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DESIGN BOOK

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the new
MODERN HOME



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Born in Costa Rica and educated at Harvard, architect Jaya Kader Zebede began her independent practice in Florida after collaborating on a project with Robert A.M. Stern in Miami Beach. Since its founding, KZ Architecture has been committed to designing forceful, modern buildings and the firm's work in the residential sector has won numerous design awards. We sat down with Zebede at the beautiful Boano-Lowenstein residence to discuss her practice.

DESIGN BOOK [DB]: Complete the following sentence. My design philosophy is...

JAYA KADER ZEBEDE [JKZ]: My design philosophy is primarily concerned with context and purpose. I don't believe that there is one right style of architecture. Every project is unique and presents a whole different set of problems to solve.

DB: Why did you choose a career in architecture?

JKZ: When I was a freshman in college, I took a class in architectural history with Professor Gerald Bernstein at Brandeis University. I instantly fell in love with architecture. I was fascinated with built forms through the ages and the processes that made them possible. My professor recommended that I continue my undergraduate studies in art and architectural history and pursue architecture as a graduate degree which I subsequently did at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard. I have been blessed to have mentors with whom to share my passion for architecture since college and graduate school and through my professional experience.

DB: You mention that you studied art and architectural history in college. Do you still see that as a part of your profession?

JKZ: Of course, there certainly is art in architecture. However, if you look at architecture exclusively as art, you are really not doing a service to the profession. I believe that we, as humans, strive for beauty. That is a very important component of architecture, but it is not the sole component. As an architect, one must serve a purpose, serve the public, and serve one's clients.

DB: Why did you move from Costa Rica to Massachusetts?

JKZ: I came from Costa Rica to pursue a liberal arts education program. I was excited to study in the context of a new culture and language while exploring endless possibilities for learning.

DB: What was your first job in architecture?

JKZ: I worked with Moshe Safdie whom I consider one of my great mentors. At the time, he was stepping down from the chairmanship of the Urban Planning Department at Harvard and was in the midst of planning an exhibit of his work at the GSD. I helped him put the exhibit together, including the accompanying lecture.

DB: What was your experience with Robert Stern's office?

JKZ: I was the project architect for the Miami Beach Library which was designed by Robert Stern. Upon moving to Miami, I helped put together a team to participate in the competition for

ABOVE: Jaya Kader Zebede. Photo by Design Book. RIGHT: The Boano-Lowenstein residence, Bay Harbor Islands, Florida. Photo by Robin Hill.





the Library and Cultural Arts Park on 21st and Collins. Stern's approach was to design a building that would belong in the Art Deco District. He endorsed an architecture of context that would address and relate to its surroundings. Working on the development of this building was a great experience. When I look at the building now, I think of a quote by Frank Lloyd Wright: "Buildings should grace and not disgrace the environment." With its interpretative references to Art Deco, the Miami Beach Library certainly achieves this.

DB: *You have received a number of design recognitions and awards recently. Does professional recognition matter?*

JKZ: It is very encouraging when the lay public praises your projects. It is even more meaningful when your colleagues recognize the value of your work, because they have a deeper understanding of the process that is involved and what you are trying to accomplish.

DB: *Tell us about the Boano-Lowenstein residence.*

JKZ: This project started in 2006. My clients came to me with a vision of a pure modern home. They had pictures of the house where Paula Lowenstein grew up, which is in Buenos Aires and was designed by Antonio Bonet, a Spanish Modernist from the 1950s. Even though my work up to that point, both individually as well as with my mentors, had been more eclectic, I always strived to make my projects grounded in the present. Thus, a modernist commission was a good fit for my design philosophy.

When I moved to Miami, I was first interested in exploring the local language of the Florida vernacular. I designed and built my home as an interpretive expression of that aesthetic. Subsequently, I was drawn to the Florida Moderns. When the Boano-Lowensteins approached me with this image for their future home, I was overcome with excitement at the prospect of delving deeply into modernism.

