

# delve

MARCH 2021 **V12**

**Ecoustic® V By  
Unika Vaev**

**Cultivating Passion  
In The Workplace**

**Creating Empathetic  
+ Flexible Workplaces**

# Women In Leadership

**Celebrating The Stories + Voices Of Inspiring Women  
Across The Contract Design Industry**



# contents

MAR2021V12

## What else you'll find inside...

<b>HEALTHCARE SHOWROOMS</b> CHIEF, CRAMER INTEGRA .....	10
<b>LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP</b> BY ALICIA KOLEDIN .....	18
<b>Q+A WITH CARLY BOUDREAU</b> PRESIDENT OF CORIANDER DESIGNS .....	22
<b>CULTIVATING PASSION</b> BY ANNE BENGE, CEO OF CULTURA .....	25
<b>CREATING EMPATHETIC WORK-PLACES</b> BY ASHLEY BLEVINS .....	28
<b>EDUCATION PARTNER FEATURE</b> AUBURN UNIVERSITY .....	34
<b>WOMEN RESHAPING OUR OWN LEADERSHIP STORY</b> BY AMY MOULIS.....	37



### WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP | DESIGN

Susan Mulholland discusses some of the incredible women that paved the way for women leaders in the design industry.



### ECOUSTIC® V BY UNIKA VAEV

Unika Vaev announces new line, Ecooustic® V. A collection of acoustic panels and tiles with an elegant aesthetic and acoustic performance.



### THE SKY IS THE LIMIT

Nicole Shamir, Executive Director of OFGO Studio discusses leadership and a passion for Contract Design.

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## editor's note

Dear Reader,  
We are celebrating Women's  
History Month by highlighting  
the stories of inspiring women  
from across the Contract De-  
sign Industry.

From women CEOs to educa-  
tional programs that are help-  
ing to shape the future leaders  
of the industry. We celebrate  
these unique voices and have  
been inspired by each and ev-  
ery one of them!

Women have played an integral  
role in the shaping of our indus-  
try and we are honored to help  
shine a light on these bold lead-  
ers.

We are highlighting those sto-  
ries as well as more from our  
special event library, Healthcare  
Design Spotlight.

We invite you to dive in!

Enjoy!

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## DYNAMIC MONITOR ARMS



**CHIEF**



QUICK-RELEASE  
MONITOR INTERFACE



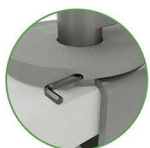
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2-PIECE DESK CLAMP  
WITH HAND KNOB

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When I was a kid, I didn't have big dreams of becoming an interior designer. In fact, I didn't even know what an interior designer was. I did know that my mom—who stayed at home with me and my brother and sister, always had a flair for decorating. When she got bored being a stay-at-home mom, she would rearrange the furniture, paint the walls, or put up wallpaper. All while my dad was at work and we were in school. When anyone asks who my inspiration was for becoming a designer, I always think of my mom.

But decorating is not interior design, or is it? The term interior design was first used in 1936 when the first professional organization of interior decoration (the American Institute of Decoration) changed the word decoration to design. If you really want to know about the design profession and the women who were instrumental in starting it, you need to look at the role decorators played in that creation.

All forms of design, whether it is industrial or architectural building design, all have an influence on interior spaces. Still, the women who really took that idea and transformed it were highly skilled at decorating, just like my mom. These prominent women of the early 20th century who established interior decoration as a profession include Elsie de Wolfe, Dorothy Draper, and Sister Parish. These first ladies set in motion the idea of interior design as a profession and paved the road for all of us to come after them.

When you get right down to it, commercial interior design is a young profession that has evolved from architecture, industrial design, and of course, decorating. Even Florence Knoll, who helped usher in the modern design movement, felt that creating great design for your home was essential to having a wonderful life experience. But how does great residential decora-



**By Susan Mulholland**

*Susan Mulholland studied interior design at Northern Arizona University and is an NCIDQ certificate holder. She has 30 years of interior design experience in commercial design. Her experience in the industry covers a large variety of projects that focus on workplace, healthcare, and hospitality. Her design studio Mulholland Art & Design Commercial Interiors is in Tucson, Arizona, where she has been helping clients for the past 20 years. [Connect with Susan Mulholland on her website.](#)*

## WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

tion and design fit into places we consider for work?

For the most part, work was not defined by a place or a building until after World War II. When the war was over, the jobs that women were doing during the war were primarily jobs meant for men. After the war, women who were working in these jobs were told to go home.

Offices were inhabited primarily by males and male-dominated professions. As we approached the end of the 1950s, more white-collar jobs for the office were created, our population and economy had exploded. Our country was experiencing a surge in manufacturing and technology. Not until the early 1960's were offices deemed worthy of creativity and decoration. If you are a fan of "Mad Men," then you know this TV series is really a snapshot in time that showed what the modern workplace was beginning to look like and the start of the modern female workforce. Interior design and decoration were now entering a new phase.

As we moved from the 60's to the 70's and 80's office design started to evolve more into a specific type of space planning niche, but men dominated in this area of expertise more so than women. Utilizing space to get the most out of the building footprint was considered part of the male architect's scope of work. These architects were also choosing finish materials and even furniture. It's ironic that as early as 1925, when Dorothy Draper, who is identified as the first woman interior decorator to specialize in commercial interiors, there were not very many women who identified themselves only as a commercial interior designer. But as more women entered the workforce, including the male-dominated profession of architecture, our emphasis on the design of homes shifted, and we began thinking about the design of our workplaces. The spirit of vitality and energy coming from that independence as more of us were entering the workforce was being transformed into our design aesthetic; commercial interior design was entering a new phase yet again.

What will the future be for commercial interiors? This is a question that we are asking as the entire world contemplates the future of our work environments. Nobody can dispute the fact that the last year has had a devastating effect on all of our lives regardless of what we do for a living. If you are keeping up with the COVID headlines, the most disturbing is the one related to women in the workforce. Many of us are no longer here. We

have lost a devastating 2.4 million women in all types of jobs and professions since the pandemic began a year ago. It has been 33 years since there were so few women in the labor force that even our profession is not immune to this statistic.

The gender of interior designers for both residential and commercial design is predominantly female. There are more women interior designers than men. Our numbers are larger in residential design than commercial. Especially in commercial design, women are still limited in a number of higher-paying positions and job security due primarily to the male-dominated corporate structure that has been in place regardless of the profession for decades. Even though more women are entering the "C" suite, there are still very few female owners of sizable commercial interior or architectural design firms in the United States compared to how many are owned by men. With the current emphasis on the lack of women in the workforce, equal pay, and general recognition for our accomplishments, this is not surprising. Diversity is necessary to evolve any social structure and culture. Women still need to be reminded that they are needed and, most importantly, welcomed to sit at the table along with men. Our viewpoints and knowledge will be different, but that is a perspective that is needed now more than ever.

As we transition out of the pandemic into the next phase of our work world, our office building environment will be different. The virus shed a bright light on all that we have been ignoring for the past decade. The problems of cultural diversity, women's role in the workplace, race, and even our planet have been exposed due to our lack of awareness. But there is hope. The women in the interior design profession have an opportunity to make a difference. If we embrace this challenge, we as designers can truly design a better world for future generations.

Throughout our collective human history, women have always had the power to focus on doing what is right for humanity first. We internalize the suffering of the world and see what is needed to heal it. Now is our opportunity to do just that, to rely on our past as our guide, be present for today so that we can move in the right direction for our future. Interior designers will be responsible for creating the vision we all need to move forward. With an emphasis on creating human-centric design solutions for every interior space that focuses on health and community, we can change the world for the better. For women in design, this is our destiny to lead the way.

Innovative solutions for  
the future of work.

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Women's Business Enterprise

Coriander Designs + Meyer Wells

Hattie Height Adjustable Laptop Tables  
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**FEATURED PRODUCT BY  
UNIKA VAEV**



Ecoustic® V is a collection of acoustic panels and tiles with an elegant aesthetic and acoustic performance. The collection is available in eight timeless designs, three solid color core thicknesses, and a variety of colors for ultimate design flexibility. The panels can be installed both vertically and horizontally. The Ecoustic® V Collection integrates engraved lines within solid color and felt-faced PET acoustic panels to create classic decorative patterns. Engravings are cut as V shape recesses which are intended to produce both shadow and highlight patterns within each engraved form.

The V collection consists of eight simple designs which create a variety of evocative effects; Linear engravings range from the closely aligned tactile textures of V Lines 14 and 25, to patterns similar in appearance and scale to traditional planked panels. V Line 55 evokes 2" planks, V Line 110 evokes 4" planks, and V Line Mix resembles random planking. Oblique 2" planks are implied by the V Diagonal design. Tessellated square patterns are offered in two sizes: V Check 50 resembling 2" squares, and V Check 138 illustrating squares of around 5.5".

