

BUILT WORLD PODCAST

Season 1 Episode 2

Jacqueline Touzet – Founder of Touzet Studio

Transcript

Brian Ehrlich

Hey guys, episode 2 of the Built World. I'm Brian Ehrlich, and I'm joined by my co-hosts, Felipe Asena and Ben Hoffman.

Spaces are what you make of them, and we talk to the people that make those spaces. Today we're talking to Jacqueline Touzet of Touzet Studio. Last year, Jackie's studio was recognized by the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Miami as Firm of the Year. She counts Apple and Nike among her clients. She's an advocate for how design can help mitigate the impacts of climate change. And as a futurist, she's focused on pursuing real solutions that can scale quickly and change how we build in the subtropics and along the coasts. Jacqueline is a professor at the University of Miami, where she teaches advanced materials and resiliency at the School of Architecture.

Broadcasting live from this beautiful co-working space here in South Miami, the Buro HQ. It's a pleasure to have you today, Jacqueline.

Jacqueline Touzet

It's a pleasure to be here. Thank you.

Brian Ehrlich

Thank you.

Felipe Asena

So, Jackie, to kick it off, you know, we'll get into your story in a minute, but there's this one question, this one idea that we always talk about, and that's developers today really approach developing buildings like a math problem.

It's maximizing FAR, unit counts, revenue sellouts, and their thought of user experience kind of ends at putting a bunch of art in the lobby.

So, from an architect's perspective, we kind of wondered how you mitigate the difference in those two aims?

Obviously, from your perspective, you want to create an interesting building that resonates with the user experience, and pushes the envelope, and the developers just want to really make that math problem as optimal as possible.

Felipe Asena

So how do you kind of bridge that gap between user experience and maximizing revenues?

Jacqueline Touzet

Well, that's a very important selling job that we have to do with our clients--and an education process, really.

We think that design is the ultimate value adder. It not only creates an identity for the project that's unique and you can market and sell on, and it becomes their story, which I think that's a value adder for a lot of our clients. But also, it creates community. It gives identity to being a part of a place, which I think people are looking for.

And it's a differentiator when you have all these products on the market, why you should live here as opposed to somewhere else, or why you should stay there instead of somewhere else.

People are looking for connection to a community or if they're living in the building for an extended period of time, I think this pandemic has shown us that design, comfort, you know? All of those things that are not showing up on a spreadsheet are the ultimate differentiator of why you would choose one versus the other. So, I think that it's our job, to communicate that effectively: why design is such an important consideration.

I think that the other part of it is to get things approved and welcomed into the community itself. That's not always an easy task. And in an era of when people are trying to get affordable housing, for example, into a neighborhood that maybe doesn't have it, how do you do that?

Well, design is one of those things that you spend the time to understand what the rest of the community needs or wants, and then you design a building that fits in and that contributes in a positive way, not just to the occupants, but the people who live around there.

And that's, for us, has been very successful in our ability to get things approved on the first round, which is also, by the way, money. If it takes you six months or a year to get something approved because you came in with something aggressive that was not responsive to the community, you're going to pay for it, and that's going to show up on your spreadsheet.

Felipe Asena

That makes a lot of sense.

00:03:46 – Jackie's path into architecture

Felipe Asena

Let's jump to the beginning. I mean, when you were younger, were you always interested in architecture? Were you playing with blocks? Were you building stuff?

Did you express any of those interests early on, or was it kind of an interest that developed later?

Jacqueline Touzet

I would say my interest has always been, I started off life as an artist, and also I wanted to be an imagineer for Disney, so I grew up being very much inspired by the future: watching, the Jetsons and Epcot on my screen every Sunday.

My husband came to it from—my partner, Carlos Prio-Touzet—he came to it from science. He wanted to be an astrophysicist; he went to Princeton for that.

I went to Cornell, eventually, after a little bit of a roundabout journey.

I started with art. My parents are immigrants, Cubans—they're like, absolutely not, you're going to starve—and so I was asked to consider a profession that could actually make money.

And architecture beat out advertising by a mile because it had something else that I love, which is history and culture. And so I was able to weave my love of art, culture, history, into a profession that I am to this day in love with.

00:04:52 – Futurism and Future-Ready Design

Brian Ehrlich

And you use the word futurist. That word I've heard kind of get thrown around a bit.

How would you define yourself as a futurist and how do you bring that kind of perspective to the projects that you build?

Jacqueline Touzet

So, I grew up thinking that the future was going to be amazing, that people are going to live better, the quality of life, [and] design was going to be incredible.

I mean, that's why I gravitated there. But more and more, recently, it's because I think we've created a sort of host of problems that the only way that we're going to have a viable,

sustainable future is to embrace technology, to embrace what man-made solutions can offer.

So we're in that age now where we've altered nature to such an extent that the only way we get through is to become futurist and to embrace technology and to really harness it to live in a way that's sustainable on our planet.

So I think futurism is no longer, "hey, it's cool and it looks awesome." It's, "hey, this needs to be a high-performance building if we're really going to be carbon free and we're going to, our energy performance, et cetera."

So, futurism for me has sort of translated now into also high performance.

Brian Ehrlich

And what does that look like in terms of a real concrete project?

Jacqueline Touzet

Okay, well, that looks like, for example, on a project we're working is Grove Central, it was designed to be an urban microgrid. So the parking garage, instead of being just a dumb—

Brian Ehrlich

What does that mean? That means you put solar, urban microgrid?

Jacqueline Touzet

I love that you asked that. So what does future ready mean? What does future in design mean?

It means that you're not looking—the days of us just designing a dumb roof or a dumb facade that doesn't perform, it doesn't gather energy or collect water or do something that it needs to do, those days I think are going to end.

Brian Ehrlich

Is that a technical term, dumb, like a dumb roof?

Jacqueline Touzet

No, I mean, that's my word.

Brian Ehrlich

No, I like that one. I was actually curious—

Jacqueline Touzet

No, so solar, a solar array.

Brian Ehrlich

So it's like an element of a building that is totally inefficient and is not also—that has like a sustainable piece to it as well.

Jacqueline Touzet

Correct.

Brian Ehrlich

Okay.

Jacqueline Touzet

Right. So roofs, in my opinion, now they need to either gather energy, and it's not [just] my opinion. They say that if we embrace every technological avenue available to us, we still fall short of our carbon goals.

So that means that our buildings have to do more. That means that our buildings have to be high performance. That means that they have to generate energy. That means that, you know what I mean?

So the roof that was just kind of keeping you sheltered from the rain, that's no longer enough. The roof has to generate energy so that you don't have to draw from the grid.

