

Celebrating Women's History Month with Female Designers



For Women's History Month this year, we've rounded up a handful of women in the architecture and design industry to pick their brains on what being a woman in this industry means to them, any issues they've faced—[particularly during COVID-19](#)—and what role models they strive to be like.

Mary Maydan, Founder and Principal, [Maydan Architects](#)

If I could inspire change in any field I would like to help promote equality in architecture. A recent major survey of the field found that women account for half of the graduates from architecture programs in this country, yet only make up about 20 percent of licensed architects and 17 percent of partners or principals in architecture firms. There are many



committees and organizations that work tirelessly to promote equality in architecture and I am convinced that it will be achieved. The question is not if and when we achieve this, but how and what we have to do to get there. I believe that seeing female role models succeed is empowering, and mentorship is crucial. Both will help tremendously, but I can't overstate enough that there is no simple solution or quick fix. Change is slow and takes time.

Women need to mentor, support, and uplift other women. My advice to young female architects is to persist and believe in themselves, even in the face of workplace adversity. Women deserve to reach the top of their profession. When so many talented women quit architecture, we all lose. The problem is bigger than just representation in the workforce. The women that are not represented in the firms are not represented in our built communities. We are missing their perspective, voice and vision.

When I started out in architecture I was oblivious to the role gender played in the industry. I fell in love with modern architecture and living in Silicon Valley, where the architecture was very traditional, I was passionate about making others see the beauty in it. It never crossed my mind that my gender was even a factor. I think that in my case, because I was doing something different which gained recognition right away, it really wasn't an issue. I believe that my mom, whom I admire, played a big role in developing this attitude. When I was a toddler, she noticed that I was very good at math. She kept asking me harder and harder questions and was delighted by my answers. Like any first-time mom, she bragged about me to everyone. For years, I was oblivious to the fact that there is a stigma surrounding women and math. I grew up seeing myself through my mom's eyes. It fostered a feeling that anything is possible and I can dream big.

I have been very privileged to have my own firm, and as such, I have never had to face many of the obstacles that women working in big architecture firms do. However, as a woman in architecture, I still face daily the challenge of balancing my workload and being a hands-on mom to four kids. Often, I find myself juggling talking to a city planner on the phone, a contractor who has an urgent request for info, an employee who needs feedback, and one of my kids itching to tell me about what just happened in school. Even though my firm is female-dominated, we are still very much aware that the construction industry is male-dominated, and there will always be men who try to undermine us. However, when one takes themselves seriously and knows their job, it's much harder to do that.

A couple of years ago, I was told that the general contractor of one of our projects said to a subcontractor: "You talk to Mary's team about colors. Everything else is my expertise." At first, I was hurt, but the next minute I told my team. "Really? That's what he is going to say to people? He is building OUR vision. A stunning complicated steel and glass residence, which we designed to the tiniest detail and coordinated with all the engineers and consultants. No matter what he said, no one really thinks that we only handle colors." We are always well prepared, and we understand both the construction and project management sides of the job. We don't just draw lines on paper. I have to add, though, that this was a rare experience for us. We are fortunate to work with a phenomenal group of engineers and consultants, who never underestimate us because of our gender. We have great mutual respect for one another.