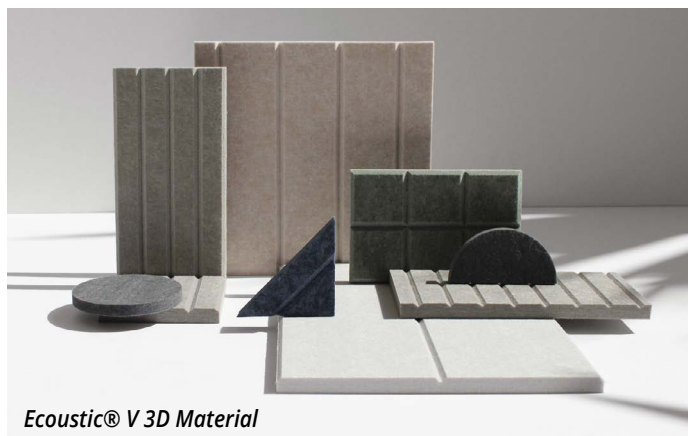
The three sound absorbing thicknesses of the Ecoustic® V Collection provide a total of twenty five solid panel finish options. Ecoustic® V 'Duo' further extends the palette via an additional thirty four felt face finishes, each of which can be applied to all of the twenty five solid panel cores. This dual combination of finishes exposes contrasts between the felt face and solid core within every engraving, potentially offering the V collection 'Duo'

specifier with an array of over 800 potential finish combinations for each of the Ecoustic® V patterns.

The collection has been engineered to provide maximum design and sound absorption with another emphasis being placed on the ease of installation.

The Ecoustic® V solid color and Ecoustic® V Duo are available in both full panels at 106.3" x 43.3" and wall tiles 21.7" x 21.7".

Designed for the environment, the Ecoustic® SC panels are low-VOC, Oeko-Tex certified and recyclable. NRC rating between .30 - .65. for direct fix to the wall and NRC rating between .85 - .95 with a 7.9" air gap.

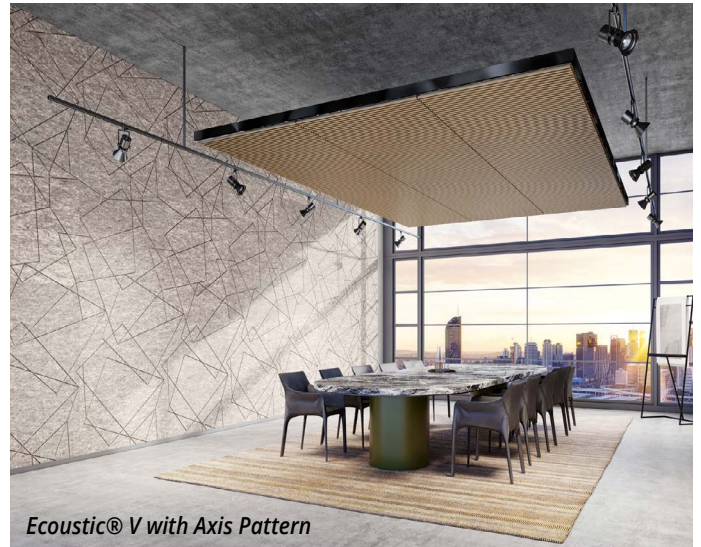




**FEATURED PRODUCT BY  
UNIKA VAEV**

# unika vaev

Three Ecooustic® V Collection design images are showing “Plank” designs on the back wall. In the ceiling you can view our Ecooustic Sculpt™ Classic Ceiling Tiles in straight rows. The product Lens (long oval and other rounded boxes) are attached to the Sculpt™ Classic Ceiling Tiles. The Lens boxes will be introduced later this Spring.



*Ecooustic® V with Axis Pattern*



*Ecooustic® V Check 5.5"*



*Ecooustic V 110 4"*



*Ecooustic V Mix*

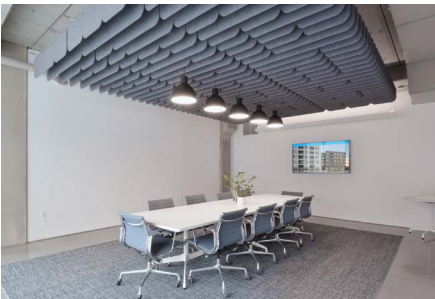
# 6 MRL FAVORITE PRODUCTS FROM ACROSS THE LIBRARY

The following products represent 6 of our favorite products currently on My Resource Library. The products are listed in no particular order.

## TEMPO

LOFTWALL

Tempo presses mute on your space while looking like a masterpiece. Go on, scream with excitement. No one will hear you.



## COMBO

SCANDINAVIAN SPACES

Get rid of protruding furniture legs that trip you up in every direction: Welcome Combo 1, 2 and 3: precise graphic tables, seats, or both combined. Stefan Borselius and Thomas Bernstrand have created a new interior architectural element in aluminum for both indoor and outdoor use.



## MOXIE SERIES

NEVINS

Moxie is a contemporary high backed lounge chair, available in 3 base style options. This stand out piece is most at home in receptions, waiting or lounge areas, where comfort is essential and style is everything.



## IVY RECLINER

IOA

The Ivy lounge provides a sense of personal space with its integrated wings. Both sides extend to an extremely comfortable lounging position making long stays easier.

## FRACTALS SEATING

STUDIO TK

Designed by Jeffrey Bennett and Nicholas Dodziuk for Studio TK, the Fractals™ seating group was conceived with two important criteria in mind: to support the worker and groups of team-based workers in open and collaborative environments, and to provide a modular program that, in its articulation, creates a new level of planning.



## FRESH

SIXINCH

The Fresh family of chairs bring a simplistic, yet refined look to any environment. The Fresh+ chairs feature two widths, ensuring you have the right seat for anyone to sit in.





*Koncis Series Dynamic Monitor Arms By Chief*

## **Increase Workspace Ergonomics at Home and the Office**

With so much of the workforce working from home, avoiding repetitive stress and poor ergonomics has become more of a struggle than ever before. A recent social survey held by Legrand | AV showed a large majority of respondents cited ergonomics as their biggest pain point when working from home.

Home workspaces were likely set up in a hurry when many people were required to work off site in March 2020. It's important to investigate furniture solutions that keep up with the times and keep workers as healthy as possible. Many solutions are easy to transport once the time comes to head back to the office, though it's important to help employees with both options as working from home continues in 2021 and beyond.

According to a COVID-19 Employee Pulse Survey by Willis Towers Watson, before the emergence of COVID-19, 7 percent of full-time employees in America worked from home. With the onset of the pandemic, that number has reached over 50 percent and is expected to lower to 22 percent once COVID-19 has passed, tripling the number of remote workers pre-2020.

User comfort and well-being are important considerations with any desktop set up. The enhanced ergonomics benefits of advanced monitor mounts help workers avoid injury and allow for flexible monitor configurations to meet the differing needs of various users.

**HEALTHCARE  
SPOTLIGHT  
CHIEF**

The Human Factors and Ergonomic Society notes the following requirements when considering the monitor support surface and viewing angle:

- **Allow users to adjust the tilt and rotation angle of the monitor**
- **Allow users to adjust line-of-sight distance to the monitor**
- **Locate the screen's center 15 to 25 degrees below horizontal eye level**

Monitor arms provide superior flexibility for monitor tilt and distance adjustment over standard desk stands. Monitor arms also enable customization per user needs for ease of movement or maximum adjustment. This flexibility is extremely helpful for a variety of user populations, including:

- **Individual work injury and ergonomic needs**
- **An aging workforce**
- **Bifocal and progressive lens wearers**

With office densification driving smaller personal work surfaces with dramatically shallow-depth desktops, look for monitor arms that provide the most complete range of motion available. The mounts should enable positioning of the monitor as far back from the user as possible for proper ergonomic viewing distance. A full range of motion also provides optimal positioning and screen sharing with colleagues.

When it comes to flexibility, monitor arms provide users with a wide range of tilt and swivel options for the side-to-side, front/back, and up/down movement that today's workforce requires. For example, monitor arms with tilt allow bifocal and progressive lens wearers to tilt the monitor back dramatically and lower the monitor all the way down to the work surface. This means no more leaning back and tilting the head up or looking down to read the screen. You should also be able to optimize ergonomics for touchscreen displays, and the angle of the monitor to eliminate any glare from lights or sun.

Chief is launching the new Koncīs Series Dynamic Monitor Arms to offer a more value-oriented solution ideal for home or workplace office settings on a budget. The elegant design with enhanced ergonomics ensures optimal productivity. Think premium-grade quality at a budget-friendly price point.

In addition, dynamic articulating monitor arms allow for quick, fingertip height adjustments, which are ideal solutions for sit/stand or multi-user environments. Some mounts provide up to 23 inches of height adjustment, so you can even stand while at your fixed-height desk.

To bring the keyboard and mouse with you when you stand, or to place the keyboard at an optimal ergonomic position while seated, Chief offers a series of keyboard and mouse support systems to meet most ergonomic preferences across a range of user applications. They optimize tilt angle of the keyboard away from the user for a more natural and ergonomic typing position, and some solutions also provide independent positioning of the mousing surface.