An urban microgrid is simply an array of solar grids that's producing energy to run the building. And the idea is that if the power fails, and this is from the resiliency standpoint now, then you can draw from that grid and you're not impacted.

And in the future, if you believe in science, and I do, we're looking at many more interruptions of higher duration and more intense.

So the more independent you are, the more of these kinds of features that you design into buildings, the better you are at bouncing back faster from an event, which is the definition of resiliency.

Brian Ehrlich

So that project that you have in the Grove.

Jacqueline Touzet

So it was designed to have an urban microgrid. And the idea was that you would gather the energy. If there's an interruption and there's retailers downstairs, you could then power their needs. You could power the train. That's how that was designed.

It's going to be a phase two. But even if we don't get it in this first phase, at least the wiring and the uplift for the roof is there. And that's something that I advocate for everybody.

If you don't have the bottom-line numbers to do it in your first phase or that solar isn't there yet or the batteries aren't there yet, at the very minimum, start to think about your buildings as being future ready. Which means, spend a little bit more on that last roof to be able to have a solar array and put the conduit in, which costs pennies, have the battery room, and you're all set.

When the time comes and you want to deploy, or FP&L's giving money for that, or there's legislation for that, you are in a good position compared to other people.

And that's what I tell my clients all the time now is be future ready.

Even if I can't make the sale to get it into that first phase, or their numbers just don't pan out in that first phase, get it ready.

I do a lot of adaptive reuse, and the buildings that are able to be retrofit, like 800 Lincoln Road, the Mila restaurant, we discovered that whoever the original designers were really smart. They designed the foundations to take that extra floor, which a lot of real estate people do. Because of that, the building has a new life, right?

Brian Ehrlich

So this is the second floor where the restaurant is there.

Jacqueline Touzet

Yeah, and so we were able to add all that loading to that roof because somebody was future ready, was thinking ahead of making a building flexible.

And that's the other thing that we talk about. But when you're talking about high-performance buildings, we don't know the uses that these buildings are going to take.

If anything, we didn't—

Brian Ehrlich

—know that it was going to turn into a techno nightclub?

Jacqueline Touzet

Right. And look at all the retail in the malls that are empty. Look at all the parking garages we know we don't need.

Future ready also means flexibility and thinking ahead about what it could be and designing it to have many, many possible lives in the future.

Ben Hoffman

Especially with the parking garages, right? Because, eventually, we hope that we're going to be using less automobiles, so those parking garages are going to become obsolete.

So we have to design those parking garages to work today. But if you have ramps, those kind of things in garages, you can't really do much with that space.

Jacqueline Touzet

Exactly. You should design your parking garages to be taller than you need. And the ramp should be detachable so that you can remove that bay and just go with a flat slab later when you don't need the ramp anymore.

So, imagine a flat pancake and you have one little piece of it that's angled to get to the other floor, that little piece of it just make it—Yeah, that's what I'm talking about.

Felipe Asena

And why would you tear that off? Because the ocean...

Jacqueline Touzet

Because when it's an office building later on, when you don't need the cars, now you have an office building.

Felipe Asena

Interesting.

Jacqueline Touzet

It's different. It's not thinking about just a single-use building.

We're having a talk about this, my friend Pat and I, who's the director of Perkins and Will, we're going to have a little chat about it. And we talked about the end of disposable architecture. If you're going to meet your carbon goals, then you have to design buildings that can be many things over the lifespan.

Brian Ehrlich

And what do you call the opposite of that disposable architecture?

Jacqueline Touzet

High performance architecture.

Felipe Asena

Reusable.

Jacqueline Touzet

Reusable.

Felipe Asena

Sure. And how are a lot of your clients adopting this idea of spending a few pennies to put the conduit into the roof?

Jacqueline Touzet

I do everything in my power to make that happen. And listen, I don't get everything I ask for.

But all I can do is....you hire someone to design your building and they should be giving you the best information that they can: to make sure that you have a project that not only is it going to be successful in the design of it and vision of it, but in the performance. That over time when you're trying to resell it or when you're trying to do something else with it, that you have the best thinking possible.

Brian Ehrlich

How much of your role is kind of in the salesmanship aspect?

Jacqueline Touzet

I think that all good architects have to be able to sell a vision because what we do is sell you, [the] client, to spend a lot of money to do what I think, or what we think, is the right path.

So not only do we have to be informed, but we have to be persuasive.

Felipe Asena

Of course, especially in this day and age.

Jacqueline Touzet

And we also have to get boards to approve our projects. So we have to be persuasive at that level too, in front of a board.

Felipe Asena

And things are changing now faster than they ever have before.

Jacqueline Touzet

It's constant. I think I got a very good education as an architect.

And the reason that I went back into the classroom, and by the way, that class that you mentioned is for next year, I'm starting it.

Felipe Asena

Which class is that?

Jacqueline Touzet

The advanced building and materials [class]. It's something that I'm talking to Sonya Chow, who's, they just started a new program at University of Miami for resiliency and sustainability.

And I think the people that are in the field building—

Ben Hoffman

Sonya is kind of leading that, the charge.

Jacqueline Touzet

She's amazing. Yeah, she's the leader. She's a director.

But people that are in the field like us need to give feedback to the academic world about what's needed to come up with real solutions. So that's what that is about.

Sorry, did I go?

Felipe Asena

No, it's amazing. And to meet these carbon goals, it's not only just designing new buildings to function this way, it's also retrofitting old buildings.

And to meet these carbon goals, you're going to have to design systems to retrofit these old buildings.

I saw an article in Fast Company about a Dutch company, they have a nonprofit called Energy Sprung, which means energy jump. And they're putting on these panels to like the exterior of buildings to insulate them to increase the efficiency.

And I think things like that are going to keep—I mean, do you see, I don't really see that in the US yet. Do you see that happening in the US, these types of?

Jacqueline Touzet

Oh yeah, absolutely. I love adaptive reuse because I think that if you ask me, the greenest thing you can do is to reuse something that's already there.

For example, Mary Street parking garage that we did for Terra, we took a 1980s really sad looking garage. We refreshed the retail by pulling up some slabs and getting them higher ceiling spaces. And then we floated a class-A office building on top.

What happens is that all of the carbon that would have been from a new foundation and a new, like new parking, all of that, we saved it. So, we're able to really focus on creating a new skin for it.

It's a rain screen and terracotta baguettes...beautiful, beautiful class-A building. But we saved a ton of carbon because we didn't have to go into the ground.

So reskinning buildings. We're doing another one in Doral, just a facade treatment. If you can refresh a design, if you can reuse it, then that's absolutely the thing you should do.

It's not always possible because buildings are built too low or below grade. Sometimes it's just not feasible. But wherever we can, we try to salvage what we can of the existing structure and build from there.