DB: *How does the design of this home fit into its larger context?*

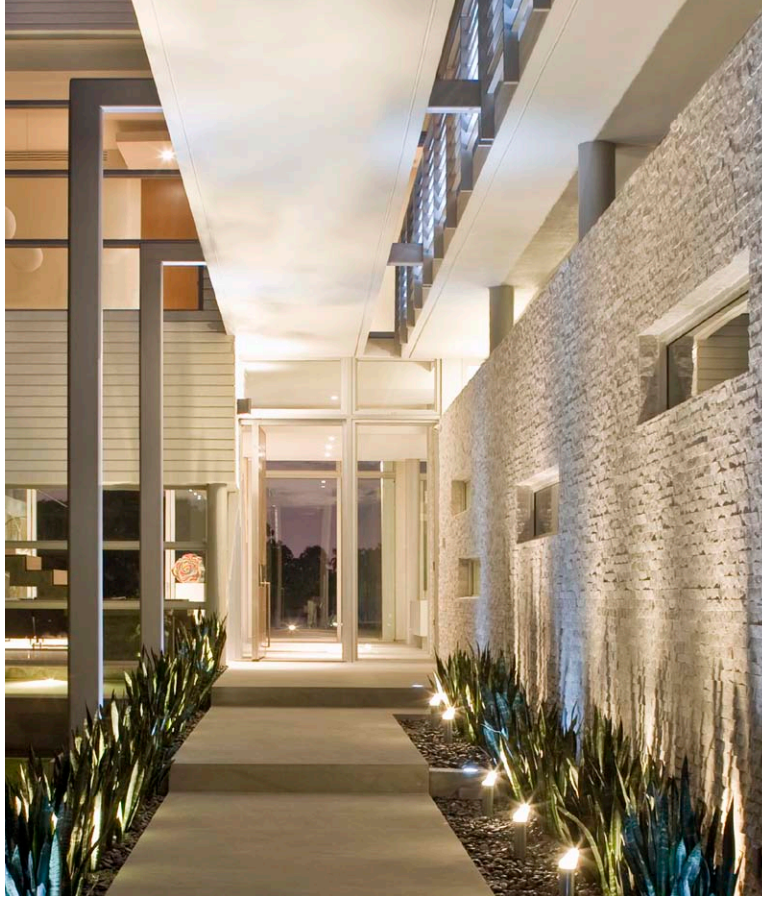
JKZ: Bay Harbor Islands is a modern town that was built in the 1950s. It has many architectural prototypes of that time. Building a modernist house in Bay Harbor was fitting for the history of the town. In regards to the immediate context, the house does not overwhelm its site, but quite the contrary. A long transparent axis connects the street to the dock and the water. In addition, the two orthogonal volumes of the structure are framed by large open spaces.

DB: *This client was also the builder for the project. How was that interaction?*

JKZ: It was a great process because I was working with clients that understood good design and shared a vision. Gabriel Boano was able to materialize the design into a beautifully crafted built form.

DB: *This home achieved LEED Silver certification, reportedly the first to do so in South Florida. What was the motivation behind being the first and why LEED?*

ABOVE: The Boano-Lowenstein residence. Photo by Robin Hill.



JKZ: Everyone on the team takes great pride in the fact that this home is not only a LEED Silver certified home, but it also received a gold certification from the Florida Green Building Coalition.

When we completed the schematic design, I brought the LEED idea to the attention of Paula and Gabriel, and they immediately embraced the concept. Little did they know that they would become LEED pioneers in Miami. We brought in a LEED consultant, and I invited my other consultants to develop the project as a learning opportunity. I think that sustainability is simply a matter of common sense. Many of the things that LEED endorses have been done in other places around the world for years. There are great opportunities in Florida to capitalize on some of these sustainable practices.