Add desktop charging to keep power in reach without risking a concussion trying to find an outlet under the desk. Options available through the brands of Legrand | AV include the Wiremold® Desktop Power Center or the Kontour™ Charging Hub from Chief which works with Kontour monitor mounts for an integrated desktop solution.



*Wiremold® Desktop Power Center*



*Kontour™ Charging Hub from Chief*

**HEALTHCARE  
SPOTLIGHT  
CHIEF**



While the workforce is at home, it's a great time to upgrade conference rooms at the office. Chief's Tempo™ Series Flat Panel Floor Support System allows for quick flat panel installation by using the floor to support the weight instead of the wall. This eliminates the need for wall inspection and remediation, saving time and money across enterprise rollouts. The lower cover can also be customized to match surrounding finishes.

Requiring fewer installers, saving time, reducing the chance for call-backs – all help minimize risk of exposure for both integrators and on-site staff. What was simply a convenience before has now become a safety necessity, and the need for efficient installation is not going to go away.

A majority of the workforce is telecommuting and meeting via video conferencing. Students of all ages are learning online, and workspace technology has paved the way in helping individuals get through it all. The challenges of 2020-2021 have resulted in several emerging trends: connecting virtually, installation efficiencies, remote management and technology-assisted social distancing.

Legrand | AV is here to guide you through this shift with a Trends Look Book, available for download here. This piece examines how these four emerging trends can be applied to remote conferencing, hybrid learning, remote teams, and digital signage.



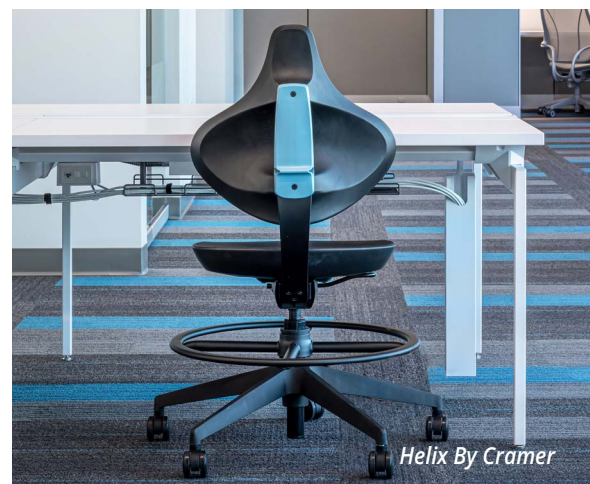


# Helix™: The Future of Modern Healthcare and Lab Seating

## What does a chair for modern healthcare and lab spaces look like?

When you think of a standard lab or healthcare seating solution, the stereotype that typically comes to mind provides basic support and is visually underwhelming, cluttered with confusing knobs and adjustments that aren't as helpful as they claim to be. We wondered why this was the case when the work of the professionals in these environments is so critical, sophisticated, and important.

These users were in need of a chair that worked with them and for them; a seat so comfortable and undetectable that it was almost like an extension of themselves. A chair that when empty and resting complemented the progressive and exciting work-space it inhabited. So, we set up shop and got to work.



**Meet Helix, the award-winning seating solution for modern healthcare and lab spaces.**

**Freedom to Move**

Helix embraces the human form effortlessly. The fluid twisting motion of the Frameless Back™ is unique to the market and provides a new level of support. This comfort system self-adapts organically to the user, requiring only a single adjustment handle to control height.

**Modern Design**

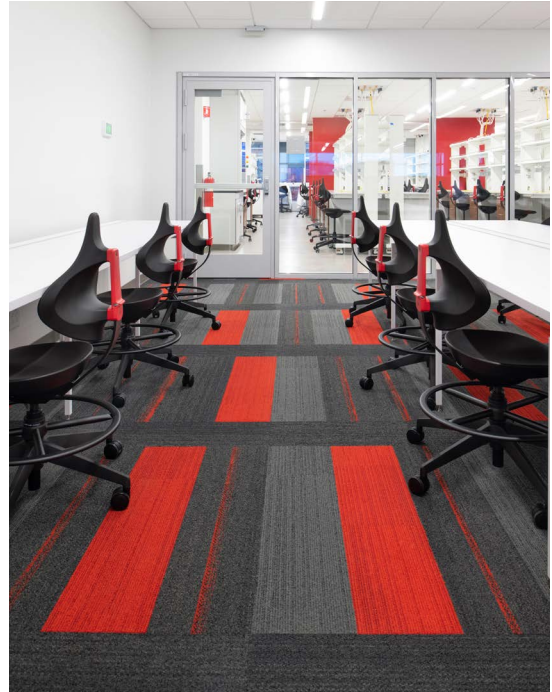
The organic form of Helix was designed entirely around the natural curves of the human body, and it provides a distinctive and purposeful aesthetic appropriate for healing and lab spaces. Its fresh optional accent colors were carefully selected to reflect an optimistic energy and help brighten environments.

**Healthcare Clean**

The comfort surfaces of Helix are seamlessly designed to reduce infection risk and offer exceptional protection against contaminants. Made up of our i+™ Polyurethane, this premium material remains resilient and supple much longer than typical vinyl coverings. Helix was designed with lab grade hygiene in mind and complies with BIFMA Healthcare Furniture Cleanability Guidelines HCF 8.1-2014.

We set the bar high to transform healthcare and lab seating entirely, and our vision was to redefine design and performance expectations; because we believe that everyone deserves a great chair. Whether you twist relax, focus or reach – Helix is there to support you.

**To experience Helix for yourself, visit [www.cramerinc.com](http://www.cramerinc.com) for more information.**





## **Integra Introduces New Coastal Collection | Metal** *Collection Offers Greater Cleanability, Maintenance and Sustainability in Guest & Lounge Seating*

Integra Inc., a leading designer and manufacturer of high-quality lounge seating and tables for commercial environments, is introducing its new Coastal Collection | Metal. This new line of seating products better meets the maintenance and design needs for a wide range of commercial interiors today, especially within the healthcare market. Coordinating Coastal Metal Tables accompany the launch.

Component-based construction is a standard across the entire Integra product portfolio, meaning all Coastal Collection product components – arms, arm caps, backs, feet, legs and seats – can be replaced or recovered should they become damaged or worn. This provides cost saving advantages and a more sustainable option than replacing an entire seating product when only a component needs to be replaced or recovered.

Among the collection's five series, the Tide and Marina chairs now feature steel arms/legs with solid surface arm caps (standard), as do the Coastal Benches. The Marina and Reef series now incorporate a metal leg option with each upholstered arm offering. The new Coastal Metal Tables, featuring a steel base or legs, round out the collection and allow designers to create a fully coordinated facility.

All products within the Coastal Collection are defined by a contemporary aesthetic. The steel arms and legs, available in several powder coat finishes, further enhance the design options available to designers. Additionally, Marina and Reef's upholstered arm versions create a softer look while also maintaining easy cleanability and durability partly through a solid surface arm cap option.



**HEALTHCARE  
SPOTLIGHT  
INTEGRA**

Bay and Marina bring unique maintenance advantages. Both are designed as a one-piece seat/back unit and feature a “cove clean-out” so debris can be easily wiped off the unit. The Tide Series offers a clean-out and an all-sides clean-out option allowing debris to fall directly to the floor. They also come with Integra’s Wall Saver design that protects the product’s exterior back and facility walls from unnecessary wear or damage.

Known for their superior strength and durability, all Integra products, including the Coastal Collection | Metal, pass a 2,000 lb. static capacity and 1,000 lb. dynamic (drop) capacity, both of which exceed industry standards for quality and strength. The products are bariatric weight-rated, certified Clean Air Gold and compliant with the Healthier Hospitals Initiative of Safer Chemicals Challenge.

For healthcare environments, the health and safety of patients, workers and guests is a priority, use of The Coastal Collection | Metal provides a distinct benefit. Typically easier and more effective to clean than most other types of material, steel is non-porous and non-corrosive, making it less likely to harbor bacteria. Additionally, when regularly cleaned and disinfected correctly, steel can reduce the risk of Healthcare-Associated Infection (HAIs) and prevent the spread of harmful diseases.

“The new Coastal Collection | Metal takes our range of durable and sophisticated guest and lounge seating to a new level,” said Chandra Putnam, Integra’s Director of Sales and Marketing. “All products offer exceptional comfort and forward design without sacrificing the durability and function healthcare and other 24/7 commercial environments need. Add replaceable and recoverable components, multiple features for easy maintenance, and a bariatric weight rating, the Coastal Collection | Metal checks all the boxes.”



Integra backs its products with a lifetime warranty, which includes use in 24/7 facilities.