00:14:10 – Jackie, the Panama Canal, and Resilient Infrastructure

Felipe Asena

That's amazing. Where did you grow up?

Jacqueline Touzet

So, I was born in Cuba and I lived in Miami until I was 10, and my dad, when we were 10, all of a sudden, moved us to the Panama Canal. So I grew up in the Canal Zone.

Ben Hoffman

What did your dad do?

Jacqueline Touzet

My dad was a machinist, and he wanted us to get a really good education. And the Canal Zone had a really, you know... It was also, he was also worried, culturally that it was a time of change in the 70s was a little bit weird in Miami. A lot of drug lords, it was just kind of, the cocaine wars were starting.

He was a little bit flipped out in Miami so we moved to Panama for 10 years. I lived there from the time—or no, sorry, eight years—I lived there from the time I was 8 to 10 to 18, and then I graduated from there.

So it was an American high school in the middle of a—

Ben Hoffman

What high school was that?

Jacqueline Touzet

Balboa High School.

Ben Hoffman

My wife went to that one.

Jacqueline Touzet

Oh really?

Ben Hoffman

Yeah.

Jacqueline Touzet

That's amazing.

Ben Hoffman

She's a military brat.

Jacqueline Touzet

Yeah, half of the people there were military. There were other people that were from Panama.

What's neat about growing up right next to the Panama Canal is like, talk about infrastructure.

Felipe Asena

Oh man, I'm sure.

Jacqueline Touzet

I mean, these people were, that generation was not afraid to build big infrastructure because they knew it would unlock value. Like they—that's where I grew up playing around. So, I'm used to, like, I used to dive into the French canal that they started—they didn't finish it—when I was a teenager. We won't talk about that. But, you know, I grew up with like big, massive projects happening.

And, you know, in my first job, I was doing stuff that was reclaiming land out of the ocean in Hong Kong. Like, I'm not afraid of infrastructure. I understand what it does. You know, Miami Beach is, somebody had the vision to build a bridge to a mangrove island.

Brian Ehrlich

Army Corps of Engineers, right?

Jacqueline Touzet

It was, Collins was building that bridge. And Fisher was building his plantation of pineapples, and he was just doing what he was doing, he was clearing mangroves, sadly, that's now we know that's not the best thing to do.

But look at how much value billions of dollars were unlocked from somebody building the bridge and then lifting and then filling the island. And you know, there's a whole story about that that's pretty interesting in our history.

But you know, I think we're due for that kind of infrastructure again. And I think for designers, it's not enough to build a building that wins awards.

That's what I've kind of—it's also about making sure that the people that have the money to make these decisions and the policy are putting it in the right place and getting us ready for the next generation.

00:16:30 – Climate Change and Sustainable Architecture

Brian Ehrlich

And what about that policy with the recent administration's infrastructure plan? Do you think there's anything there that could be impactful for your industry?

Jacqueline Touzet

Oh yeah, I think there's a lot. There's a lot.

I just interviewed the senior advisor to climate on from HUD. And they're tying a lot of the monies that the grants that are coming to build affordable housing to resiliency.

And they're really stressing equity also, because a lot of these places that are low, low lying and are going to be impacted by climate change are actually places that historically have been left behind from an investment standpoint or red line.

So when they—when HUD and Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac—when all those people start making resiliency and sustainability a requirement of the due diligence, then you're going to start to see the market start to follow.

I think that that's very much on the agenda. They're very transparent about it. They're focusing on it, and they are not going to invest their dollars anymore federally in areas that they don't think are doing the right things on the resiliency or sustainability front.

Felipe Asena

And when does that hit in Miami?

I mean, one of the things I hear all the time is that the banks are going to be kind of the canary in the coal mine with sea level rise.

Jacqueline Touzet

It's first insurance. There's already play in it. We just had this ULI summit for the Americas...

Ben Hoffman

Yeah, tell us a little bit more about that. This was a three-day summit?

Jacqueline Touzet

Yeah, it's a three-day summit. The first day was design and planning. The second day was about—sorry, the first day was policy. The second day was design and planning. And then this last day, today, was about financing resiliency.

And what it's about getting people ready nationally. And it's a really great summit. I encourage you guys to look it up online if you can, because they have a lot of resources from all these different federal agencies, explaining what's going on and what's changing.

But what they're saying, basically in a very broad-brush way, is that everybody's getting ready to change standards: from ASTM standards to insurance standards. Eventually, when that happens, like I said, when HUD starts to give you grants based on your resiliency or sustainability, then yeah, lenders are going to follow.

But it's first going to be insurance, and the big federal agencies are going to start that. And you're going to see that in a couple of years, what's going to happen is that when you do the due diligence for a property,

One of the things that they're going to be measuring is your climate risk or your fragility index, or you can call it a bunch of different things, but there's a lot of people crunching a lot of numbers from repetitive loss over time from insurance to, you know, how the sewer is to what your exposure is to what your elevation is to what kind of construction you have.

They're jumbling it all together and they're spitting out a score on a property. So that's why I got involved with the MRED group to kind of try to talk to them about that because the real estate community and development community, they need to understand it's not business as usual.

You would have usually assessed the site and suitability for a purpose based on is that a good, you know, location, location, location. Well, now there's this other layer. And I think that's going to increasingly be something that people are going to be looking at.

Felipe Asena

It always strikes me when I see the \$15, \$20, \$30 million homes being built on North Bay Road or Venetian. And they don't seem to really take into these climate risks. They're built at grade, like, there's no elevation.

It just seems like they're going to get taken out in 10, 20, 30 years. Who knows? But I mean, how do you, when you approach the single family, I know you do some single-family homes.

Jacqueline Touzet

I do, and those are my people. I—look for us, we're a small firm, and I do design single-family homes, and I encourage them to build higher than the code requires by several feet.

And I have been doing that for years because you should definitely, even though the code doesn't ask for it, you should not be at this moment meeting the code requirement.

You should be doing above and beyond code because granted, these are not people that necessarily are really impacted. Some of them are self-insured.

So, if anything is going to be on the coast, it's going to be the pleasure palaces and the hospitalities that refresh themselves every couple of years anyway. You know what I mean?

So, if a 4th and 5th home gets swallowed up by the water...as long as you're, I'm very candid about the risk and I talk to them about it, and I'm elevating a pool on an island right now because it's two feet under where it should be.

So, we do it but these are people that can absorb the risk. So, people that I'm worried about are the people that can't.

And so, I think I'm a capitalist in the sense that I think that there's an ecosystem and there's a room for luxury and there's a room for a single-family. And those people will pay into their taxes, help pay for a lot of the services and resiliency that we need in our community. So for me, it's not about, hey, are these crazy people building on the water?

