

# Meet The Engineers: Barbara Raitz



AirbnbEng

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Meet Barbara Raitz! In today's Q&A Barbara tells us about storytelling through code and how to be a magician.

**How did you get started in Computer Science?**

I grew up around computers and initially pursued a Computer Science degree for practical reasons. After working a few years in the industry, I discovered that I absolutely love it! There is beauty in well crafted code and elegant architectures. I love diving in deep, trying to understand the `story` of complex code, and then providing cleaner, simpler, and more powerful solutions.

If I could say anything to those considering this career path, I want to shout out that it is an amazing field! Though it can be initially daunting, there is such a rich, vast, nearly limitless set of opportunities with this skill set. I love quoting a colleague who said: “Do you want to watch the magic show, or do you want to become the magician?” I feel so lucky to have found a home where I can have such impact, while having so much fun.

## **What was your path to Airbnb?**

I first heard of Airbnb on a podcast from The Commonwealth Club. I very quickly identified with the whole premise of Airbnb, but didn't consider it much further until a recruiter reached out and contacted me. Because of that initial spark, I decided to come visit the office and meet the team, and was undeniably affected by the positive energy and excitement of the place! Even though it was an introductory visit, I knew I was changed, and every subsequent visit re-enforced that.

I joined Airbnb because it is a technical playground with many opportunities to dig in and make a difference; because the amazing people and culture absolutely blew me away; and because I felt a strong connection to the Airbnb mission. I am particularly drawn to the concept of unique, authentic, local travel that benefits the community, and, that in this ever virtual world, we are bringing people together again.

## **What's the most interesting technical challenge you've worked on since joining?**

I would like to share two!

Initially, I paired up with Spike Brehm to work on Rendr, a library that can re-use and render javascript code on either the client or server: original, powerful, fast — isomorphic javascript! This was a fascinating, ground-breaking, and richly challenging and rewarding project, and I am proud of our results!

From there, I moved to a completely different project that needed me most. I have spent much of my efforts diving deep into tangled legacy code and gradually moving it towards a cleaner, tested, decoupled service-oriented architecture. This process of refactoring mission critical code and data structures while still “in-flight” requires absolute attention to detail, small steps, and patience. Specific to the Calendar, it is rewarding to see powerful new features, such as seasonal availability rules, shine through.

## **What do you want to work on next?**

Consistent with the mission of Simplify, there are other product areas that would greatly benefit from a deep-dive and refactor. Each has it's own challenges, and is thus richly interesting. I will likely continue supporting opportunities that deliver the biggest impact in terms of decoupling code and processes, increasing stability and maintainability, and delivering powerful new capabilities and features.

In terms of learning something new, I have my eye on React.js — I instinctively like it and want to try it out myself sometime. I have also wanted to explore and experience writing a mobile client application. Maybe in my free time =)

## **What is your favorite core value, and how do you live it?**

I am drawn to all the core values, and absolutely love that our company truly promotes and lives them! Though hard to choose a favorite, I suppose that I best embody “Champion the Mission”. In terms of my technical role, I passionately pursue real architecture changes that I feel will have the most impact to our fast-growing team, product, and company. And then I follow through with careful, persistent, patient hard work. In terms of something bigger, I truly love how Airbnb promotes “belonging anywhere”, in being gracious and welcoming hosts, and being your individual unique self. I love how Airbnb is beneficial to local communities and real individuals. I love how this form of travel encourages people to go outside their normal bounds to perhaps discover something new. These actually map to other core values, and I promote and champion them as well!

## **What's your favorite Airbnb experience?**

For New Year's 2013, I wanted to go somewhere special with my boyfriend and we landed here, the experience was absolutely amazing! The space is truly beautiful, from

the stunning landscaping and views, to the fabulous and uniquely crafted house itself. For us, it was magical. It was beautiful, relaxing, and creatively stimulating — it allowed us to both relax and go into hyper-creative mode, imagining all sorts of creative, crazy, inspiring futures — colorful ideas that are still with us today. But as any well-travelled person could tell you, the most meaningful memories are tied to the people and kindred spirits you meet along the way. Jeanne, our host, is one of the most gracious, welcoming people I've met. She went out of her way to make our stay uniquely special, arranging for a special boat on New Years eve to go to the center of the lake to watch ALL the fireworks. But truly, she opened her heart to us, and we shared real life stories, goals, and aspirations. It's rare and beautiful when, unexpectedly, your life and perspective changes because you went somewhere or crossed paths and made friends with someone new. This was one of those memorable experiences.

Side note, this listing won Airbnb's Most Unique Listing award in 2014.

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