Designers, facility managers and others wanting more information about the new Coastal in Metal Collection can visit:

<https://integraseating.com/seating-for-essential-care/>

**About Integra**

Located in southern Wisconsin, Integra Inc., is a family-owned and operated company that has been designing and manufacturing seating and tables for lounge and reception areas since 1982. The company started with Monroe Putnam’s patented “tube and plug” inner construction design. Since then, Integra owners, Monroe and Deena Putnam, have grown Integra into a leading company that accommodates the unique requirements of each customer and end-user, and continually adds new products that exceed customer expectations. Integra sets the standard for products with functional style, durability and flexibility combined with first-class customer service. With a focus on durability and minimizing environmental impact, all Integra seating lines have replaceable components to provide a more sustainable and cost-effective solution for any facility.





# KEEPING SPACES SAFE

Jonti-Craft's complete lineup of table dividers, portable sinks, mobile storage solutions, supply cabinets, and space dividers can help you reconfigure learning spaces—and other environments—to keep students protected while they fully engage in classroom activities. Our smart, safe solutions contain flexibility, portability, and affordability so you can welcome students and educators back safely while meeting health protocols.





**BY ALICIA KOLEDIN, ASSOC. AIA**

The recent inauguration of the first female and first person of color as Vice President of the United States was monumental. But its singularity raises questions like “Why did it take so long?” “Why do so few women succeed?” and the all-important “Why does a woman’s path to leadership differ from a man’s?”

In architecture school back in the late 1990s, several female classmates switched majors in the first year or two. Among my fellow female graduates, I remember only one of those being a woman of color, and perhaps the only person in our class who was Black. Fast forward 20-some years later, and unfortunately, many females and minorities in the design industry still face serious barriers to leadership.

Yet, some women have secured their seat at the table within our male-dominated profession, usually through untraditional means or along paths that looked more like rollercoaster rails than tree-lined boulevards. Here are a few of their stories.



**Angie Lee AIA, IIDA,  
Partner & Design Director-  
Interiors at FXCollaborative**

Angie Lee says her parents, like many first-generation Asian immigrants, yearned for her to

become a doctor, or lawyer, or even a classical musician. But she channeled her love of artistic pursuits – drawing, photography, writing – into architecture. “It was a happy medium for them,” she says, “and for me, it was magic. I would have done it for free.”

Spending her early career in Pittsburgh, she worked on a lot of base building projects. But when she started working with Gensler in New York, she fell in love with the pace and texture of interiors. “The result is always more immediate and there’s a storytelling aspect to it,” she says. “It has a more lenient vocabulary than the male-centric, Euro-centric, Capital A ‘Architecture’ that I had learned.”

In a way, Angie says, she had to “unlearn” what it meant to be a designer and backed into it without knowing initially what it would lead to. “There was a loosening, an unfurling, and a rediscovery of my identity. As a Korean American, I think a lot about the way our culture shapes our sense of place and space, our relationship with the surfaces in a room, the colors we apply.”

“I was always one of the few women in the room at any given moment, especially at construction meetings,” she recalls. Now, as a Partner at FXCollaborative, Angie works to help support a more welcoming culture at her firm. “Learning how to confront our inherent biases is exciting but challenging,” she says. “It’s not easier now, there’s just more of us doing it. There is still a lot of reconciling that needs to be done in our industry, in how we see women and women of color specifically. And the timeline is likely to be longer than people expect.”



**Cat Lindsay,  
Principal, Lindsay Newman**

Cat Lindsay graduated from the University of Florida, but soon found herself in Chicago and New York, working for large firms with “the best of the best from everywhere.” She developed a strong collegiate camaraderie but was surprised when she was the only woman among 30 new Associates. “I

never really noticed the gender gap before,” she admits.

In 2002, Cat joined her husband in his architectural practice. “We built an excellent team with entrepreneurial spirit. We all did a bit of everything and learned a great deal about how to design and deliver a project with large-firm capacity and small-firm attention to detail.”

After completing numerous diverse projects for high-profile clients, in addition to consulting and teaching, Cat joined the client side. As Executive Director and Head of Workplace and Design at WarnerMedia, she oversaw the design and construction of their new headquarters at Hudson Yards. Her number one challenge? Building consensus. “The company really cares about people. There were 4,500 people with different views about what the workplace of the future could look like. All divisions were assured they would be able to continue to make their magic.”

Cat attributes her success to having a “strong backbone.” She also credits her fully integrated design approach. “Interior design is not a stage set,” she argues. “I focus on how people experience the space, as well as the quality of the materials and the light.”

An eternal optimist by nature, Cat jokingly refers to her blood type, “B positive.” So throughout the pandemic, despite understanding that so many people are struggling with numerous issues right now, she repeats her mantra: “There will be good that comes from this.”



**Julie China, Owner,  
Idea Space Architecture +  
Design**

Julie China, who runs design firm Idea Space with her husband Darren, discovered her career in her high school guidance counselor’s office. She saw interior design as the perfect balance between creativity and the practical skills, work ethic, and discipline she developed in her childhood dance and music classes.

oped in her childhood dance and music classes.

“As a business owner you wear a lot of hats. Project management, accounting, marketing – all those basic business skills you don’t really learn about in school – take up a lot of time. Design is important, it’s what we love doing, but it’s in addition to everything else we do.” That’s why “Architects and designers need to do a better job of charging what they’re worth,” she says. “There’s a value to what we do, and our clients can’t do what we do.”

Julie feels lucky to have been influenced and surrounded by women in leadership roles early in her career. “It was empowering. Sometimes I felt I needed to try a little harder to prove myself, to show I knew what I was talking about. But I was able to face it and build that confidence by watching and observing other women.”

Consequently, Julie’s leadership style is an inclusive one. “We bring clients into the process and make them part of the team.” This has been particularly helpful throughout the pandemic. “During COVID, things are taking longer. It’s difficult to get materials, furniture, appliances. There’s higher demand, and less inventory. But just being honest about it goes a long way. We provide alternate options and make sure clients are aware and in the loop.” Moreover, “We want to deliver an amazing customer-team experience, so we make sure to treat everyone – collaborators, contractors, vendors, employees – with respect.”



**Betty Brano, Owner,  
Brano Design**

Betty Brano started her career in the fashion industry, then transitioned into the financial sector. After her role was outsourced, she says, "I had to re-invent myself. I thought about fashion, and what I had liked about it. I wanted to use what I knew and translate that into interior design."

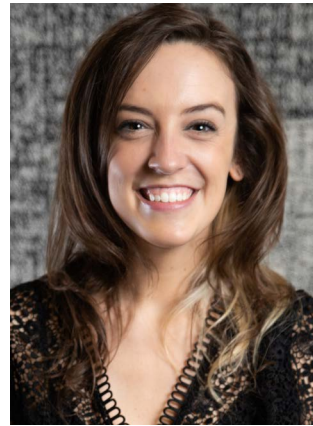
Her 15-year-old business, Brano Design, provides interior design and construction services for commercial, hospitality and government. The company employs up to 15 people at times. After bids have been won, Betty works to keep an eye on the numbers and how they are performing. Because interior finishes are often the last piece to the project, the primes and/or owners may demand adjustments to reduce costs, given that contingency have been applied elsewhere on the project. "The need to stand firm and not allow yourself to be bulldozed is critical."

M/WBE certification helps but is not a failsafe. "You cannot walk onto a job with the mindset of 'I am an M/WBE' and expect to be treated with kid gloves," she says. "You have to lead with your ability to perform the job to the satisfaction of the client. Then, if they ask for a certification you can provide it." She stresses that "M/WBE's literally have to fight for work, and once on-site, have to perform to prove themselves."

Betty's held firm within the male-dominated construction industry, in part, she says, by not being afraid to speak up. "Listen to what's being said and respond to it, offering your own perception. Don't let them write you off. Stand your own ground."

She also values networking. "It's good to have someone else who is a business owner to talk to, even if they're in another industry. Get to know people on a deeper level, so you can help each other out and share ideas."

Her ultimate advice? "Be prepared for the challenges, and don't look at them as a negative. They're just growing pains, what you need to overcome in order to get to the next level."



**Nicole Czapek, HKS,  
Associate, Interior Designer**

Nicole Czapek has over ten years of experience in health-care and mission critical interiors with HKS. Based in the firm's Chicago office, where she started her career as an intern, she has also worked in their Los Angeles office and with teams in the Salt Lake City, Detroit, Phoenix, and Richmond.

Interior design made sense for Nicole, because it "was something I was already doing. I designed floor plans on a Lego table, drew in perspective, and turned packaging into dollhouses. I was always building or constructing something for fun."

"My favorite part now is how it all comes together. I initially thought interior design was more about colors and materials," she admits. "Now I'm grateful for the whole process." She also appreciates learning from each project: "Did that work, did it not work? We have repeat teams, repeat clients, and we just get better each time."

Her female bosses have been instrumental in Nicole's professional development. "When you see yourself represented in leadership roles, it makes all the difference. To have all those women within my reach, only a phone call or Instagram away, is amazing." Despite still sometimes being the only female in room – and sometimes the youngest, "I recognize it, but I don't feel intimidated. I'm there for a reason."