Well, you know, they know, they're informed people. They're choosing to be there. They like the view. This is their fifth home. They're good. But what about everybody else that's on the river or, you know, in the low-lying communities? Those are the people that the public dollars and the federal dollars are going to be trying to help kind of move them along and have a plan for them.

And then if you're a developer somewhere in the middle, market rate, then you have to look at the thing in terms of where you're going and what you're building there, and what they're saying is really how long are you going to be in for it—what's your exit strategy—and that's going to start to become a conversation.

Ben Hoffman

A lot of these developers, though, have a very short-term perspective, right? Like, they're looking at this and saying, okay, I'm going to build this and flip it, right? I'm going to build this building, condo it out, move on to the next. So, sometimes, it becomes a difficult challenge, I imagine.

Jacqueline Touzet

Here's where I'm at with that. I don't expect developers that that's their business. I understand that.

You know, what I do believe, though, is that our public leaders should have a fund. And I believe you should get all, this is my personal belief, get the density, give the bonuses to people who want to build in these areas, take that money, have a resiliency fund, and start with a master plan planning for the future and helping the people that don't have the access to dollars. And have, because the community is not resilient by the way, if we have no firefighters, no teachers, nobody that can live near our communities.

So it's not about just taking care of, as much as I say, yeah, it's great to have the luxury, it's great to have the hospitality, it's great to have all of it. But you have to have a plan for those people that can't fix it themselves.

Brian Ehrlich

And is there some example that you see now that seems to be working well or going towards that vision that you just described? Whether it's not in South Florida, and in other places?

Jacqueline Touzet

After I get off this podcast, I'm going to actually have a working session with people that are looking at Miami 21 to see what needs to happen with that code. And they're proposing how to make [it] more affordable, how to make it more resilient. And [we] in the design community and the real estate community, I think all of us should look at that and make sure that we have input into, yeah, that makes sense.

Let's plan for that. So, we're in the process and there's a lot of conversation.

Brian Ehrlich

Who are you working with?

Jacqueline Touzet

It's a ULI. Grafton is, and there's simple, it's just really volunteers, people that are saying, hey, these are big changes to zoning that're coming.

We only get certain bites at the apple, you know, from a zoning side and from, and I think we need to.

Brian Ehrlich

So take us kind of behind the, you know, in the background here. Basically, you have the ULI, they're, you know, big advocates for kind of good policy. And so, they're going to interact with the local government? Or like how will that, how will that work?

Jacqueline Touzet

So there's the South Florida Climate Compact, which has been really amazing. We're very lucky to have a regional approach to resiliency that they've been monitoring and taking data points for a decade. Like they know what's going on with climate change.

So I feel like we know what's going on and we can have a reasonable understanding of the science of what's going to happen. And I think we kind of have to pivot.

Okay, that's great. We understand that. Now what are the solutions? Like what do we do about it? And so on that score, there's a couple things:

One, the mayors are very, like Mayor Cavo is very active in that. She was just on a podcast that I listened to about this issue. And there are people that are talking about changing the building codes, the zoning codes, setting up standards that can measure resiliency and therefore reward it.

Like LEED, when you did LEED building way back in the day, the early adopters get more bonuses, like what can we give you to make this more palatable? How do we get better? Makes sense? Yeah, how do we get you to embrace it until it becomes the code? Because eventually, I hate to say it, this can't be voluntary—it has to be the code.

If you lift your building and pay extra to do the freeboard—freeboard is when you plan for five feet of the road changing—let's say, Miami Beach it's becoming a requirement, [in] other places it's not yet. If you do it as a developer, but the guy across the street doesn't do it, and he just built a brand new building, guess who's going to be fighting you when the time comes to raise that street?

You know, so this is not stuff that can't be done. I'm going to do it. Do you want to do it? No? [Well] all of us have to do it [or] we're not going to be resilient.

And when they come to give us the bonds for the cities to rate us, are we a resilient city or are we not a resilient city? Miami Beach, for example, because they had done the pumps, because they had done some raises, their insurance premiums went up, but their rating went up.

And so somehow or another, people didn't end up paying so much more. And that's what it's going to be. The insurance companies, the bonding, the lenders, they're all going to be looking at, okay, there's a checklist: Are you elevating your structures? Yes or no. Are you putting up your mechanical equipment? Yes or no.

Are you making your elevators resilient? Because if you've got a pump, if you've got a high-rise and your elevator doesn't work, guess what? You don't have a building that can be occupied.

So are you doing these things? And if you're doing these things, then you get a premium, you get something.

Brian Ehrlich

And what kind of a grade would you get, Miami, the area?

Jacqueline Touzet

I think in some ways, I think, it's interesting because I've been in...

Brian Ehrlich

Or what other municipalities are even doing better?

Jacqueline Touzet

Miami Beach and Miami are at least having the conversation and they're working on changing their quotes.

They haven't yet done it, [but] they have a chief resiliency officer and there's a lot of conversation. I have yet to see yet that translate into buildings really changing the way they operate substantially.

I think that [there] needs to be more of a code change. Like it needs to be required because I think voluntary...

Ben Hoffman

At the county level here in South Florida too, right? Because I mean, we have 33 different municipalities. They each have their own zoning code, they each have their own building code, and some of them are tiptoeing around the free board and some of them are tip—you know, it's like nobody wants to like to do that, but...

Felipe Asena

And what's the general consensus on what sea level rise is going to be? I mean, you kind of mentioned in the beginning that you kind of already, you guys kind of established what's going to happen more or less.

Jacqueline Touzet

It really depends on what we do. That's why carbon enters the conversation. If nothing changes and we do nothing about carbon and we keep pumping carbon into the atmosphere, then we're looking at the high side of that curve, which, you know, it's pretty scary. You can look at the maps, it's 5 feet, you know, that's a game changer for most of South Florida. There's a lot of people's—

Felipe Asena

Within what time frame?

Jacqueline Touzet

2050, 2030, you start to see it in actual actuary charts now that it can translate the amount of sea level rise. If it's 5 inches, then it's going to be this amount of money. If it's two feet, it's going to be this amount of money.

And, you know, it depends on where you are in Miami because the elevation is affected. But the low-lying areas are, they don't have 20, 30 years. You know, that's—I think I need another drink.

Felipe Asena

Bartender.

Ben Hoffman

Come on in.

Brian Ehrlich

Mojitos.

Ben Hoffman

By the way, we are sipping some Bacardi mojitos here. That's part of our shtick here. We're semi-sponsored by Bacardi. So Jacqueline got us kicked off on the mojito. Last week, last time, we were drinking some Bacardi with ginger beer, but today we're drinking some mojitos.