DB: *What are some of the features that contributed to this home's LEED certification?*

JKZ: The energy optimization of the house is 30% greater than required by the most recent codes. This was accomplished with the use of a white, cool reflective roof as well as low-E glazing, increasing

insulation in the building envelope, and installing energy efficient HVAC equipment. This home also consumes 45% less water than a home of a comparable size. This is achieved with the use of

reduced flow fixtures and a 2500 gallon cistern, which is located underneath the house and collects all the rain water from the roof for irrigation. The irrigation system is very efficient as well.


I worked with landscape architects Bell + Aquiri to select native plants that are drought tolerant and self-sustaining.

The house has solar tube skylights in the bathrooms, which do not have access to an exterior wall for windows. The abundance of natural light throughout the house also contributed towards LEED certification. I personally

have always stayed away from spaces that lack natural light, because they make me feel claustrophobic. If there is something that defines my projects, it is the fact that they are all enveloped in natural light, and one is constantly in contact with the outdoors. That is certainly one of the features of the Boano-Lowenstein residence.

"MY DESIGN
PHILOSOPHY IS PRIMARILY
CONCERNED WITH
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I DON'T BELIEVE THAT
THERE IS ONE RIGHT STYLE
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ABOVE: The Boano-Lowenstein residence. Photos by Robin Hill.

A photograph of a modern architectural courtyard. On the left, a building with a dark stone wall and large glass windows is visible. The courtyard features a wooden deck floor, a white wall with a horizontal window, and several palm trees in the background. A small tree and a concrete planter are on the right. The sky is blue with light clouds.

"I never dismiss
something that
a client brings to
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explore the idea..."

– Jaya Kader Zebede



My clients also did a great job sourcing local materials made from renewable resources or with a significant percentage of recycled content. The house also features 100% solar hot water and a non-chlorinated pool.

DB: *How does your design process relate architecture and interior design?*

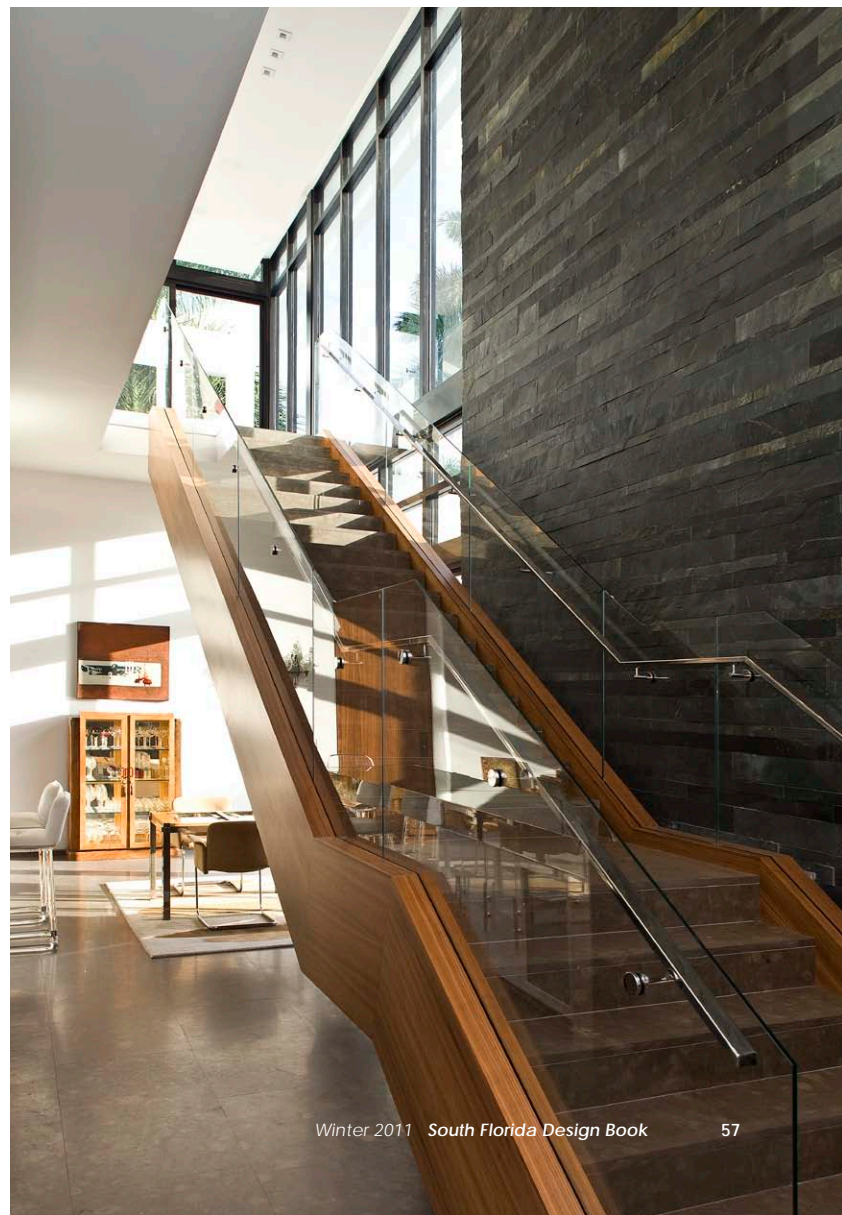
JKZ: They are one and the same. I think that one informs the other, and the interiors fall into place if you follow the architectural intent of the project. I am comfortable working with interior designers who share that vision.

