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## Architects of the Featured Projects

**Joyce Owens, FAIA, RIBA**, was the first woman to receive the AIA Florida Gold Medal in 2022, the highest award AIA Florida bestows. In 2020, she received the AIA Florida Medal of Honor for Design. A University of Notre Dame graduate, Owens left her London-based practice after 15 years and relocated to Florida in 2004. Her firms have garnered attention and international publicity for numerous awards. She has become "The Coastal Architect" and is a huge advocate of the climate-sensitive architectural style Tropical Modern, which incorporates resiliency, as well as passive and active sustainable principles into the design.



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**Lance Jaccard, AIA**, is CEO of OTJ Architects where he leverages decades of design and construction industry expertise on clients' behalf to realize built environments where individuals thrive and businesses prosper. His portfolio includes workplaces for Adobe, Booz Allen Hamilton, PBS and the U.S. Department of State. Jaccard is a graduate of Clemson University.



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**Jaclyn Garcia, AIA**, believes empathy is the key to her success as a director of design at OTJ Architects. She uses this quality to deliver environments that encourage individuals to do their best, most creative work. Jackie references the rich architectural history of Miami in her work while leveraging a passion for color to develop brand-specific palettes that amplify each client's unique corporate persona. Garcia was born and raised in Miami and is a graduate of Florida International University.



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**David Corban, AIA**, is the founder of David Corban Architects, a Naples-based firm committed to serving marginalized communities and tackling climate and environmental issues. The firm's work has had a lasting, positive impact on thousands of disadvantaged individuals and has inspired communities everywhere about the transformative potential of thoughtful design while enhancing the cultural value of the public realm in Southwest Florida.



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**John Gerneth, AIA**, is a principal architect at David Corban Architects in Naples. Gerneth received his Masters of Architecture from Kent State University. He has been the lead architect on numerous award-winning projects, including 2024 AIA Florida Award winner Rebecca's and The Maddox and Celebration Park, and is the recipient of a National AIA Small Projects Award. David Corban Architects is noted for designing projects for not-for-profit organizations that serve vulnerable populations in Southwest Florida.



Architects create spaces where we experience all aspects of life. This issue features projects that impact the community from a social gathering space to offices creating a positive workplace to a state park and shelter for domestic violence victims. Architects shape our communities through design.

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(Hall+Merrick+McCaughtry  
Photographers)

*Editor's note: In the print edition of the  
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issue, the photo credit for Durango  
Cabin was incorrect. The correct photo  
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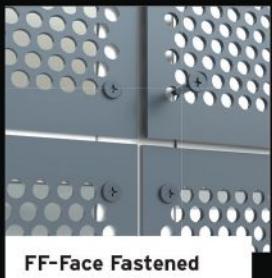


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**"The buildings and spaces we create will endure long after we are gone, supporting and enriching the communities they inhabit."**

# President's Perspective

## Elizabeth Camargo, AIA

As I begin my term as president of AIA Florida, I am filled with gratitude and enthusiasm. It is an honor to serve our organization as the ninth woman to hold the position of president. I am deeply thankful for the trust our membership has placed in me and for the opportunity to build upon the legacy of those before me. Together, we will steer our association toward a future of empowerment, greater inclusion and community engagement.

Following the remarkable leadership of Rhonda Hammond, AIA, is no small feat. However, I am excited to take on this challenge and expand the conversation of why architecture matters under the lens of this year's theme, Shifting Paradigms. We will explore how the unprecedented speed in which our world is changing is affecting our profession, our communities, and our built environment. Architects must not only recognize these shifts, but also adapt and innovate in order to maintain the relevance and influence of our profession.

My journey as an architect has always been driven by a deep commitment to both the natural and built environments. I have long held the belief that our work must honor and enhance the world around us. We must design with mindfulness, diligence and an eye toward the future, as the impact of our work transcends the present.

Sustainability, a core principle that many of us share, has been central to our debate for decades. The buildings and spaces we create will endure long after we are gone, supporting and enriching the communities they inhabit. It is through this perspective

that I approach my role as president, with a focus on fostering a resilient future for our profession and the communities we serve.

Architects possess many unique skills. Throughout this issue, we will highlight one of utmost importance — the ability to shape and transform communities through our designs. You will see exceptional examples of how architects directly influence the places where we live, work and play. This issue features an outdoor entertainment center helping to reinvigorate downtown Fort Myers. There are office spaces designed to benefit different professions, a state park and a shelter providing refuge for victims of domestic violence. As you examine these remarkable projects, I urge you to reflect on the profound impact architecture has on people and the built environment. We must re-energize our determination to position resilience and sustainability at the forefront of our efforts.

As we embark on this journey together, I am inspired by the innovative work of my colleagues and the relentless passion of the next generation of architects. We have much to accomplish! While the challenges ahead may feel daunting, I am confident we will rise to the occasion. I feel proud of the direction we are taking as individuals and as an organization and our commitment to build a better future for generations to come.

I look forward to a year of learning, growth, advocacy and leadership — together, as one design community.

Let's get started!