Nicole helps lead her Associate group in Chicago, currently focused on creating an open and safe space for management up and down. She also recruits local talent, especially those candidates coming right out of school. "We have amazing talent right here in our backyard."

Her advice for those entering the profession? "Internships are the greatest things! Don't be discouraged by one instead of a full-time job right out of school. Just take it – that's how you're going to learn and grow. Be super flexible and patient right now, ask a lot of questions, and just get out there."



**ALICIA L. KOLEDIN, ASSOC. AIA  
FOUNDING PRINCIPAL, AKCELERATE**

*A "recovering architect," Alicia has spent over two decades in the A/E/C industry. Before launching AKcelerate in 2017, she worked at prestigious international architecture firms, including Gensler; Skidmore, Owings & Merrill; and Diller Scofidio + Renfro. As a consultant, Alicia develops bespoke marketing, communications, and business development strategies for her clients, which are designed to support aspirations and bolster growth potential.*



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# Q&A

With Carly Boudreau  
President of Coriander Designs

Coriander Designs began in 1979 in the two car garage of founder Kenneth Boudreau. Starting with one design for an end table, and a corporate motto for eagerness to meet the customer's desires, modifications led to an endless catalog of unique seating and casegood products. Since the commencement of the design team in 1980, Coriander Designs has seen a parade of styles from traditional, to modern, to the unnamable.

With the 30th anniversary of the founding of Coriander Designs in, came a fresh perspective rooted in the same values. **Carly Boudreau**, second generation owner, brings an understanding of the unique contemporary demands, while ensuring the maintenance of the core values that made Coriander Designs the reliable provider by which it has become known.

We got a chance to know Carly a little better and invite you to do the same. It's obvious that her commitment to excellence and ambitious spirit will continue to serve Coriander Designs and the Contract Design Industry as a whole for years to come.

**Q: Growing up in the Contract Furniture, did you always know that you wanted to carry on the family tradition? If not, what did you want to do with your career?**

**A:** I am the youngest of three with two older brothers so, growing up, taking over the business was never discussed with me. I think it was always assumed that my brothers would. I worked at Coriander Designs when I was out of school for the summer and over winter break, but there were no conversations regarding my future and if the business was going to be a part of it. It wasn't until spring break of my senior year at college, when my parents flew me to Maui where they were living at the time, when everything changed. My oldest brother,

Corey, was visiting my parents as well. Corey had been the production manager at Coriander Designs for 4 years since graduating college. We were out to dinner one night in Lahaina when my parents mentioned that it was time to give Corey a raise. Their recent move to Maui had meant they were ready to hand the business down. Corey had his own plans though as he announced that he was going to be joining the Marines. With this unexpected change in plans, my parents, who really had put the company behind them at that point, started to think about either selling the business or enlisting me to take over. I didn't have plans for what I was going to do after I graduated, so I said I would give it a go. And here I am, 16 years later!



**Q: How did you start in the industry?**

**A:** I worked at the company over summer and winter breaks while I was in school. My father started the company before I was born so you could say, I was born into it. It was just always there. Like another sibling.

**Q: What do you especially love about Coriander?  
What makes the company so special?**

**A:** The people. I love the people here at Coriander Designs, and not just everyone who puts their heart and soul into their work everyday, but also our customers and our suppliers. I have formed great relationships with them over time. Our GM has been with the business since I was two months old. Our average employee has been with Coriander Designs for 16.8 years. Typically a blue collar job like manufacturing would see a high turnover rate, but we have been very fortunate to have such an incredible group of people that call this place a home away from home. I also love that everyone takes ownership and pride in what they do, and that shows in the products that leave our factory doors.

**Q: What is your vision for the future of Coriander?**

**A:** My vision for the future of Coriander Designs is to become the most innovative furniture manufacturer. We love working with mixed materials - learning about new products that our suppliers are coming out with - and we get excited for opportunities to incorporate them into new products for our

customers. We don't shy away from a challenge. We have really unique custom projects moving through our factory floor all the time. Each project is an opportunity to learn and grow and each one makes us better.

**Q: How does being a female owner give you a unique perspective within the industry?**

**A:** Well I don't know if this is unique but being a woman, you have to be flexible and adaptable to change. We're taught from an early age to make others feel comfortable, even at the risk of our own comfort. I believe that adaptability and inclusivity engrained into us leads to innovative ideas and out of the box solutions.

**Q: How would you describe your approach to leadership?**

**A:** My approach to leadership I feel is quite simple. Hire people that I know I can trust, and allow them the space, support and opportunity to excel.

**Q: Are there any female leaders that have inspired you?**

**A:** U.S. Womens soccer team winning the World Cup in 1999 defeating China in penalty kicks. Knowing the blood, sweat and sacrifice that got them to that point, and feeling the excitement and victory of the moment is unmatched. Plus, they're such great role models for my girls.







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# Cultivating Passion In the Workplace

**How A Passion For Work Can Propel Your Team To Greatness**

**BY ANNE BENGE**  
CEO, CULTURA

Creating a place where you love to work requires you to understand why you matter and why you love what you do, then you can create a place that supports that love.

I just don't look at the furniture industry the way the furniture industry seems to look at itself. There are funnies like "it's only furniture" and "furniture emergency" and "we are going to furniture hell" said tongue in cheek, but all energy is meaningful and if you demean what we do by distilling it down to trivial tidbits, then it's tough to realize how you matter. I have worked 19 years for manufacturers; Gretchen Bellinger, Inc., Knoll International, Herman Miller, Inc., Office Specialty/Inscape, and Teknion. My 16-year dealership experience is with Haworth.

It wasn't until I long settled into a career that I started to understand that I was not part of a little, rinky-dink industry but a piece of Global Corporate Real Estate. That mind shift was everything and shaped not only me but my leadership and subsequent company.

The world of real estate eventually changed but the furniture industry didn't. Still driven by commission and salespeople, still driven by concerns about installation, still driven by the world's next best chair, and still filled with more old people than young people. It's time for a dramatic shift. At Cultura, we do not have commission, at all. In my mind, it is the driver that prohibits true innovation, promotes conflicts, prevents good decisions, and wrongly ignites behaviors that are toxic to company culture. Truly building a place where you love to work cannot happen if a

salesperson is paid to sell products because the place you might love to work may not include commissionable products. It may need great thinking and design and reuse – all supporting the pillars of do the right thing, be sustainable and honest. How can you truly be honest in your intelligence if you are paid to think about selling more? Sometimes, selling less or not selling at all is the best sale.

The commercial real estate world is leasing more and more space that requires less and less permanent buildouts. Due to uncertainty, lease lengths shrinking, and the cost and time of construction, they all seem to end up in the same "white box". That plain box is created to adapt to different businesses, like the astounding difference between how different a software company is set up compared to a hardware company. The plain box is then curated by Cultura, in collaboration with the design firm, architectural firm and client to physically manifest the company culture. Finding new products, curating spaces into places, sourcing solutions, knowing quality and pricing, understand the blending of expensive and less expensive, all to create affordable amazing places is what we do.

In my opinion, the role of a furniture dealership changed dramatically about 10 years ago. What used to be a pretty office filled with technical CAD specifiers waiting for interior designers to pick out furniture to be specified, ordered and installed, disappeared for me. Identifying installation and warehousing as your value proposition is crazy. Reducing furniture to a commodity, that all looks the same, that all costs the same, and then

## WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

asking the client to pick one they like the most is just stupid.

I say goodbye to that old paradigm of a furniture dealership. I love design, furniture, culture and making people's lives better through design, furniture, culture and places. The number one question I get in every interview centers around finding your passion, why you get up, why you matter and finding happiness. For me, it took years of searching as I started with a degree in Anthropology in the 1980's that seemed to be a useless liberal arts degree and a background of weaving at Cranbrook in the late 1970's. Figuring out why I matter and that my love for culture and people and design can profoundly change so many people is what is most interesting to me. Instead of thinking about Caltura as a \$30,000,000 company, maybe think of it in a different way; in 2020, Caltura supported 10,000 workers and created a place where they could maybe love to work. That feels a whole lot more meaningful to me.



### Anne Bengé CEO, Caltura

*As the owner and CEO of Caltura, Anne is a dynamic leader that empowers the Caltura team to be bold in its creativity, fostering a culture of innovation. She challenges the status quo in search of ingenious solutions, always curious of emerging trends in business and how these relate back to clients. She is a visionary that adds value by applying a "what if" mentality to drive a team forward and open new opportunities. With over 30 years in the commercial real estate industry, she has an invaluable wealth of resources that strengthen and broaden the capacity for providing inventive and results driven solutions.*

*Leader of the DEI CREW Taskforce  
Member of the Biocom DEI Taskforce  
Member Biocom Return to Work Taskforce for COVID-19*



### About Caltura

Our mission is to create places where people love to work. We do so by cultivating discussions around our clients' culture that informs our design process and approach to solutions, giving culture a place. We are an engaged team of diverse expertise and backgrounds, that when combined, provides a full range of furniture-based services. We are a living example of what we set out to do everyday; we all love where we work.