Jacqueline Touzet

Very yummy.

Ben Hoffman

Thank you. I'll make you another one. In the meantime, so you, after Panama, what happened after Panama?

Jacqueline Touzet

Panama, I came here. I had to adjust. And then I went to Miami-Dade. I discovered architecture because I went on a couple of study abroad trips.

Felipe Asena

Where did you study abroad?

Jacqueline Touzet

The first trip was Italy, Greece, and Turkey. And then I went to Switzerland, Germany, and Austria. And I just realized that this is a profession I could really sink my teeth into and that I would be engaged and interested in my whole life.

It was a passion.

Felipe Asena

Just seeing the diversity of buildings and—

Jacqueline Touzet

Yeah, and then the fact that every building's different, every client's different.

So I love what I do, and I'm very lucky to be able to do something that touches so many people's lives and is, to me, they call it the mother of all the arts in a way. So I never really left being an artist.

It's just, it's an all-encompassing art that also has technology and science behind it, which is...

Felipe Asena

—a lot of math?

Jacqueline Touzet

Yeah, but the math thing I was afraid of.

Felipe Asena

It scares me too.

Jacqueline Touzet

Don't, nah, it's not a big math thing. I think you got to get through structures. I actually ended up doing pretty well in that, but it wasn't super bad.

And then I got a scholarship to Cornell and I went there and I loved it, it was great. But I was ready to come back home when I was done. It was, you know, it was cold.

Felipe Asena

Yeah, I'm sure.

Jacqueline Touzet

And I love Miami. I love the, I love the mosaic of people here. I love the diversity. I love the sun. And being Cuban, I really love being in a place where people speak Spanish.

And I can occasionally go to Cuba when I still have family there. So, for me it's as close to being in Cuba as I can be. But I recognize that I am a Miamian, not a Cuban. I am very much a Miamian, as much as you can be.

I feel very connected to this place.

Felipe Asena

And so, your first job after Cornell was...?

Jacqueline Touzet

I did a lot of work for little shops in Lincoln Road. I did a historic preservation. I worked for small firms. And then I ended up in a really small firm, it was Giller & Giller, and somebody told me about an opening at Architectonica.

No, sorry, I went to work for Shapiro first before I went to work for Architectonica, and that's where I met my husband. And he had come from Architectonica, and we designed the Satai Hotel.

Felipe Asena

Okay, amazing.

Jacqueline Touzet

I was hired to be his project architect. And that's how we met. So we used to go to the Raleigh, have martinis, and sketch the satay. And that was fun. And, when I started dating him, I left.

Brian Ehrlich

Wait a sec. Okay.

Jacqueline Touzet

I left [Shapiro].

Brian Ehrlich

I was about to say, like, why don't you tell us this story?

Jacqueline Touzet

No, let's not tell that story.

Brian Ehrlich

No, but I think it's actually quite interesting because a lot of people shy away from talking about, you know, meeting people.

Jacqueline Touzet

On the job, yeah, because that's a very...

Brian Ehrlich

Well, I actually think it's kind of, it's quite silly. And it's almost a little backwards.

Jacqueline Touzet

I agree.

Brian Ehrlich

I mean, of course people meet people while they're working. Like, why wouldn't they if they're passionate about the same things?

Jacqueline Touzet

No, I agree with you. I think it's, I think in the whole Me Too movement, the whole idea of you dating your supervisor is a little bit fraught.

Brian Ehrlich

Okay, right.

Jacqueline Touzet

But if it's welcome attention and you like each other, I think it's a very different thing.

I always tell people—my developer clients are like, “I don't want to compliment a woman anymore.” And I'm like, you're fine. Just, you know, just keep your pants on. You're good. Don't be weird. Everybody's fine.

Anyway, we dated, it was great. I went, but then I went to work for where he had just come from, which was Architectonica. And he said, if there's one firm in Miami that's doing international work and will really teach you, then I think that you should go there.

And I went there for seven years. So, and that was quite an education. Bernardo Fort is like our godfather [to] our business. He was a very encouraging figure, very...he was tough, but we, both Carlos and I, really learned a lot working there.

I eventually became a vice president. I ran the multi-family in Miami and Hong Kong. And when I left there, I was doing 6.8 million square feet in Hong Kong. They were literally pouring the site out of nothing. It didn't exist and they were filling it in from the ocean.

Felipe Asena

Amazing.

Jacqueline Touzet

Another big infrastructure project. And that was fun. And I loved it. And I—yeah, it's a great firm.

Brian Ehrlich

He's a great guy.

Jacqueline Touzet

Yeah, he's a really wonderful guy. I have nothing but good things and he taught us a lot. And then we had children and when I had a child I couldn't—

Ben Hoffman

How many kids do you have? Two? Boy? Girl?

Jacqueline Touzet

I have a son, Carlos, and a daughter Alex, and they're 19 and 18.

Ben Hoffman

And where are they? Going to school or?

Jacqueline Touzet

NYU and Holy Cross and they study liberal arts.

Ben Hoffman

It's a good base.

Jacqueline Touzet

They don't know yet they don't know but you know.

Brian Ehrlich

Who do you think they're studying?

Jacqueline Touzet

I think Carlos likes history and politics. And Alex is a musician, poet, artist. You know, she's a writer. They both love to write. So I think they're creatives, but you know, I don't know.

I think it's really interesting that their career might not even exist yet. So liberal arts, I'm very comfortable with because.

Felipe Asena

You can go anywhere.

Jacqueline Touzet

You can go anywhere.

Felipe Asena

Sure.

Jacqueline Touzet

So that's what they're doing.

Brian Ehrlich

That's what Steve Jobs said, right?

Jacqueline Touzet

Yeah.

00:33:59 – Established Sites, Design, and Innovation

Felipe Asena

I guess that leads to like something else we were talking about. I mean, do you, in your role as an architect, do you view your role as more like Steve Jobs type where you need to tell consumers what they need?

Like they don't know what they need yet, so you need to build it for them. Or do you feel like it's more responsive to hearing what the end consumers say that they want in terms when you, when you design, I guess any of you?

Jacqueline Touzet

That's an interesting—I think it's a bit of both, okay? Because you don't ask your surgeon how to operate on you. But you definitely want to hear people and how they live, and you don't want to impose that on people.

So I think we start by listening, always. I do. And then I hope to give you something more than what you asked for. I hope to inspire you. I hope to give you something that you didn't consider, because that's my job.

If I only gave you what you ever thought you wanted, then I'm not particularly inspiring or good at what I do. So I think it's a bit of both.

Felipe Asena

Is there a project you think that exemplifies that you were excited about?