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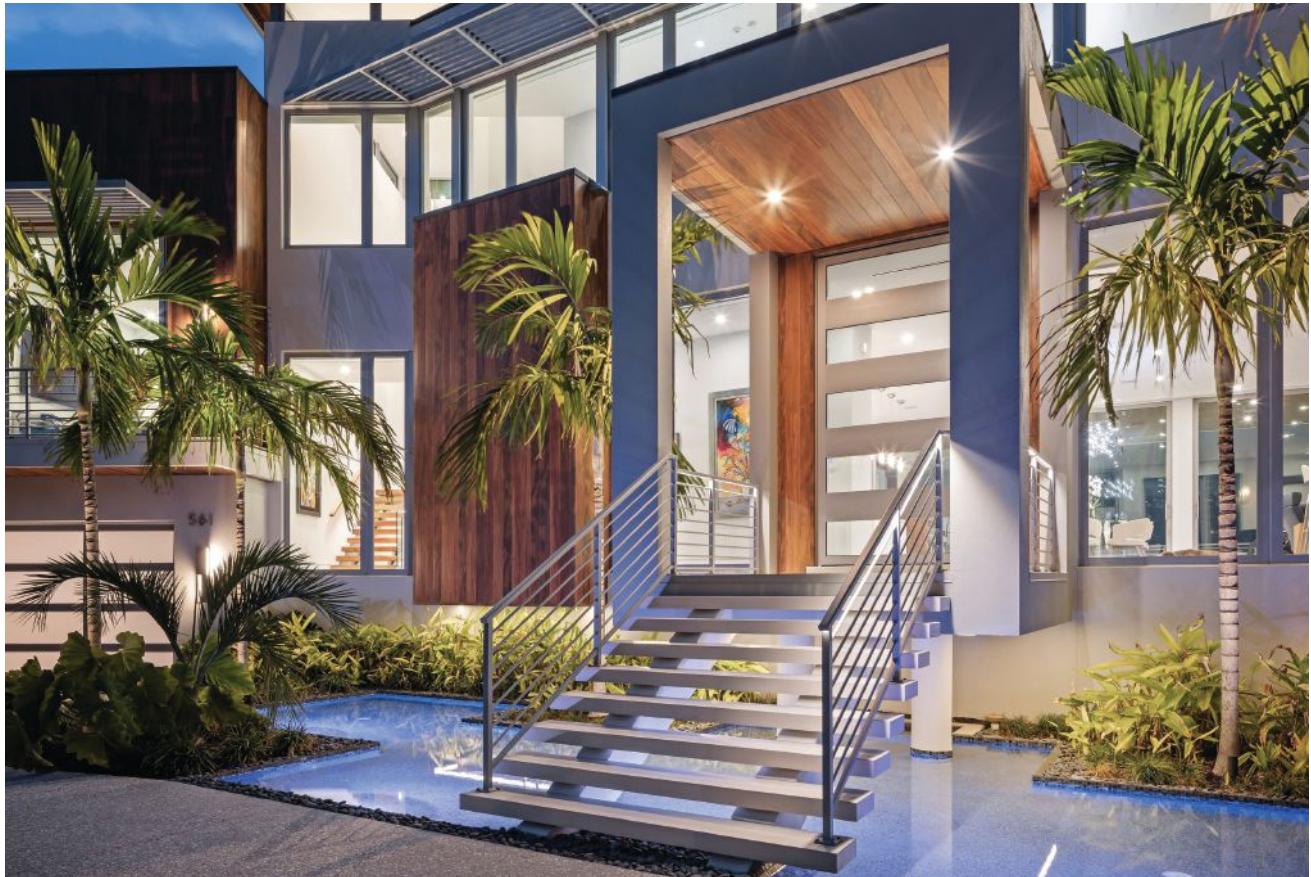
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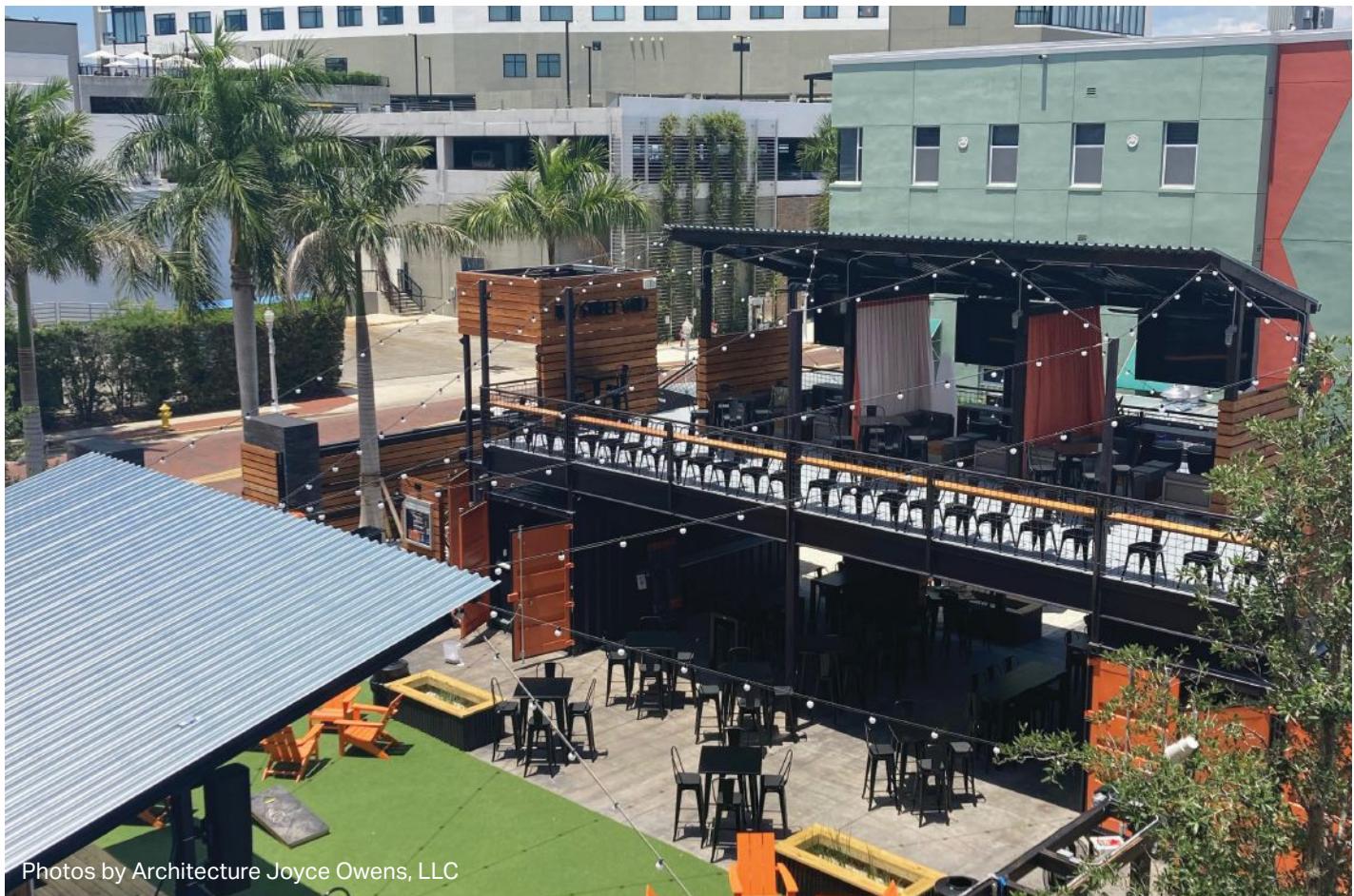
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# Bay Street Yard

Fort Myers, Florida

Architecture Joyce Owens, LLC | Fort Myers, Florida



Photos by Architecture Joyce Owens, LLC

Downtown Fort Myers is undergoing a renaissance. Like many American city centers, it suffered a long decline in the late 20th century as new development moved to the suburbs. Recently, however, the area has become a hotspot for restaurants and nightlife, boasting restored historic buildings, brick-paved streets, a major new hotel and improvements to the waterfront along the Caloosahatchee River, which gives the neighborhood its new name: the River District.

In that context, former Fort Myers mayor Randy Henderson looked at the undeveloped lot he owned on Bay Street, which included some parking spaces for his office building next door, and began envisioning a better use for the land. He started talking to developer David Fry, who

had a long-term interest in creating an outdoor bar and entertainment venue in the neighborhood. They ultimately became co-investors in Bay Street Yard, built on Henderson's former parking lot, a multifaceted venue featuring two bars, three food trucks, and facilities for live music, sports viewing and private parties.