In a year of social justice, diversity, equity and inclusion, the intersection and support your business gives is on all levels. It is personal, as we found out this year when one of our employees asked that we not work with an organization that was found to be racist. It is about learning your biases, being self-aware, open to learning and pushing these issues into the workplace because it is your community and obligation to do better. We measured our company race, age and gender against the community of San Diego (using the amazing EDC data vault of information) and found that we do reflect the community that we serve. The Caltura 6-person leadership team is 100% women, represents age groups ranging from 25 – 58 and is 33% Hispanic.

Our richly diverse workforce is influential, inventive, impactful and dedicated. We boast a 99% employee engagement rate and #1 Best Places to Work in San Diego 2019, for the small employer category and the 4th largest women owned business/7th largest minority owned business in San Diego (SDBJ). The results of this, put into a financial metric, is that Caltura grew 15% in an industry that was down 8%.



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**By Ashley Blevins**

*Ashley Blevins is the Director of Sales for GMI Companies who is a manufacturer of the brands Ghent, Waddell, and Vividboard. After spending over a decade in marketing, specializing in dealer relations, Ashley has been responsible for expanding the national sales footprint for the GMI family of brands.*

*Ashley is a certified presenter of CEU's and travels the nation providing presentations that train and educate dealers, architects, and designers on skills to educate their clients and close the sale*

*Ashley has found her passion in serving customers by providing value, earning trust, and turning customers into partners. Her philosophy for marketing and sales revolves around embracing change, trial and error, thinking strategically and using data to drive your next move. In her free time, you can find her enjoying the country air with her family or waving her Terrible Towel on Sundays.*



**Creating Empathetic  
& Flexible Workplaces**

To all the women in the contract interiors industry, I'm speaking on behalf of you. For parents, both men and women, I'm speaking as one of you. And lastly, for anyone in a leadership role, listen up, take this in and take actionable steps towards developing a better future for all.

International Women's Day was celebrated on March 8th, the theme was Women in leadership. The goal of this day was to celebrate the efforts women and girls around the world are making to shape a future of equality. This article will talk about how we can build a better workplace that includes and celebrates diversity in leadership, focusing on creating a workforce that empowers women. As a leader myself, it's also important to share pushing for equality is not only the right thing to do, businesses will thrive and improve by doing so. The world and our industry specifically **NEEDS** women in the workplace. [According to one report](#), among the world's largest 500 companies, only 10.9% have women in executive positions. However, diversity at the management level is a huge indicator to the company's overall success. According to Fortune's "[Most Admired](#)", companies that have twice as many women in management levels are associated with a higher status in the report. There is not a specific report that proves women are better at being managers, leaders or running a company. There is evidence that points to how diversity in leadership can increase a company's financial standing. [Research shows](#) that company profits and share performance can be close to 50 percent higher when women are well represented at the top.

Having a diverse leadership team will push everyone to do more, work smarter, and push the company to the greater good. Not only that, it's becoming a key indicator for talent recruitment and retention to have a diverse workforce along with a diverse leadership team. To add my personal experience over the last few years at GMI, I have personally heard from multiple female interviewees that having females in leadership positions weighed heavily into their decision about what company to join. What can you do to create a diverse workforce? Let's dig in.

## WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

### WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE.

Imagine saying that only 75 years ago... a time where women didn't leave the home. It seems so foreign, yet we are in the same century that women and minorities were not allowed to vote or even hold certain jobs, roles, or duties. As I sit here and write this article, I'm humbled by the women who paved the future that allows us to have a voice and do what we love best, work in this industry with all of you.

Our industry is an amazing place for women. Women make up 54% of the workforce. Women are also the majority in the American workforce with a 50.04% lead over males. Yet the next statistic will make you realize how high the mountain remains. What runs through your mind when you hear that only 4% of that 54% of women in our industry, make up leadership roles within the C-Suite? Let's pause on that and reflect. How can we climb this mountain together and continue to promote leadership that reflects the majority of the workforce?

The Covid pandemic is unfortunately having a more adverse impact on women leaving the workforce. [1 in 3 women](#) have considered leaving the workplace over the last year as a result. Can you imagine if 1/3 of our industry, the industry that has 54% of its workforce as women, walked away? Overall, women have lost 5.3 million jobs during the pandemic, and more than 2 million have left the workforce because of layoffs or lack of childcare. When you compare those numbers to men at 1.8 million the impact on women will be noticed for some time, maybe even decades. On top of sheer numbers leaving the workforce, the gender pay gap could also increase and could take years for it to get back to pre-pandemic status. And with only 4% of women in leadership roles, how can we ensure we don't move backward and create workplaces that encourage growing this stat?

### CULTURE:

Culture was affected across every company in some way during the pandemic. It's much harder to create a unified culture when you are not surrounded by it day in and day out. Culture in my opinion is used to encompass all that is good or bad with a company. Employees who love their job, feel empowered in their work, engaged with their colleagues, and have a manager they respect and admire. Employees who are disengaged can be put into two categories; disengaged and actively disengaged. Disengaged employees are going through the motions while actively disengaged employees are simply unhappy at work, and focus their time bringing others down to their level. When it comes to culture, we should really look at what makes employees engaged, disengaged or actively disengaged. Talent doesn't leave an organization; talent leaves a manager. To start changing your culture, you need to start from the top down and make sure your leadership team are engaged leaders. They need to fully endorse, live and breathe, and promote the culture. When it comes to a culture that promotes women, how can we ensure we as leaders do not fail them? What can YOU do within your



**WOMAN MAKE UP 54% OF THE INTERIORS WORKFORCE YET ONLY 4% OF THE C-SUITE**



**WOMAN HAVE LOST OVER 5.3 MILLION JOBS COMPARED TO MEN AT 1.8 MILLION**



**"IF EMPLOYERS AREN'T ADVOCATING FOR THEIR EMPLOYEES, ITS SIMPLY BAD BUSINESS."**

## WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

own company to foster, encourage, mentor, and help women thrive? I dove into these various questions by surveying a group of my own mentors, working women across various industries as well as friends within this industry. Let's review what I uncovered:

### PAID TIME OFF:

Out of every person I talked to, this was the most appreciated and talked about subject. Women either started their conversation with gratitude for their company or loathed their experience and therefore the company associated with that time in their life. The average maternity leave in the US lasts about 10 weeks. FMLA allows up to 12 weeks, but keep in mind only 60% of people are eligible for that. This is a much larger topic we won't spend a ton of time on but is worth noting. The US is far behind the curve and is the **ONLY OECD** country to not have a paid maternity, paternity, or parental leave. This is not an industry issue but much larger. So, what can we do within our own industry?

Start with FMLA or short-term disability if available and review options. Jennifer Pitkin IBCLC, worked to create policies around parental leave and benefits for companies such as Johnny Rockets, Barnes & Nobles and Southwest airlines. "If employers aren't advocating for their employees, it's simply bad business. It might not be covered under the federal mandate as salaried employee, but it's irresponsible not to make accommodations simply to retain employees/get a return in performance or reduce healthcare costs. In other words, it saves companies money and allows them to make more money."

During discussions about paternal leave we need to ensure the manager or party discussing terms, dates of leave etc. is understanding, empathetic and simply excited for the person. This is a very important time in their life regardless of your own individual feelings, make them feel this way during all discussions.

I want to share a different way of thinking and talking through conversations with employees. One of my mentors was helping me during an interview process to land a talented employee. He told me that hiring talent comes down to asking the person to tell **YOU** what their ideal offer would be. Are they more interested in the benefits, the vacation or is it salary? How can we develop an offer letter that makes them happy without knowing those things? This same concept can be applied to many other areas, discussing paid time off is one of them. Each person is different, each pregnancy and time off request is different. Having one solution for all cases just does not make sense. Make each discussion about the individual and cater to their needs when you can.

## 5-Steps to an Empathetic Workplace for Women

### CULTURE

#### LOOK AT THE PAST AND MAKE THE FUTURE BETTER

Change is constant and our policies should continue to flex and adapt as we learn. Continue to educating management to be adaptable, flexible and encourage engagement with their employees which in turn will allow for an engaged and empowered culture.

### EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT

#### TAKE INVENTORY OF WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOUR TEAM

Instead of telling your employees your plan for them, ask them what plan works best for **THEM**. Have a baseline of options and help mold a plan specific to each individual's needs.

### ONE POLICY DOES NOT FIT ALL

#### ACCOMMODATE & CREATE FLEXIBLE POLICIES

Ask the question, what does **YOUR** leave look like to **YOU**? Can you imagine if your manager asked you that? How empowered you would feel to think through what is best for you and your family? Empowerment retains talent and pushes them to **WANT** to work harder for a company.