Jacqueline Touzet

Yeah, I mean, for example, Nike came to us and they wanted to do what they had done in Oregon. And they wanted to do their dark metal skin because they had done it and it was inspired by the gyms and the, that sort of vocabulary.

And we said, you're in Miami Beach, that's not our vocabulary.

And in Miami, if you're talking about sport and playing and you're talking about being outside too, so why don't we do a building that's lighter, that has something to do with Miami Beach and the DNA of it, but translate your idea into our material palette, our color palette, the way that our buildings work.

And it was a really nice, we drove out there with a piece of fiber reinforced concrete. And we said, you guys are innovators, you should have a really highly innovative skin made out of a material that reflects who you are. And they were excited about that.

Brian Ehrlich

And how would you describe that skin that's outside of that building on Lincoln Road?

Jacqueline Touzet

So it's a fiber-reinforced concrete, which I am very interested in because it doesn't corrode, it doesn't have metal in it. And, concrete is, for me, super important because it's the number one carbon problem in our industry. And we haven't really reinvented it in 200 years.

Felipe Asena

How is that? Sorry to interrupt.

Jacqueline Touzet

Well, because it's a mix that was developed with Portland cement, lime, you know, the whole thing. And that mix really hasn't changed much. People are starting to, but the whole process of making concrete just generates a lot of carbon.

Felipe Asena

Just a lot of diesel fuel used...?

Jacqueline Touzet

The energy of it and also the materials of it.

So fresh water, the virgin materials that are put into it... So now what people are doing is, can we reinforce it with something that doesn't corrode because our feet are going to be wet some part of the year, right?

So that's the fiber-reinforcing, that's glass-fiber reinforcing. So that's really interesting. Can we use salt water instead of fresh water? Can we use something that reduces the quantity, makes it stronger so you have less of it? So that's another way of reducing carbon.

I once asked a structural engineer, has anyone ever asked you to reduce the carbon in your foundations by strengthening the mix? And he's like, nobody ever asked for that. And yet that's a huge cost of carbon in our buildings.

So anyway, for Nike, it was, here's this lightweight perforated concrete that you can make your pattern in, but it's concrete. And it's kind of in the tradition of the brise soleil of Miami Beach, which is those perforated blocks but a super modern twist on it.

And let's study this building the way you study your shoes. You know how the sole is different than the top and the lacing, because you're really looking at it from a performance slash design standpoint.

Brian Ehrlich

Layering.

Jacqueline Touzet

Right. Like, you know, how do you design Nike? Do you design like the solution? I'm going to put it over here—No, they're very customized.

So why would you take that approach with your building? And they're like, oh, you know.

Ben Hoffman

How did Nike find you?

Jacqueline Touzet

We had a reputation in Lincoln Road of being able to get things approved in a very difficult situation, because you have a historic preservation community that's really strong, which I

actually think is an asset to our community because they ask these national brands to design something for Lincoln Road, not a cookie cutter thing.

So, Apple had gone to [the historic preservation community] to do something on the corner. They had hired us to do the building adjacent. They loved what we had done adjacent, so eventually Apple hired us to do their building.

Because—so it was through Comras, he recommended us to both of these national brands.

Ben Hoffman

Michael Comras?

Jacqueline Touzet

Yeah, Michael. And we, and then, that I think the whole block, and we ended up doing Nike, Apple, and Gap. And that whole block broke records for real estate because they were able to resell to the owner of Zara.

Ben Hoffman

And how big is your firm?

Jacqueline Touzet

We are now 12 people. So we're small but I'm very proud of our firm because we're little, but every year, the last two years, we've won more awards than any other design firm in Miami.

And last year we won Firm of the Year. And that just is because I think we pay attention and we care deeply about every project and we try to do something unique. We're not a global firm doing stuff everywhere. We're really here.

Ben Hoffman

Most of your work is in Miami.

Jacqueline Touzet

Yeah, most of our work is in Miami or in the Bahamas or in the region.

Ben Hoffman

Okay.

Brian Ehrlich

And if you had to go back to that, let's go back to that Lincoln Road project or those three projects that you have there. And you had to make those projects a little more, let's say,

integrative to the social fabric of the city, is there a change that you would make kind of going forward?

Because while I appreciate them, and I think that it's like super interesting to hear, you know, how you guys change the skin on the Nike building, one of the areas that I feel like when I'm walking as a resident down Lincoln Road from Alton Road on the north side, I always feel like there's tons of sun.

I don't really feel like that entire stretch of that block that you built is shaded at all.

Jacqueline Touzet

I think that what you need to understand about Lincoln Road, though, is in all of those cases, we had an existing design that we had to respect the parameters so we couldn't extend any further than what they were there originally.

So, in terms of creating overhangs that go into Lincoln Road, extending more shade and all that, there were parameters, and we did study the sun in Lincoln Road quite a bit in terms of the heat gain on the buildings.

For Nike, we did—and this thing is driving me crazy, sorry—but in terms of encroaching more into the public realm with bigger overhangs, that's not possible unless you get like a variance from public works, et cetera.

Like there's a limit to how much you can do it that way. And we had to, in every case, it was on the...

Brian Ehrlich

So regulation kind of held you back in that sense.

Jacqueline Touzet

Yeah, I mean, how far you're able, we encroach as much as we can with overhangs as much as we can. But beyond that point, you're in the public, you have public—

Brian Ehrlich

It's interesting because that exact area I feel like could use a lot of overheads.

Jacqueline Touzet

I think the best way of dealing with that particular issue is with trees, with canopy. Like I don't think that you can...

Brian Ehrlich

And there are no, just to note, there are no trees on that entire extension.

Jacqueline Touzet

Yeah, I think that I'm a big, yeah—the urban retreat project that I was talking to you guys about is, the first thing we did is create a shady plaza of trees.

That was like, that was our big...

Brian Ehrlich

Or even at the end, like at the entrance of the Nike building, when you're walking, you know, I think, what is that?

Jacqueline Touzet

We're right on the property line.

Brian Ehrlich

Yeah. Oh, so you couldn't. Yeah, interesting.

Jacqueline Touzet

But I understand what you're saying.

Brian Ehrlich

But it's super interesting to hear the machinations behind...

Jacqueline Touzet

Listen, we're always trying for more shade and that's a big problem.

But I think that the biggest and the best architects are shy usually about talking about this to our clients, but I'm very humble about the fact that landscape architects are super important and we need more trees.

Like that's, you know, I could design the best building in the world...

Brian Ehrlich

I just think it would make the real estate way more valuable as well and the entire neighborhood more valuable there.

Jacqueline Touzet

When it's not in your property and you have easements and you have all that stuff, it's less you can do about it. But on the other project that I was telling you about, that we pulled back our building to give space for the trees.