"The developer came to us with a sketch and a strong idea of how it might work," recalled Joyce Owens, FAIA, RIBA, whose firm, Architecture Joyce Owens, designed the venue, "but the site was tight. They wanted a stage, a two-story drinking area, plus space for the food trucks, but with an upscale feel. It was up to us to make that a reality, and the client listened to us and was always very respectful of our work."

The design team came to think of the project as a "not-building," given that it primarily consists of outdoor spaces but had to accommodate a number of distinct activities and the necessary infrastructure to support them. Complicating matters was the fact that the owners envisioned this as an interim use for the site, which they expect to develop into a larger mixed-use project in about five years. The architects, meanwhile, hope that the design will prove so successful that the business will be around a good deal longer, so all of the components of the venue needed to be sturdy without being so bulky that they would be too difficult to disassemble if and when the time comes.

Patrons enter the site via a gate of wood slats bracketed by masonry-clad piers. The

gate aligns with the principal circulation path running the full depth of the site. To one side is the main bar area, with an upper-level, "VIP" deck that can hold up to 70 people. Behind the bar area are the food trucks, which can move in and out via a vehicular gate along Bay Street. On the other side of the circulation spine is the entertainment area, including a stage, a lawn of artificial turf and flexible seating.

The structural cornerstones of the venue are repurposed shipping containers, painted dark gray with bright orange doors. Two containers bracketing the stage are used for general storage but also form a backdrop for live performances. Two additional containers on either side of the main outdoor seating area hold bars, while others accommodate restrooms and a refrigerated space for beverages. Between the restrooms, an outdoor trough-style sink with foot-activated faucets and exposed pipes becomes a sculptural element.

A simple steel structure supports the upper-level deck and the corrugated metal roofs above the VIP area and the stage. Wood slats on the entry gates, signage tower and VIP deck add a sense of warmth. Abundant greenery contributes to a garden-like atmosphere.

Acutely conscious of the risk of hurricanes, especially in the wake of the damage that Ian brought to the Fort Myers area in 2022, the architects ensured the project would be resistant to any future natural disasters. The shipping containers, for instance, are manufactured to be watertight, and all of the openings in them can be sealed during a storm. The entire project meets FEMA standards for flood resilience.



# Empira Group

Miami, Florida

## Global Audio Streaming Provider

Miami, Florida

OTJ Architects | Miami, Florida

OTJ Architects recently completed two office interiors in Miami for European-based companies. One of the projects is in a conventional commercial skyscraper downtown, while the other is in the funky and rapidly evolving Wynwood neighborhood, famous for its colorful murals. In each case, the architects sought to strike a balance between the distinct local character of the site and the established corporate culture of the client.

### Empira Group

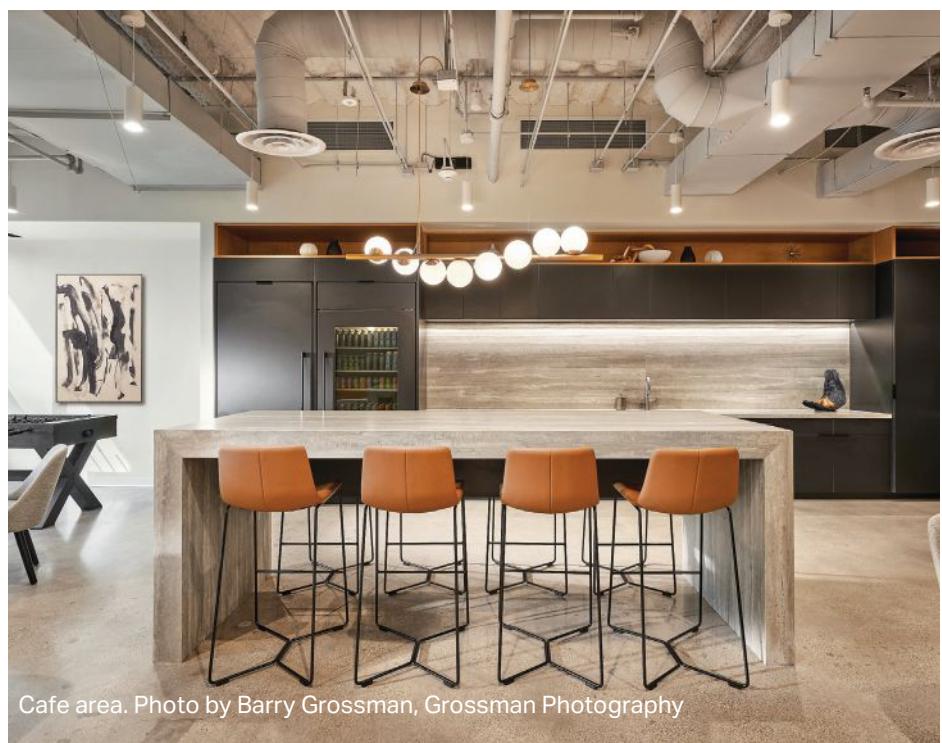
Empira Group is a real estate, infrastructure and private debt investment company headquartered in Zug, Switzerland. Its new Miami office, the company's U.S. headquarters, is located in the 55-story Southeast Financial Center, completed in 1984. The building is a downtown Miami landmark thanks to its serrated plan and multiple setbacks on upper levels.

"Empira really liked the iconic quality of this building," said Eric Holland, IIDA, principal at OTJ. "Design is very important to them, and they wanted a space where they could bring other developers they might partner with and show them that Miami was a player. At the same time, they made it clear that this workplace had to be 'on brand' with their corporate aesthetic."

The company's European offices are characterized by a rich materiality. Almost all of them, for instance, have wood floors. Here, OTJ specified an engineered wood product that offered the warmth and texture of traditional wood flooring but would hold up well even in high-traffic areas. Oak slats lining walls and ceilings in the reception area and main conference room extend the warm palette while subtly injecting a staccato rhythm that hints at the fast-paced lifestyle of Miami. A sharply angled reception desk