### MOTHERS RETURN TO WORK

#### RETAIN & RECRUIT THROUGH ACCOMMODATIONS

Small gestures can go a long way. Start small by creating a space for nursing mothers to feel safe, supported, and secure. Look into policies for traveling mothers to help navigate the obstacles.

### DON'T BE A QUEEN BEE

#### LEAD BY LIFTING OTHERS UP, NOT TEARING THEM DOWN

As women in this industry, we need to stop the phenomenon of women sabotaging other women. In order for this to happen, we need women to become champions for other women. Nurture, mentor, educate, and push women to be the best they can be. This is how we will increase our numbers in leadership roles.

LAYOUT BY ASHLEY BLEVINS

## **ACCOMMODATE FLEXIBLE RETURNS TO WORK**

For any parent bringing home a child is a huge lifestyle change and one that does not happen overnight. Parents should feel welcomed back to work with a schedule that allows them to be flexible when they need. Like what was mentioned above, each individual will and should have different paths on their way back to work. Some parents may feel compelled to come back earlier, while others may want and or need longer and there should not be a penalty because of that. Many women I spoke to talked about how terrified they were to let anyone know they were pregnant in the first place. What kind of workplace are we

building in this country that allows fear to override joy in such an important and even challenging time in one's life?

Back to my earlier example, ask the individual: what does your leave look like to you? Can you imagine if your manager asked you that? How empowered you would feel to think through what is best for you and your family? Empowerment retains talent and pushes them to **WANT** to work harder for a company. Allow each individual to help develop the right plan for themselves and the company.

## **ACCOMMODATIONS FOR NURSING MOTHERS**

Another key topic among many of the women was returning to work with accommodations for nursing. I heard a little bit of everything, one woman said she was given a key to a storage room with a fold up chair that was so full she had to go in and clean it out herself. Another woman talked about going to her car a couple times a day and getting awkward looks every time she would leave, and another mentioned she stopped breast feeding earlier than planned because her workplace didn't approve or accommodate. We simply can and must do better.

For the small group of women, I chatted with, those who had great reviews of their maternity and back to work accommodations had an average of 6 years with that company. That is exactly why companies who invest in this area retain talent and can recruit effectively. A few great examples of what companies did well are outlined below:

1. One traveling mom was given lounge access at the airport to ensure she could nurse in a clean, private area. Airports are getting better with the nursing pods, but most are not kept up

with and become rather dirty over time. Think through lactation services for travel and how you could help accommodate that daunting process.

2. Proctor and Gamble is a big company where I live, I have many friends in leadership roles who talk very highly of their six-month maternity leave and how much they invest in policies like this to retain talent. Policies aside the three women who work here all said they probably would not have kept up breastfeeding as long as they did if they were not supported at work the way P&G and the culture supports their choice.

Another woman talked about having her normal six-week plan through short term disability but then was able to work from home for another month to transition back to work at her own pace. Again, this goes hand in hand with asking the individual what works best for themselves and the company overall.

## **MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP 101:**

During my conversations, I was horrified to hear one woman talk about how her boss openly told her she didn't like kids and even stated she was excited to have a single woman on her team who didn't have children. I was mortified for her, she talked about how others were treated differently simply for being parents. When she did become pregnant, she was terrified it would dampen her career and success because of her direct managers feelings towards children.

Woman to woman, we need to do better. Out of the 14 women I talked with leading up to this article, 6 of them mentioned having women managers who were less understanding and flexible than current male counterparts. I'm not surprised by this, there is a lot of psychology behind it. Since women in the C-Suite is such a small number, it can become competitive and turn into the Queen Bee scenario where women in those roles keep other women down to secure their own spot. Certain women

leaders feel the need to make sure their teams work as hard and sacrifice as much as they did to ensure their direct reports pave the same path as them. These two scenarios are exactly why women are not represented in leadership at the rates we want to see. As leaders, it is our job to look at how we made it to where we are and what we can do to make it better for the next person to follow. Let's stop the bleeding and lift each other up instead of tearing them down.

This certainly isn't a one size meets all approach to creating better environments for women in our industry, it is meant to open your eyes to areas you can help improve within your own company. To sum it, read the infographic to the right, share it with your peers and leaders in your business and get to work on setting goals and creating your own empathetic and flexible workplace.





**BY NICOLE SHAMIR**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OFGO STUDIO

People often ask, so what's your story? Well, contract furniture has been in my DNA for as long as I can remember. As a child, I watched my father build his office furniture business from the ground up and I quickly developed a deep connection to the industry. After graduating from university with an Honors Bachelor of Business Administration, I started my career in contract furniture and was propelled down the path that led me to where I am today. Along the way, I have developed the strong belief that leaders start not with "what" but with "who." I absolutely love my job. I find it challenging yet wonderful because, to me, it is all about people. Collaborating with people, learning from people, giving your best to people, and partnering to do more together than one could ever do alone.

One of the most important lessons that I've learned along the way comes from the inspiring female role model, Carrie Green, founder of the Female Entrepreneur Association, who said, "success is not an accident, it's something we have to create on purpose and every single one of us can do this. So show up for your dreams, discover what you're capable of and turn your ideas into a successful reality." Embracing this mindset is what keeps my train in motion because it's important to know that there is no secret sauce to this balancing act. In 2017, I became pregnant with my first child, who is now a bubbly and beautiful three-year-old girl. Five days later I went back to work full time and learned a whole new meaning to "the juggle is real". But the truth is,

I would not have it any other way. I became more focused than ever before with a whole new meaning to my "why".

In 2019, I officially assumed the role of Executive Director at OFGO STUDIO. Alongside my amazing team, we relaunched the brand with a powerful new vision: *Premium for All*. Our mission is to create products of the highest quality that provide a complete solution to our consumer, because we believe everyone deserves the best. I have had the privilege of leading the charge toward furthering our new brand vision and together we have successfully launched 12 new product offerings, including our award winning 'Chicago From Your Couch' entry, Arrive Inline.

Someone once told me, "People won't remember what you say, but they will remember how you made them feel." This one small tidbit of career advice originated from a famous quote by the inspirational female writer, Maya Angelou—and it has had a huge impact on both my career and the direction of the OFGO STUDIO brand. Be Authentic. Own your identity and be proud of it. In owning our identity as an organization, we keep our customer focus as the cornerstone of our strategy. We operate in a manner that gives us the capability to accomplish projects of various sizes and scopes, while still remaining nimble and flexible.

**WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP**



*Beatbox By OFGO Studio*

Fast forward to today's date, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, it's clear that all of our lives have been altered. But being a mother has taught me that we are strong, adaptable, and capable of anything we set our minds too. We might be juggling a million and one different things but the sky is the limit, and there is no ceiling to what you can accomplish. Throughout the pandemic, OFGO STUDIO has successfully continued to grow its presence as well as continually take part in offering customized protective product solutions to aid hospitals, businesses, and consumers to safely re-open and re-emerge.

Working with my team to stretch our creative muscles is one of the most rewarding parts of my everyday activities. Fostering a collaborative environment and feeling inspired at work is the heart of our organization. It's amazing how a table of tiny 3D printed parts can turn to air high-fives with big smiles on our faces that shine through despite our protective masks. Our latest launch, Let's Meet Media, focuses on the current circumstance that people are distributed more distantly than ever before. We designed Let's Meet Media as a touchdown offering that supports working in-person or virtually, all while allowing for collaboration, content sharing, and peer-to-peer learning.

For some time, I've been following inspiring women entrepreneurs, writers, influencers, and leaders, and I am in awe of how much there is out in the world to be inspired by—and in saying this, I would like to invite you to continue to be part of our journey as OFGO STUDIO prepares to launch a combination of over 6 new product offerings and enhancements within the next four months of 2021.



*Let's Meet By OFGO Studio*

 **OFGO STUDIO**





# How Auburn University is Redefining Relationships, Resources, and Responsibilities

By Vera Reinke

To celebrate women in business and leadership this month, MRL sat down with the inspiring and empowering educator duo, Anna Ruth Gatlin and Lindsay Tan, from Auburn University in Alabama. We discussed all things education, MRL, students, Industry Partners, and navigating today's world as women, leaders, educators, and mothers.

Anna Ruth and Lindsay are such an inspiration for students and the interior design industry. Both have such unique passions, and nothing holds them back from giving their students the best they can, even in an unprecedented pandemic. They are being pushed outside of their comfort zones to provide the best education they can while holding true to being mothers.

We talked about what Auburn is doing to reframe the mindset around relationships with industry partners, technology and how MRL melds into their curriculum, as well as the balance of work and life. I left this conversation feeling inspired and honored to have had the chance to meet them.