DB: *As the one professional in charge of the entire design process, how do you resolve creative differences between the various parties?*

JKZ: Many times when you are building a home, the client also has strong opinions. I never dismiss something that a client brings to the table. I always explore the idea, and then I show them drawings reflecting what they were proposing. Juxtaposing two drawings illustrating what I propose and what the client or another member of the design team may propose always provides a good framework for dialogue. If you present all of the options, I think that good design is always going to win.

DB: *Can you tell us about the Franco residence?*

JKZ: The Franco residence was recently completed. The Francos were also interested in modern architecture and design. I was



LEFT, ABOVE AND RIGHT: The Franco residence. Photos by Robin Hill.



“We just started construction on another tropical modern home ... I think that every project, regardless of size, is always a wonderful opportunity for exploration and discovery.”



excited from the beginning and welcomed the opportunity to further explore the tropical modern aesthetic within the context of a new project.

DB: *What is next for your company?*

JKZ: We just started construction on another tropical modern home set in an unusually shaped lot, one I initially designed back in 2005. The original clients left the state, and just this year the land was purchased by new clients who fell in love with the project. I am excited that the plans are finally going to materialize. We had to do a lot of modifications to address both the new clients’ needs and recent changes to the Golden Beach zoning code. In addition, several other projects are coming up the vines in design and construction documents. I think every project, regardless of size, is always a wonderful opportunity for exploration and discovery.

DB: *You have done a lot of single family residential work. What if someone offered you a large condominium commission?*

JKZ: I would have a hard time doing it, especially the “large” part. I would much rather work on smaller projects that are respectful of the environment. My practice’s portfolio includes smaller scale commercial and condominium projects that reflect this design intent. I think large condominium complexes that create an intrusive barrier along many of Florida’s beautiful shorelines are particularly troublesome.

DB: *Any plans to return to Costa Rica or do work there?*

JKZ: I have actually designed a couple of projects in Costa Rica, but they haven’t been built yet. I keep being hopeful that one day they will. It would be wonderful to have opportunities to do more projects there. First, it always feels like home; second, there are beautiful mountains and views all around you that would definitely provide great food for thought and inspiration. Moreover, Costa Rica’s Central Valley offers a climate that could really embrace sustainable practices. I grew up in a house where if you were hot, you opened the windows and if you were cold, you just closed them.

Costa Rica would also be a great location for exploring and discovering great built forms, because there are no hurricane restrictions and thus you can have large expanses of clean glass. I have always dreamed of designing with large expanses of glass so the indoors and the outdoors can be more fully integrated. ●

For more information about KZ Architecture, visit www.kzarchitecture.com.

ABOVE: The Benenson residence. Renderings by DIGITART3D.COM.