Reception Area with Marble Desk Photo by Barry Grossman, Grossman Photography



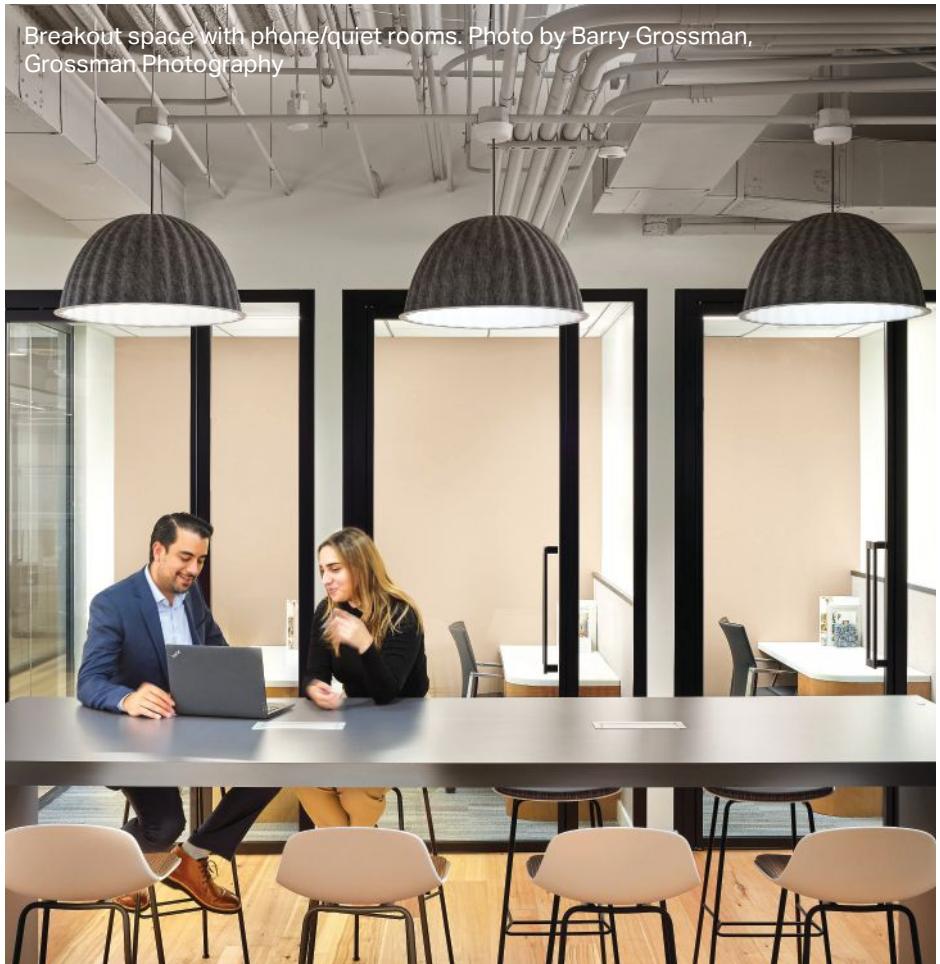
Cafe area. Photo by Barry Grossman, Grossman Photography

made of luminescent, mother-of-pearl quartz enveloping a block of cast resin adds another dynamic note, while the book-matched stone panels behind the reception area credenza suggest an abstract painting that one might expect to see at Art Basel.

The staff breakroom takes on a somewhat more industrial aesthetic, with black cabinet doors, an exposed concrete floor, and a table, countertop and backsplash covered in travertine-like porcelain. Even here, however, a high, open shelf of wood and cocoa-colored upholstery recall the warmer tones of the reception area. An unusually elegant foosball table occupies one corner of the space, providing a recreational outlet for employees on break. Most of the office space is devoted to open-plan workstations, though there are three private offices: one for the head of the Miami office, another for the owner when he is visiting from Switzerland, and one interior office for human resources. Several glass-fronted phone rooms allow for private calls or undisturbed work, while small breakout rooms accommodate collaborative work. Partitions between workstations were kept low to allow natural light to penetrate as deeply into the space as possible. The resulting space exhibits the precision, refinement and taste associated with Swiss design, but its comfortable furnishings, jaunty accents and industrial touches remind staff and visitors alike of the more "chill" Miami vibe that lies just beyond the floor-to-ceiling windows.



Floorplan



Reception area. Photo by Kendall McCaughtry (Hall+Merrick+ McCaughtry Photographers)



## Global Audio Streaming Provider

While the Empira Group offices evoke the elegance and glamour of a contemporary high-end Miami hotel or condo, the new Wynwood offices of a confidential global audio streaming provider capture the essence of the city's tropical modernist vernacular and deep Latin American roots. Bright colors, large-scale artworks, and retro-modern furniture create a lively and cheerful atmosphere. That said, the design never stoops to cliché and the space retains a professional character throughout.

"When we started on this project, our contacts were out of New York and [Europe]," said OTJ's Eric Holland. "Their impression of Miami was mostly pink flamingos and palm trees. We had to dissuade them from touristy imagery." He added with a laugh, "I've lived in my house for like 20 years and never had a flamingo touch down in my yard!"

The reception area exemplifies OTJ's design strategy. Its terrazzo floor, breezeblock partition, and curving, fluted walls painted seafoam green conjure scenes from mid-20th-century Havana or Rio de Janeiro — area rugs in the space, in fact, allude to Roberto Burle Marx's famed paving patterns along

Copacabana beach — yet a glimpse toward the conference room off to one side, with its riotously colorful mural panels, immediately transports the visitor back to present-day Wynwood. Below the mural panels, a more conventional conference table and a neatly tailored, royal blue banquette provide businesslike balance to the composition. The layout of the reception area also reflects the client's

corporate culture. Upon entering, both employees and visitors are greeted not by a receptionist but by a "concierge" behind a lozenge-shaped desk. Across the space, an opening in one of the fluted seafoam green walls reveals a "cafecito" staffed by a barista ready to serve up a stiff dose of caffeine. "It was very important to the client to praise the Cuban-inspired coffee culture here in Miami," explained Jaclyn M. Garcia, AIA,



Stairs and custom mural. Photo by Kendall McCaughtry (Hall+Merrick+ McCaughtry Photographers)



Floorplan

senior associate and director of design at OTJ. "They see this office as a gateway from the U.S. to Latin America."

The base building is typical of the formerly industrial Wynwood neighborhood. Originally a ship-repair warehouse, it consists of a one-story section along the street plus a longer, deeper, double-height space at the rear. The expansive, open volumes easily accommodated the client's specialized programmatic requirements, including a large performance area with a stage and bar that also serves as a staff lounge. Most of the main volume is devoted to open workstations along exterior walls, with glass-enclosed conference rooms running down the middle. The top of the ceiling over the conference rooms, which is visible from a staircase leading to a roof deck, became a platform for another huge, colorful artwork. A soundproof listening room adjacent to the reception area posed several technical challenges. "Artists will come and play here," explained Garcia, "but since they are often playing brand new material, the space had to be very secure. The walls are extremely thick, and we worked with an acoustical consultant, Edward

Dugger + Associates, to make sure that the room was well isolated."

The project also presented serious logistical challenges because it was delivered during the COVID-19 pandemic. The design team had to be nimble, exploiting digital technologies for visualization, documentation and architect/client meetings. "[H]omes, driveways and garages doubled as finish studios," according to a project

description by OTJ, "until in-person meetings could resume, nearly two years after kick-off."

The office is designed for 100 percent free addressing, meaning that there are no assigned desks or workplaces for any employees. Staff members are empowered to decide for themselves how, and where, to work most effectively. "Our whole goal," said Holland, "was to create a space where people want to be."