Brian Ehrlich

And what project was this?

Jacqueline Touzet

That's Urban Retreat. And that is next to the historic post office, the Miami Beach post office. And there our idea was.

Brian Ehrlich

On 13th and Washington.

Jacqueline Touzet

Yeah, sorry. And, so what we did is we created, we pulled back and we created a series of trees that are shade trees.

And even though the street tree on that particular street were palms, we lobbied the city and said, that's very nice, but we would like to have shade.

Because in the future, again, if you're trying to walk from point A to point B, shade, you know, it's going to get hotter and hotter.

Ben Hoffman

What are some of your favorite shade trees from Miami?

Jacqueline Touzet

I love oaks. They don't always have a lot of room to spread. And my friends who are arborists and landscape architects are always complaining that they put them two feet away from the curb line, which is ridiculous. You don't want to do that to an oak, you know.

But I over the course of the pandemic, I have been nerding out on landscape. And I ripped out my line...

Brian Ehrlich

I buy so many plants, oh me too. I have someone to introduce you to.

Jacqueline Touzet

Oh my God.

Brian Ehrlich

She's amazing. I've ripped out my lawn.

Jacqueline Touzet

I put in an edible garden. I've been planting shade trees since forever.

Brian Ehrlich

What do you have in the garden?

Jacqueline Touzet

So I have, well, I have, everything that I have is either native for pollinators or bees or butterflies, or I also, you know, we have a vegetable and herb garden, and I have chickens.

Ben Hoffman

Love it.

Brian Ehrlich

What kind of vegetables and herbs?

Jacqueline Touzet

I have kale, I have lettuce, I have native tomatoes, the Everglades tomatoes. I have all kinds of herbs for mojitos and mints that happen.

Brian Ehrlich

See you next time.

Jacqueline Touzet

Because I think that, that has been such an amazing gift to myself and to the neighborhood.

I have to tell you, I have designed a million buildings—not a million, but I've designed a ton of buildings—I have never gotten more compliments on anything that I've done.

Brian Ehrlich

And where do you live and what neighborhood?

Jacqueline Touzet

In South Miami. People just randomly stop by and thank me, like older people.

Ben Hoffman

So Jacqueline, it's so funny because we did the same thing to our house in Belle Mead. We just put in all native, you know, grasses and plants and I mean, it was unbelievable what happened to our garden.

I mean, all these bees, birds showing up.

Brian Ehrlich

You had a bunch of butterflies, remember?

Ben Hoffman

Yeah, butterflies. I mean, we had like 3 people.

Brian Ehrlich

This is what happens when you get old, by the way.

Ben Hoffman

Yeah, it is, absolutely. I mean, it was awesome. Like my kid was just like loving it, right?

And same reaction from people. I love your garden, you know, like it's such a gift. So low maintenance, I didn't have to use a lawn mower anymore.

It's like I go out there I do my weeding. It's just therapy, right? It's—and it just adds so much to the neighborhood.

Jacqueline Touzet

Yeah, I mean, if you think about it, the whole idea of a lawn, pristine, it's sterile. There's no life there. And you start adding native plants, even ground covers, all of a sudden you get the bees, you get the butterflies, you get the birds.

And it's been my little personal project, because I work with landscape architects all the time, and I'm like, can we do natives? And they're like, oh, they're scruffy, they're kind of ugly, you know, whatever.

So I've been experimenting to see, can I do something architecturally that I like, you know, that has like a formal edge, like I did a curve. So it has a definition, it's not some scraggly thing, because I'm not, you know, I'm an architect, let's face it. So, but is the content of it is all natives.

And I, and I, and I think that I'm, I really has, I've educated myself enough now that I can go toe-to-toe with my landscape architects and say, you know what, I don't like that one, that one's ugly. And, at least be able to have a conversation about it aesthetically and from, again, not performance, but like, what is it doing for pollinators, birds, et cetera. You know, like, I'd like to have some hollies.

And they're now they're looking at me like: Oh no! The monster we've created. I may even get a degree in that. I'm contemplating.

00:45:41 – Affordable Housing and Public Transit

Felipe Asena

I want to take it back to affordable housing, because I know you do some work there. And one thing we've noticed with affordable housing, everyone's always trying to figure out, do we do tax credits? Do we do, how do we incentivize workforce housing?

And one thing we always bet around is zoning. That seems that no one really talks about is, using zoning as a tool for affordable housing. I mean, if you would just change T3, LRO to T4, T5, you would change a hell of a lot in Miami and other cities as well.

I mean, what do you think about the affordable housing in Miami? My rent's gone up almost 100% since the pandemic.

Jacqueline Touzet

I think it's one of the biggest problems we have.

Felipe Asena

How would you address that? Do you think zoning is a good tool for that?

Jacqueline Touzet

I think zoning, but I also think design.

Felipe Asena

Design.

Jacqueline Touzet

Because unfettered zoning changes—for example, like I said, I'm having this call afterwards to talk about Miami 21 and the proposed changes there. So I've been looking very carefully at what they proposed.

So yes, you can do it as accessory dwelling units. And that would definitely...single-family needs to be looked at. Everywhere in the country, they're looking at, hey, can we really afford to have all of these regions?

Brian Ehrlich

Not, and if somebody wants to, sorry to interject here, but if somebody wants to get involved in this new policy change with Miami 21, who should they be working with or who should they be advocating with?

Jacqueline Touzet

I have to get back to you on that. I saw it online on LinkedIn and I'm like, I want to be a part of that, so I show up when there's a design professional kind of aspect to it.

I'll find out and I'll let you know. I don't have an answer as to exactly where, but I think we can show up at hearings when they have them. I think we just have to be aware when they're rewriting these codes. And we have to [be aware], if we care about our city and we want to have a voice on this particular issue.

Yes, the zoning, absolutely the zoning. But zoning without design oversight, in my opinion, is like, that's how you get slums. That's how you get, you know, that's how you get people reacting.

Felipe Asena

Right... Isn't that Houston? Houston has no zoning, right? It's just wide open.

Jacqueline Touzet

Why do people like to live in Coral Gables?

Felipe Asena

Because of how perfect everything is.

Jacqueline Touzet

And why is it perfect?

Felipe Asena

Because they're crazy.

Brian Ehrlich

And it all has, there's all, every street has a Spanish name from like, you know.

Jacqueline Touzet

I think it's because they have tree canopy, mature tree canopy.

Felipe Asena

The tree canopy is huge.

Jacqueline Touzet

And because they have also, they have standards.

Brian Ehrlich

Standards.

Jacqueline Touzet

And without standards, you have people going, you know, running amok. Coral Gables has really nice, have you noticed, apartments.

Brian Ehrlich

And there's consistency, no?

