

Jun 26

Jacqueline Gonzalez Touzet



“Get as much knowledge and experience in sustainability as well as design. Don’t forget the enormous power and

footprint we have as designers to make a difference. Arm yourselves with knowledge and go out there and go for it."

#WomenWhoBuild meet Jacqueline Gonzalez Touzet,

Jacqueline is the co-founder of Touzet Studio, a Miami based namesake firm she started with her husband Carlos Prio-Touzet. Throughout her career Jacqueline has been recognized for her design leadership, winning awards including Miami AIA's Young Architect of the Year and Architect of the Year. In addition to her work, Jacqueline was the Chair of the Resiliency Committee for the Board of MRED (University of Miami School of Real Estate, Development and Urbanism), is a Trustee for History Miami Museum, an AIA advisor to the Sea Level Rise committee, and a frequent guest critic at University of Miami.

Jacqueline sat down with us to discuss her journey in Architecture, how her education impacted her career trajectory, the struggles and rewards of having her own firm, what she sees for the future of Miami real estate, and her advice for young students entering the field.

Tell us a little bit about yourself and your journey in Architecture?

I am not one of those architects who always knew they wanted to be an architect. I did however, always love drawing and spent countless hours drawing as a child, mostly portraits and cartoons. I would check out many books on art (Leonardo, Rafael, Durer) and fantasy fairly tales. I loved the illustrations. I loved Disney animation as well.

So for the first part of my life until I was 18, I really thought I wanted to be an artist and I had no clear understanding about what an architect did. As a first generation Cuban American, my parents were scared I would starve. My father had wanted to be an engineer and thought I might be a good one. He taught me how to draw plans and elevations. I thought it was boring.

**What made you want to pursue it as a career path?**

I remember being very lost when I graduated from high school. I had just moved back to Miami from Panama. All my friends had gone to college while I was in community college. So I took an aptitude test. The results were artist, advertising, or architecture. I chose architecture because it seemed to be a career where there were bigger issues than selling something.

My very first class was an Architecture History class. I took a loan out to go to Europe and see it for myself.

It was like falling in love. I was hooked.

Then I found out about the Bauhaus, Le Corbusier, Wright and Aalto. I had new heroes.

You received your Bachelor of Architecture from Cornell University. What skills did you develop during your time at the University that you still utilize in your day to day?

Cornell was an exceptional school and really helped shape me as a designer and architect.

Cornell's program was part of a college that included art and landscape. I have always been interested in multi disciplinary approach to design. It was at Cornell that I developed my "voice" as a designer. I learned the importance of keeping a sketchbook and recording my own process. I keep several sketchbooks at all times. I still believe in models, process, rigorous research.

I resonated deeply with the idea of regional modernism and contextual modernism – buildings that are designed to be of their place and time. They had amazing history classes on everything from Japanese Gardens to Classical Greek temples – all of those courses fueled a lifelong interest in history, craft, art. But they taught us to take the lessons from history and apply them, not copy. At the same time – they focused on the idea that architecture was the "mother of all arts" they also taught us as architects we needed to be expert at technology and building.

All of these lessons are still a cornerstone of my practice.

You are the Principal of Touzet Studio Design & Architecture, a namesake firm that you started with your husband. Tell us a little bit about this process?

We worked on large international projects as well as small ones. At the end of the day we both felt our work was better and stronger when we did it together. That's the only reason to ever form a partnership.

We met while designing The Setai at Shapiro Associates. Carlos had come from being a VP and Senior Designer at Arquitectónica – I had come from a small Miami Beach firm. Working with him was like when I discovered how great architecture could be. We clicked. We complemented each other really well.

What made you decide to branch out on your own?

We had two small children under 3. That was a major driver for me. I was dreading leaving them to go back to Arquitectonica (I was a Vice President by that time)

because I knew I would miss so much. And what I wanted to do was to do both. Carlos was let go from his position as Director of Add Inc. He wasn't really cut out for corporate firms and was more interested in design and craft. If it hadn't been for those circumstances, it might have taken longer for us to take the risk. But I believe it was inevitable we would work together.