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# Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park Interpretive Pavilion

Copeland, Florida

## Shelly Stayer Shelter for Victims of Human Trafficking and Domestic Violence Southwest Florida

David Corban Architects | Naples, Florida



Like the traditional cracker structures, a covered porch wraps the structure providing respite for weary hikers and views of the marl prairie, hammock and cypress swamp.



Two recent projects by David Corban Architects—built in very different contexts and for widely divergent purposes—demonstrate the power of architecture to address complex problems. In one case, an interpretive pavilion brings a new sense of place to a large state park that is exposed to extraordinary natural hazards. The second project serves as a refuge for people facing some of the gravest personal perils imaginable.

## Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park Interpretive Pavilion

The Fakahatchee Strand Preserve is Florida's largest but least developed state park, covering some 85,000 acres in the western part of the Everglades. Its diverse yet interconnected ecosystems, including cypress swamps, hardwood hammocks, wet prairies, salt marshes and mangroves, provide a habitat for wildlife ranging from Florida panthers and bears to crocodiles, storks and even minks. Just eight miles from Florida Bay at its closest point, the park faces perpetual risks from high winds and flooding in the hurricane season and from fire in the dry season.

Some time ago, the Florida Park Service developed a proposal for new visitor facilities at the preserve, incorporating parking, restrooms and better access to an existing boardwalk leading to an old-growth cypress swamp. The Friends of Fakahatchee, a volunteer group that raises funds for park improvements, subsequently asked David Corban Architects to undertake a sustainability review of the proposal. The architects responded with a comprehensive report that led the park service to reconsider its plans and hire the firm to oversee the infrastructure improvements except for the restrooms, which were already completed.

"Nothing about the original design said 'Florida,'" said David Corban, AIA, LEED AP, the firm's founder and principal architect. "It could have been anywhere. The site design was very inefficient and used up too much of the pristine land. The proposed pavilion and boardwalk were to be made out of pressure-treated wood that burns easily and sets off toxic chemicals."

The centerpiece of Corban's design solution is an open visitors' pavilion that

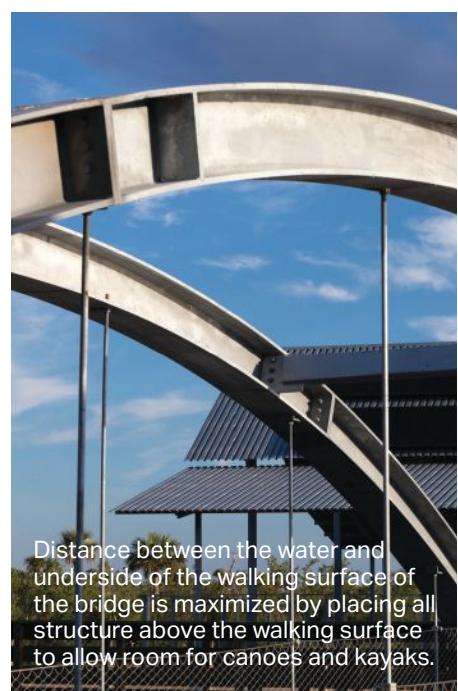


From the carefully chosen materials to the project's self-reliant solar power, a major influence of the design of the project is minimal impact and maximum preservation.

recalls the vernacular Florida "cracker" architecture of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with an overhanging, dual-pitch roof and a pier foundation to lift it well above the ground (and water) plane. The floor and foundation structure are of concrete to resist fire, while above the floor level the structure switches to lightweight galvanized steel to thwart corrosion from the salty air. Diagonal bracing obviates the need for heavy walls to resist lateral forces. Solar panels provide electrical power.

The architects also designed a new raised walkway to connect the parking area to the pavilion and the existing boardwalk. The floor of the new walkway is made of metal grating that is fire-resistant and allows sunlight to reach plants below. Whereas the state's original proposal called for an off-the-shelf flat truss bridge spanning a narrow canal between the parking area and the pavilion, Corban's team designed a graceful arched bridge of galvanized steel whose curvilinearity complements the angular form of the pavilion. The railings lining both the walkway and the perimeter of the pavilion are made of stainless steel wire mesh that practically disappears when viewed from a distance, helping to reduce the visual impact of the structures.

"We wanted to touch the landscape as little as possible," said Corban, "for both aesthetic and sustainability reasons. The steel was basically 100 percent recycled. We reduced the mass of the structure wherever possible. The result not only feels like Florida, but will hold up to the threats of wind, fire and water."



Distance between the water and underside of the walking surface of the bridge is maximized by placing all structure above the walking surface to allow room for canoes and kayaks.



Framed view to courtyard from support services wing. Photo by Joshua Colt Fisher.

## Shelly Stayer Shelter for Victims of Human Trafficking and Domestic Violence

Florida ranks third among U.S. states in the number of reported cases of human trafficking—the recruitment, transportation or harboring of people for the purposes of forced labor or sexual exploitation. Communities with large percentages of undocumented immigrants are especially prone to trafficking and related crimes, such as domestic abuse. In one such community in a rural, exurban area of southwestern Florida, victims were often reluctant to travel to the nearest shelter, some 45 miles away, even if their lives were in immediate danger.

The Shelly Stayer Shelter for Victims of Human Trafficking and Domestic Violence, named for the businesswoman and philanthropist who provided the lead gift for the project, was conceived to address these social crises. Designed by David Corban Architects, the facility provides a secure living environment for up to 60 people along with outreach and support functions. Given the relatively generous four-acre site, the design team was able to spread out the program and introduce large courtyards, helping to ensure ample daylighting and direct outdoor access for all of the living quarters.

"We believe this is the first purpose-built center for victims of human trafficking anywhere," said Corban. "As we started to design, we found very little information on it. We were familiar with domestic violence shelters, but we had a learning curve on trafficking."

While domestic violence and trafficking might seem to be related phenomena, the needs of their respective victims are quite different. "On the domestic violence side, it's almost always a woman and her children," explained Corban. "But on the human trafficking side, it's almost always single women. They are often drug-addicted and estranged from their families. We learned that they needed to be separated from the domestic violence victims because they are often still in touch with their abusers or traffickers and might even try to recruit others on behalf of their oppressors."

Accordingly, the architects devised a floor plan with four distinct zones. A small wing containing offices, a board room and outreach facilities lies toward the front of the property. Behind that zone are two mirror-image wings — one for human trafficking victims and one for domestic violence victims — containing bedroom suites plus communal living and dining spaces. In between the residential wings

is a service spine with the main security desk, laundry facilities, a childcare room, a youth study room, play areas and a kennel for residents' pets. Between the service core and the residential wings are large courtyards. The domestic violence residential wing is complete, while only half of the human trafficking wing has been built to date, with the second half to come later.

