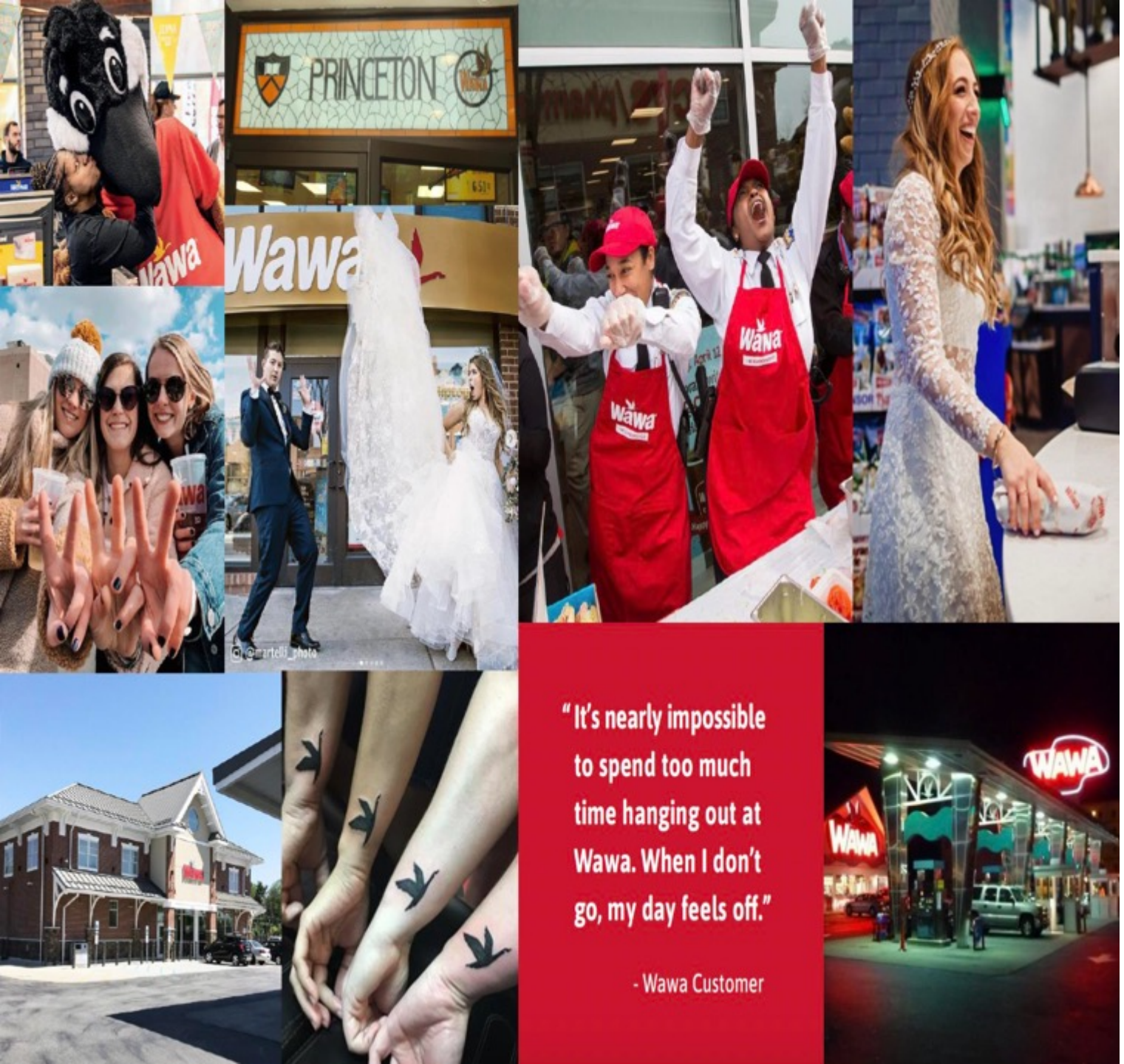
Love Music…

Favorite Genre: (90's Hip-Hop)

My Favorite Sports Teams, *it's a Philly Thing..*

Advisory Board– ConnectingPoint: C-BuildPoint

SPECS 2025 – Rightsizing Prototype Portfolio | Invite to Advisory Board 2025/26



If you're looking for someone who cares about the little details, isn't afraid to push boundaries or fail, and leads by serving others while taking pride in every task, big or small you've found the right person. I love creating places and spaces that become part of someone's journey, whether it's a daily ritual or a once-in-a-lifetime moment… yes, people have even gotten married at a Wawa! I bring leadership, a hands-on approach, and the experience to hit the ground running. In the words of Nike: not just "Just Do It," but "Why Do It"? because you never know what might happen, and that's what brings me joy. Let's connect I'm looking for the next chapter in my career journey to create something special like a Wawa, even better.

Thank You

Adrian Cortes

Transforming Design Vision into Scalable Brand Experiences

Cell: 215-316-1617
Email: a_cortes@comcast.net
LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/A-Yo-Adrian

"The only way to discover the limits of the possible is to go beyond them into the impossible." - Arthur C. Clarke