I am so very glad it worked out the way it did. We've been very lucky.



What does your day to day look like?

Since the pandemic, I have become an avid gardener and empty nester. I usually read and write in the mornings. Cafecito and maybe some exercise or gardening. Then studio - on Tuesday I stay home and work on solo design or with Carlos.

We work with our team and review projects on a daily basis. We sometimes pin up and discuss details, materials. Carlos and I are what you would call very "hands on principals".

And it doesn't stop at design. We visit our job sites regularly with our team. Our approach is holistic. There's nothing we like better than meeting and collaborating with our team and with the people who actually build our buildings. It's a huge reason we wanted to have our own practice and went away from the mega firm. That connection to the work.

What has been the biggest struggle and the greatest reward in starting your own firm?

Greatest struggle:

- Handling the dips in the economy, pandemics and other large events as a small firm.
- Finding the confidence in turning away work that actually will cost you money and drain you.
- Learning and accepting that you are not for everyone and everyone is not for you.

Greatest reward:

- Designing beautiful spaces and buildings. Doing good work.
- Having your clients tell you how it has exceeded their dreams.
- Being able to design and build a great design studio and body of work with my partner of all things. Having the time and space to be there for my children.
- Having young colleagues come by and tell you how you changed their life and helped them grow to be the architects they are now.

And yes, I love the all recognition we have gotten as a small firm (Firm of the Year, design awards etc) and the press.

As a woman, a Latina and a small studio in an age of mega firms I know what an unlikely and improbable story I am. I know the statistics. And so I take none of this for granted and am deeply grateful for all of it.

How do you approach each project?

Very mindfully.

We study the place and client carefully. One of us usually takes a lead (Carlos or me). We develop a parti, inspiration images. We model the breezes, sun, study the context. We research the history and culture. We interpret the dream of our client (or try to!) into an elegant and sustainable solution.

Where do you draw inspiration?

Nature is often our biggest inspiration. We've designed facades based on sea shells, erosion, wind and water. We also look to history and materials. Culture - film, literature and art. We are both sci fi and fantasy nerds.

What do you see for the future of Touzet Studio?

We are seeing more cross disciplinary work (interiors and landscape integration). We want to grow into designing products.

**You are the Chair of the Resiliency Committee for the Board of MRED and an AIA advisor to the Sea Level Rise committee. Can you tell us a little bit about these two causes and why you were drawn to them?**

I was for four years. Simply put, we cannot claim to be doing good design if we aren't designing for the future. And the future requires every ounce of innovation and ingenuity we possess.

What does your participation entail?

I am reaching out to the next generation and trying to bridge academia with practice. We need innovation and research to actually get pilot projects built. That's been the focus of my last four years. Right now I am working as a volunteer with ULI, ASTM standards and am a frequent guest lecturer and mentor. I am leaning into putting all of this into my own projects. We need to get pilots built. I see

my role as a vocal proponent of resilient and high performance building specific for our region. I try to be a force for that because I think as a designer and as a leader that's what I should do for my community and the world I leave for future generations.

What do you see for the future of Miami real estate/architecture?

I think the codes will stiffen and there will be managed retreat in places. And this is all along the coast, every where on earth. I reject the idea that Miami is so much worse off than places with no money and no resources. We have both. And increased heat, wildfires, and flooding is coming for us all.

Therefore I hope we become an example to the world of what's possible and reinvent ourselves to live with the increased challenges. We also need to build more affordable and equitable housing. We need to make better designed Net Positive buildings the code - and fast.

My focus is simply this: when we build back better- how should we build? How do we protect and build a community in this region in the future? What does that mean for this climate and how do we do it?

What is one piece of advice you have for students entering the workfield?

Get as much knowledge and experience in sustainability as well as design.

Don't forget the enormous power and footprint we have as designers to make a difference. Arm yourselves with knowledge and go out there and go for it. The world needs you.

Architecture • Design • Development • Jacqueline Gonzalez Touzet • Miami Architecture • REAL ESTATE • Touzet Studios

⟨ Tamara Silver

Kaitlin McCarthy ⟩