The plan diagram is relatively straightforward at first glance, but because of the need to maintain strict separation between the human trafficking residents and the domestic violence residents, access to various spaces in the shared service wing had to be carefully controlled. The centrally situated security station has clear sightlines not only to the support spaces and courtyards, but also to the front doors of all of the bedroom suites. The security space also includes sitting areas and a small hair salon so that mothers may keep an eye on their children in the glass-walled play area, study room and childcare space while doing other things.

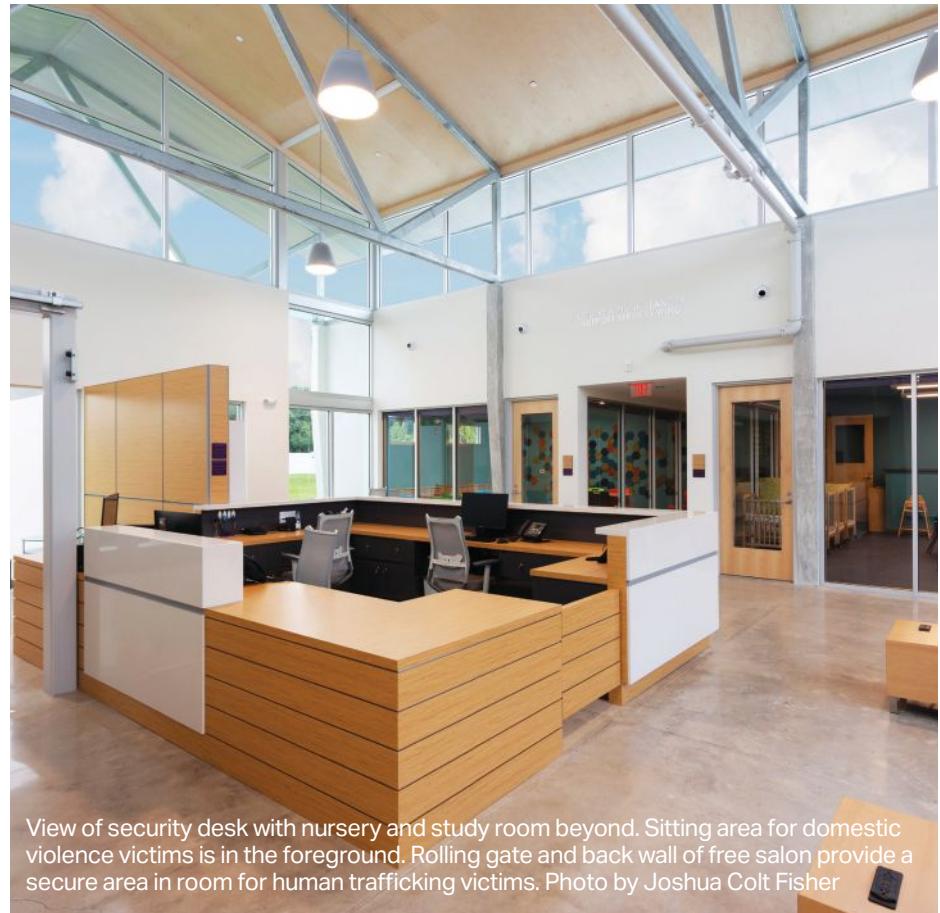
The residential wings are divided into "pods," each containing four secure bedroom suites, two communal living areas, a shared dining space and four open but discrete kitchens so that all of the resident families may prepare their own meals at the

same time. On the domestic violence side, each bedroom includes enough beds to accommodate a family of up to five people with a single shared bathroom, while on the human trafficking side, each suite has two single bedrooms sharing a bathroom. On both sides, in addition to closets and cabinets in each bedroom, separate, lockable storage units are provided for residents' possessions.

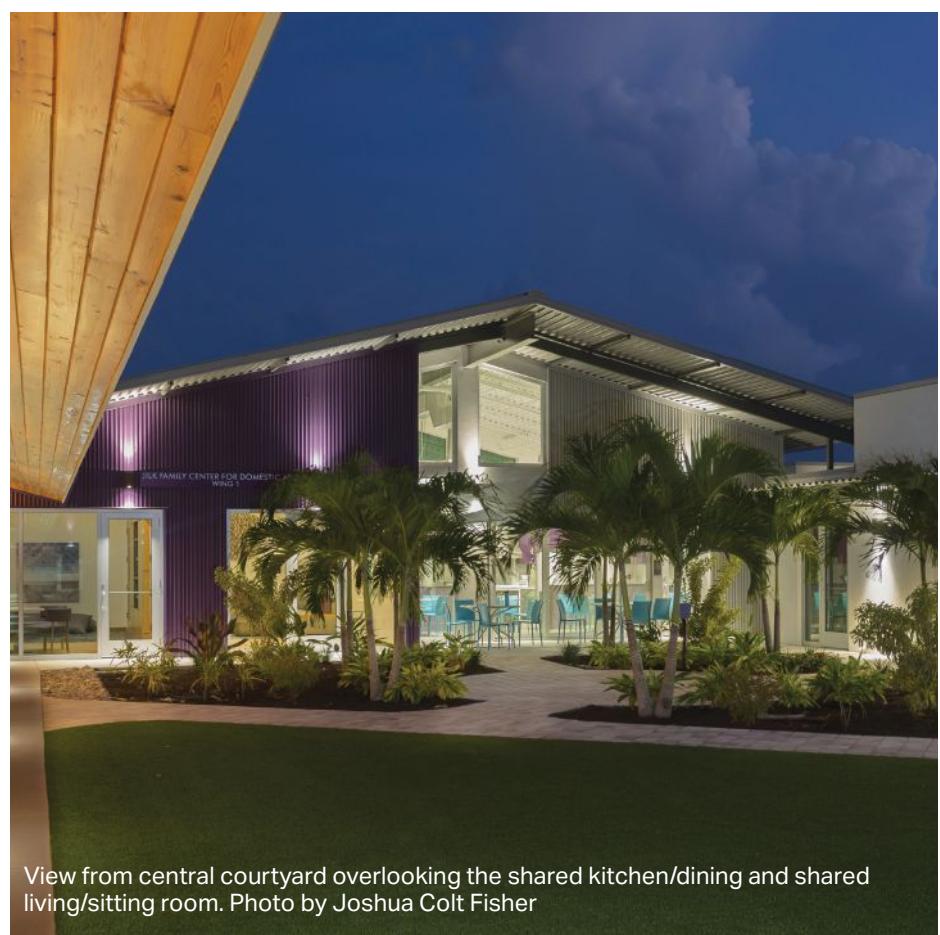
Throughout the complex, pitched roofs and panels of wood or laminate contribute to a domestic feel. At the entrance and over the main security station, the roof is raised on galvanized steel trusses, allowing for clerestory windows all around. Pops of bright color on furniture and portions of the corrugated metal exterior cladding add cheerful notes.