*(This article is a glimpse into our conversation, be on the lookout for a few videos about how MRL has helped Auburn, their students, and educators.)*

## **Redefining the Industry Partnership Model**

Auburn's educator Anna Ruth spearheaded an effort to redefine what an industry partnerships model could look like. She started transforming this relationship in the classroom when she recognized a problem with how students were feeling about industry partners and how the students felt industry partners were only coming in for a sales pitch. Anna Ruth is working hard to shift the students' mindset and starting with calling them 'partners' because they are exactly that, partners. A partner in this regard, is someone who will take some of the workload off your hands, will help you find the resources you need to get the project done, and will help educate you on new products, materials, and resources. (Sometimes bringing in muffins since they are the crowd favorite.) These relationships are to be nurtured

and cultivated as part of your professional network and have a bit of give and take. Students have embraced this mindset and eagerly look forward to building these lasting relationships.

Anna Ruth brought up a good analogy about industry partners, “Think of a wheel of design, everything must work equally. The designers rely on reps to get them accurate information. As a designer, you’re the glue, you’re enforcing the whole wheel and making sure that everybody uses all the resources to make everybody’s job that much easier.”

#### **Distinctive ways Auburn uses MRL in their curriculum.**

Auburn was one of the first universities to embrace MRL and work it into their curriculum. There was not a specific model for them to follow so they have experimented with a variety of uses for the My Project tool such as:

- Using My Projects for school project submissions.
- Creating student research projects for them to share amongst themselves.
- Utilizing My Projects as a collaboration tool among the students; to share mood boards, ideas, vet their project with their peers, and using it almost like file sharing but with the purpose of communicating the design intent, project specifications, and project selections on their project.

Anna Ruth noted, “Gone are the days of emails with 100s of attachments and having to explain what each one is. You can now create an experience using the My Project tool to house the information, in one central and editable location.”

- They are using MRL’s Project Binder tool as a central location for presentation research, by embedding a link to the MRL binder in the presentation including all the visuals, the specifications of products, finishes, and materials. Also, the information is never out of date, as it automatically updates because it all links to the manufacturer’s binders.

Anna Ruth and Lindsay have noticed that the students’ approach to technology is positive as they are a generation of technology-literate people. Even though they are technology literate they can at times take technology for granted and tend to be nervous about adapting technology, so it must be intuitive. Digital tools need to be user-friendly so the students can easily navigate the program so they don’t face that first disappointment of “I can’t figure it out, so I won’t try.”

Linking back to relationships with Industry Partners and understating the value proposition of a new program, and how to move past the skepticism of “What’s in it for me?”. Auburn quickly saw how MRL helps save them time and money. Saving time because the necessary manufacturers are in one location, and the need for a physical resource library is being given an alternate of going virtual, especially now in a time of a pandemic

MRL has been a vital resource for remote learning and working.

#### **Looking Forward**

Auburn works hard to be the best training ground for interior design professionals. This past year has pushed the boundaries of redefining what education can look like in a virtual environment. The pandemic has forced educators, like Anna Ruth and Lindsay to question what it’s going to take to get the work done right. They utilize digital collaboration tools to enhance the virtual classroom, create digital versions of material that can be centralized, adapt to changes quickly, and empathize with where the students are coming from because they probably don’t want to be virtual any more than they do.

Connecting with students was a big concern in the beginning, how to not defray those connections because those student/educator connections are vital to a student’s success. Before the pandemic no one stopped by during “office hours” but now Zoom has made it easier for connecting with students. Zoom’s personal meeting rooms have allowed students to ask clarifying questions after class or use the time for feedback on their work by utilizing a screen-share to annotate their work. Anna Ruth feels like she’s able to get to know her students better; students are more confident in coming to ask questions and getting help. Being virtual has also expedited being able to answer quick questions or provide feedback but it is still tricky to uphold the boundaries for your life and work balance.

Going forward and coming out of this pandemic we talked about what the future could look like for interior design, we all agreed that with this pandemic we see it as an opportunity for tremendous growth and improvement. While the built environment will always be necessary, this pandemic has proven that we do not always have to be face-to-face and that not everyone has to be fixed to a desk, also informality has become socially accepted.

Lindsay noted one thing that I felt in my heart. She said “one thing she hopes that does not change is having to apologize for being a mother”. Such as “I’m sorry, I have to take my sick child to the doctor or I’m sorry I’m not available in the evenings.” Even though you don’t have to be sorry for these things, there is always that attitude that you should. The pandemic has helped normalize being a mother and the responsibilities that come with it, it has opened doors to talk about our kids at work, and it’s ok to step away from a meeting if our tiny virtual learners need help connecting to class. The pandemic has unleashed the acceptance that we all have lives outside of work and we’re more than who we are from 9 to 5. Let’s embrace this perspective and continue to support women and mothers all year round, not just in the month of March.

[MRL cares about the people who use our program and if you ever have questions or need a quick training webinar, we are here for you. Email us and we will get it set up! info@myresourcelibrary.com](#)

## WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP



### **Anna Ruth Gatlin, PhD, LEED AP, AUID, IDEC, NCIDQ,**

is Assistant Professor of Interior Design in the Consumer and Design Sciences Department. After an extensive career in commercial and institutional design, Dr. Gatlin joined the faculty at Auburn University in 2017. She has won numerous national and regional awards for her design work and has been voted one of DesignIntelligence's Top 25 Design Educators nationally three years in a row.

Dr. Gatlin has pioneered several public-private partnerships in her time at Auburn and continues to integrate these partnerships into her studio teaching approach. Her research program focuses on academic spaces and student retention with an emphasis on how space shapes perception and personal experiences. Her creative scholarship explores southeastern life through the lens of heritage handiwork.



### **Lindsay Tan, MFA, IDEC, ASID, IIDA, EDAC, LEED GCP, NCIDQ,**

is a design ecologist & entrepreneur academic. At Auburn University she serves as Program Coordinator for Auburn's nationally-ranked, CIDA-accredited interior design program in the College of Human Sciences and a member of the graduate faculty in the nationally-ranked Consumer and Design Sciences graduate program (M.S. thesis/non-thesis and Ph.D. options).

Professor Tan's key research interest is in the development of design interventions for security and resilience in the modern urban ecosystem. She has special expertise in symbolic aspects of human-computer and human-environment interaction - an approach that helps to illuminate the "why" behind today's most pressing global health and quality of life challenges.



**AUBURN**  

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**UNIVERSITY**



# Women Reshaping

## Our Perception Of Ourselves As Leaders

**“WE NEED TO RESHAPE OUR OWN PERCEPTION OF HOW WE VIEW OURSELVES.  
WE HAVE TO STEP UP AS WOMEN AND TAKE THE LEAD.”**

**-BEYONCÉ**

**BY AMY MOULIS**

Being a woman in leadership is about reshaping how we see ourselves as leaders. Women step up every day to manage many different situations; we do it automatically, without hesitation, and in a very instinctive way. Having this ability comes naturally, and for that reason, women are natural-born leaders. This unique advantage, coupled with another great asset, our intuition, becomes a winning combination in being leaders for ourselves and others. Using our intuition to lead ourselves, our teams at work, our families at home, and our communities through

our charitable giving provides us all with a greater connection to the world around us.

For the last year, I have been working almost exclusively on leadership development with women in workplace settings, charitable organizations, and individual groups of friends. Our virtual sessions are a unique mix of leadership development and culinary education. My own philosophy is food, and personal leadership development is foundational for life. What has come out of these sessions is twofold; the desire to

learn more about ourselves and the importance of exchanging ideas and experiences provide us with a new perspective of ourselves as leaders. We have also found there are three distinct steps that support us in reshaping the perception of ourselves as leaders.

First, it starts with each of us reminding ourselves we are our own best leaders. We don't have to look for outside leadership to guide us. Being our own leader trusted guide, and source of what is best for us is something we often forget we have the capability of being. In to-

## WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

day's world, we tend to have many outside obligations that commandeer our time, creating a fast-paced and thriving lifestyle, but one that can leave us feeling depleted if we don't take the time we need to slow down and recalibrate.

The second step is slowing down and reconnecting with ourselves and then with others as a way to help reshape our approach to being leaders. We all cook a meal together during our virtual leadership and culinary education sessions and discuss an aspect of life and leadership outlined for that day's sessions. The design of each session is meant to help us all slow down the fast pace of life, creating space for connection, recalibration, and education.

The third step to reshaping our perception of ourselves as

leaders is to share our story with others. Through these conversations, valuable information is exchanged, each person sharing what has helped them be better leaders at home and work. During these guided sessions, friends, family, and team members share their stories and experiences with each other. The conversations are often deeper and more meaningful than through a typical catch-up phone call or a quick email exchange. The sharing of ideas and life situations gives others a new viewpoint for their own life and leadership evolution.

We are all always evolving, and our leadership approach changes as we reshape our perception of ourselves. Women especially have natural-born leader instincts, and when we take the time to slow down and reconnect, we are reminded again how powerful we all are as leaders.



### AMY MOULIS

*Amy Moulis is the founder of [The Modern Intuitive Life](#), a conscientious way of living and excelling in every aspect from finance to food. Through her web-based platform, and utilizing her certification as a Leadership Development and Coaching Professional (CPC), Amy seeks to help support individuals who are curious about how they can listen to their own intuition and ask the questions to guide them to their unique answer.*

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