Asked if it was emotionally difficult to design for users who are experiencing such trauma, Corban acknowledged that at times it was. "The main thing we kept thinking about while working on this project was, 'How can we solve these problems through architecture and try to make a better situation for these people?'"

View of residential entry from parking. Residents come and go freely. Many of the women have jobs and school age children attend local schools. Photo by Joshua Colt Fisher



View of security desk with nursery and study room beyond. Sitting area for domestic violence victims is in the foreground. Rolling gate and back wall of free salon provide a secure area in room for human trafficking victims. Photo by Joshua Colt Fisher



View from central courtyard overlooking the shared kitchen/dining and shared living/sitting room. Photo by Joshua Colt Fisher

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Jane Lanahan Decker, AIA, CBO, CFM, CRC, is currently the Building Department Director for the City of Doral, Florida. She has prepared a list of recommendations for practicing architects negotiating the permit approval process with local authorities. She is the 2024 recipient of the AIA Miami Leadership in Government Award.

An edited and condensed list appears below, but the full article is accessible online via the QR code.



Read Complete Article

# Building a Rapport with Your Local Building Department

Hints from Jane Decker, AIA  
City of Doral, Florida

1 Be your own best advocate by educating clients on the value of licensed architects, as well as AIA membership. Too often, property owners attempt to bypass architects and take ill-advised shortcuts, creating costly problems down the line.

2 Read directions, ask questions. A common misstep that delays permitting is failing to submit all of the required documentation like calculations, specifications and reports. If you receive plan review comments, don't disregard them.

3 Do your research when hiring permit expediters. Well-credentialed firms can be assets, but under-qualified "plan runners" may lack the expertise to properly address comments or maintain the intended design integrity.

4 Meet with building department staff. Many have experience in the trades or private sector, so take advantage of their insights.

5 Be an effective communicator:  
a) Use the department's preferred nomenclature and avoid acronyms or jargon they may not know.  
b) Always provide clear identifying information like permit numbers, addresses and descriptions.  
c) A concise narrative explaining plan revisions is more helpful than merely saying "revised per comments."  
d) Never submit drawings flagged as "Not for Construction" or inconsistent with your agreed design milestones.

**Follow these guidelines and you'll establish a reputation for being knowledgeable, responsive and respectful of the permitting process, yielding dividends through faster approvals, fewer resubmittals and a satisfied customer who realizes the full value of your architectural services.**

# On the Boards

## Florida International University, Trish & Dan Bell Chapel

Miami, Florida

Gurri Matute PA | Miami, Florida

The bowed walls of this multi-faith chapel, designed for a lakeside site on the main campus of Florida International University (FIU) in Miami, abstractly yet unmistakably evoke the image of a fish. While widely recognized as an icon of Christianity, the fish is also a noteworthy spiritual symbol in Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism, among other religions, making it an appropriate emblem for a facility intended to promote tolerance and acceptance of multiple belief systems. Scale-like patterns on both the exterior and interior surfaces of the chapel's two predominant walls add a more literal aspect to the symbolism.

The project calls for a sanctuary that can accommodate 225 people, private prayer rooms, a multi-purpose room and support spaces. The surrounding site



View of the chapel overlooking the lake.

includes meditation pods, a labyrinth and an amphitheater whose forms complement those of the main structure. An 80-foot-tall

bell tower adds a linear counterpoint while enhancing the complex's visibility amid the FIU campus.

## Red Beach Lake House

Sebring, Florida

Nandez Design Studio | Miami, Florida

Yes, there is topography in Florida, as evident in the site for this weekend house on Red Beach Lake in Sebring. The site lies along the Lake Wales Ridge, a natural sand ridge extending roughly 100 miles down the center of the peninsula. The house's steeply pitched roofs emphasize the property's surprising vertical dimension. The sloping site dictated the project's split-level design, with a carport and main entrance on the middle level, living spaces and one sleeping suite on the lower level, and two sleeping suites upstairs. Each of the sleeping suites includes a primary bedroom, a bathroom and a children's bunk room and can be locked for privacy, thus accommodating up to three families at once. Families can socialize in the large, open living spaces on the lower level, which will have direct access to a covered terrace, outdoor kitchen and pool overlooking the lake.



Front view.

# UPR Ponce Smart Hub

Ponce, Puerto Rico

Architectural Studio | San Juan, Puerto Rico

Over the past decade, Puerto Rico has borne the brunt of several major hurricanes, including both Irma and María in 2017, and suffered significant damage from a series of earthquakes. In that context, the proposed Smart Hub on the campus of the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce is conceived as a resilient academic facility aimed at promoting business growth in the region and providing emergency business infrastructure during future disasters. The project includes biomedical, chemical and engineering research laboratories along with educational, administrative, gathering and co-working spaces.

In lieu of a typical hermetic suburban structure, Architectural Studio pulled the programmatic elements apart to create outdoor plazas and courtyards, yielding a sort of mini-campus in one building. A screen of vertical aluminum pipes animates the façades while providing needed sun-shading. The facility will be able to operate "off the grid" thanks to rooftop solar panels while material and systems choices will minimize water consumption and CO2 emissions.



West Elevation, Sections and Screen Concept Sketch

The advertisement features a modern, two-story white house with large glass windows and a balcony. In the foreground, a man and a woman are seen from behind, embracing. A young girl is also visible, looking towards the house. The BORA-CARE logo is prominently displayed in the lower-left corner of the image. The logo consists of a green circle with the word 'BORA-CARE' in white, and below it, 'TERMITICIDE, INSECTICIDE, AND FUNGICIDE' in smaller text. The background of the advertisement is a white page with text and a contact section.

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# EP Spotlight

Wesley C. Kean, AIA



Photo by Chance Stillman.

When Wesley Kean, AIA, was growing up in New Hampshire, his father, a builder, would invoke the old saying, "Measure twice, cut once." That advice stuck with him throughout his education at the University of Miami, his participation in the university's study-abroad program in Rome and his early days in architectural practice. Today, as head of Kean Office for Design and Architecture (KoDA), based in Miami, he continues to follow the motto in a more metaphorical sense.

For Kean, the "measuring" phase consists of rigorous research and analysis of a project's site, program, context and environmental implications, all of which inform the design. Taking that idea a

step further, Kean and his colleagues routinely engage in broader research initiatives and theoretical explorations independent of specific commissioned projects, allowing the firm to address issues of concern to the community such as climate change, sea-level rise and housing affordability. One such initiative, titled "Tight Urbanism," investigated strategies for exploiting Miami Beach's extensive alley network to mitigate the effects of climate change. This past summer the firm focused on Miami's Lake Belt, which runs along the urban development boundary with the Everglades. All of these efforts have helped to earn Kean professional recognition including the 2023 H. Samuel

Kruse Silver Medal for Design, awarded by AIA Miami, and the 2024 national AIA Young Architects Award.

Kean has a longstanding interest in Metabolism, the mid-20th-century Japanese architectural and urban planning movement that sought to apply organic principles to postwar development. "After the war, the Metabolists saw that mankind's attachment to the land was actually disturbing and destroying it," he explained. "They proposed creating a new terra firma to preserve the natural one. They came up with these schemes for floating cities, and when you realize the inevitable impact of

climate change on a place like Miami Beach, you start to see the applicability of their ideas to the present day." An essay by Kean titled "How Metabolist Ideas Could Become the Solution to Sea-Level Rise Vulnerability" was published in the Summer 2018 issue of *Florida/Caribbean Architect*.

KoDA's entry in the recent competition for the Parkland 17 Memorial, commemorating the victims of the mass shooting at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, on February 14, 2018, illustrates the firm's approach to individual projects. The proposed location for the memorial is an abandoned golf course about a mile from the site of the former school, which was demolished earlier this year. The memorial site is also less than a mile from the border between the developed part of Broward County and the Everglades.

The firm's submission was spearheaded by three young staff members who, coincidentally, all had attended Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School: Chance Stillman, Nikola Jovicic, and Yagmur Akyuz. Hoping to use the design process as a way to work through their grief, they approached Kean, who endorsed the idea. "For this team, it was deeply personal," said Kean, "and I realized very early that as a principal it was important for me to step back and relinquish control in this case while remaining supportive."

"We had a conversation about what it meant to experience loss," said Stillman, who is an architect and studio director at KoDA. "We felt it was important not to create objects that represented each person individually. Instead, we focused on the feeling of absence — a void."

The team followed the firm's usual strategy for conceptual design, beginning



Approach: Individual clearing.



with intense research regarding the shooting and sharing of personal stories. They concluded that the memorial should be not just a place for commemorating the lives lost, but also a means to promote healing. They landed on the concept of "holding space," meaning the act of being physically, mentally and emotionally present for someone else.

Their design solution called for a series of 17 spiral forms — one for each person murdered in the shooting, though they are not assigned to individual victims — that would draw visitors into a small court with a circular pool of water at the center.

The spiral walls would gradually diminish in height as they neared the pool, thus evoking a sense of disappearance as one approached the void at the center. Complementing these small, individual spirals would be a larger one, representing the collective experience of grief, which would be covered by a canopy with an open oculus over the central pool, again expressing the idea of the void.

The design also called for partial restoration of the vibrant ecosystem that existed on the site before it was turned into a golf course. The contrast between the density of the proposed hammock-like

landscape and the open skies above the spirals would emphasize the sense of emptiness at the center of the courts. At the same time, the reinvigoration of the natural environment would symbolize hope and renewal.

Although KoDA's proposal was not shortlisted for the competition, Kean feels that the design process enhanced the sense of camaraderie in the office. "I think it brought us together," he said. "It also reinforced the value of these sorts of emotional contributions to design. Anytime you put yourself out there, to be vulnerable in that way, it's very powerful."

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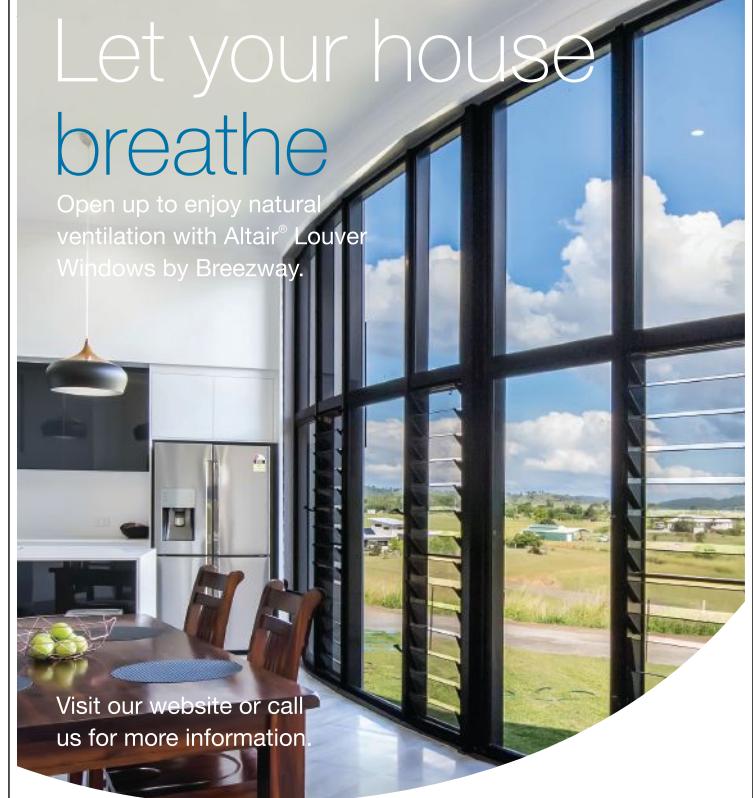
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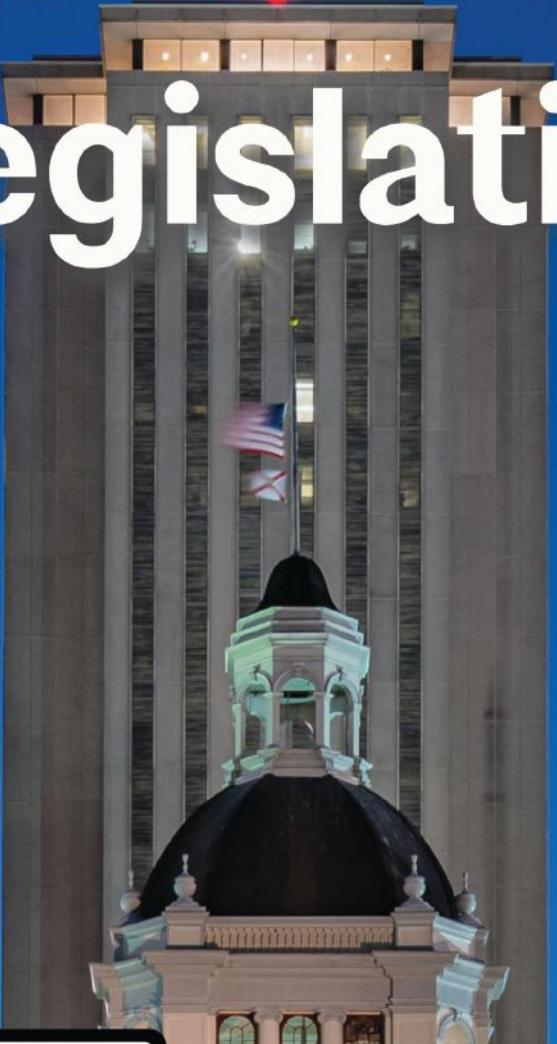
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