Jacqueline Touzet

Yes.

Brian Ehrlich

Which comes from standards.

Jacqueline Touzet

But standards, yeah. So what is your vision of your community? And is there a process to enforce [it]?

Yes, give, you know, a look at Coral Gables. Merrick planned to have these garden apartments on the periphery near transit. He planned it to have an arts and crafts center. He planned it to have people work. It was a planned community.

I think design has a big role to play about how you do it. And if you're going to allow more density, then for sure, make sure that it's done in a way that people accept it.

Because, I think especially with a single family, which is the big one that we have to deal with, you're not going to get acceptance from communities.

You're going to get a lot of legal fights. You're going to get a lot of "not in my backyard." If you don't have a good argument that you are making the community more resilient and that the design standards are going to be held.

I don't think it's a matter of just saying, okay, relax the zoning and let's all go away. Because then you get people parking, you get mess, you get, you know, and then it's a nuisance thing that somebody has to manage.

Brian Ehrlich

Right. Disparity in this city, in terms of neighborhoods where that's not being, [where] I think that it wasn't planned for.

Jacqueline Touzet

I think that Miami Beach and Coral Gables are good. I think the City of Miami, is not as good at enforcing or to look at, like, look at all the density that's coming along on that. Yeah, and there's no real coordination of how much density is acceptable and how much nuisance that creates and the loading and the servicing.

You have to be sensitive to people that are adjacent single-family residents and stuff like that. Otherwise, you're not going to get buy-in and you're going to get legal fights. And then it's interesting because the guy from Lennar, one of the vice presidents, was on a podcast

for UM and I listened to it. And he was saying that, for every house that they do, like the cost of the litigation, the cost of going back to the boards is one of the biggest line items.

And so how do you get people to accept it? Through design and through regulation. I know people don't want to hear regulation, but I believe that design standards matter.

Felipe Asena

No, that makes a lot of sense. Is there anything else that you see that could help drive affordability in Miami?

Jacqueline Touzet

I think transit and affordability have to be tied together. I think that strengthening transit is another thing that we could do because you definitely don't need a car if you're along the transit line, if the transit line gets you to where you need to go.

Ben Hoffman

So we actually have a Miami-Dade transit director teed up for two weeks from now.

Jacqueline Touzet

Great.

Ben Hoffman

Yeah, so that's going to be an interesting conversation I have with him too.

Brian Ehrlich

What would you ask him?

Ben Hoffman

Yeah.

Jacqueline Touzet

I think that there's been a lot of density along the corridor. How do we make sure that density is mixed, truly mixed with more affordable housing? Because I do see a lot of market rate, but I don't see a lot of affordable.

And the people that most need access to that transit are the people that don't have a car or have issues with mobility. So, I think that's something that needs to be continuously pushed.

Again, looking at the code and what they're asking for, these large developments that are coming online, there needs to be a lot of more provision made for truly affordable housing.

Brian Ehrlich

Where have you seen that in the United States as a really successful example?

Jacqueline Touzet

So in Greenbuild in Chicago, we went to see a couple of transit-oriented projects, and they were truly affordable. Like they had HUD housing on transit.

Brian Ehrlich

And they were major lines, they were connecting.

Jacqueline Touzet

They were major lines. Everywhere in the world, in Hong Kong, in Chicago, if you look at Denver they're extending their light rail, everywhere that there's a stop, you know, there's a cluster of housing and there's density growing around those stops.

Why? Because these are the people that least can have. So it's not just, you know, housing in the middle of nowhere. That doesn't help anything. Housing and transit are like this—you have to have both.

And I think that we have to, and also, by the way, when Flagler planned the rail, he did it on high ground, he did it on the ridge.

So as we talked about equity, as we talk about low-income people that are historically been pushed to areas that are gonna be flooded, and we talk about moving those people to another place, if you're looking at equity and you're looking at a future city that's inclusive of everybody, different levels of income, then there has to be a place for low-income housing along the spine, along the high ridge.

And that is where that is exactly.

Brian Ehrlich

Where the high ridge along the railroad.

Jacqueline Touzet

Where your metro rail is, where Flagler planned the train, because they were very smart. Back in the day, they didn't build in low in the marsh, they built on the ridge. So if you look at where the metro rail line is it's really interesting. The last train to paradise has a map.

Look at that map, and that's about Henry Flagler, and then look at our metro rail line.

Brian Ehrlich

It's—they match up.

Jacqueline Touzet

They match up. In fact, all of the warehouses that he had, Henry Flagler for the train, are still, some of them on US-1, you could look at them and they're still there. So it's interesting, and I think that's a big part of equity, is that you, yeah, okay, people along the river are going to get flooded.

There's a lot of low-lying areas. When you build...Mariposa is a development in Denver, and they were really good about taking people and putting them into mixed—I like mixed-income housing.

I don't think you should ghetto people into low-income [housing] by themselves because it starts becoming crime. And I think you should create a baseline that people can truly afford HUD level and then allow people to kind of have, the ability to kind of move up as things progress.

Felipe Asena

Well, it's like the Jane Jacobs argument, right? Isn't that [what] Jane Jacobs talks about mixed-use and how?

Jacqueline Touzet

It's actually like mixed-use. It's also mixed income. I think that's a much...

Ben Hoffman

You want everyone interacting with each other because then there's opportunities there, right? For the for the less—people that have less advantage in life, right, to mix with people that are a little more prosperous, right?

Jacqueline Touzet

And think about how healthy cities work. You have elderly, you have students, you have people that are single, most yeah...and you shouldn't put all of those people in one development.

But there has to be really, I think that there's a way that sometimes in development projects, they kind of sort of say that they're affordable, but they're not really. And I think that it needs to be truly affordable. It needs to be mixed into a project. And that's how you make a sustainable city, truly an equitable one too.

Felipe Asena

We're seeing now a big trend is big groups like Blackstone that has invitation homes, they're buying all these single-family homes and using them as rentals, as rental income.

I saw an article in the Real Deal this week that a Cincinnati agency, it was a Cincinnati, I think it was a Port Authority arm, bought 200 homes, they edged out over a dozen other investors. The agency actually bought these 200 homes and plan on selling them back to the renters.

So, it's interesting to see these government agencies getting active in the affordability crisis by helping these renters get ahold of them, because these investors keep taking this single-family home stuff off the market.

Jacqueline Touzet

Yeah, it's interesting, Berlin had a problem where they had a really good public housing program, and then they sold a lot of their properties to private developers, which immediately jacked up the rents and made it unaffordable. So, they're buying them back and making...and then, you know what?

Again, I am a capitalist and I'm all about free markets, but I think there's a role to protect the most vulnerable. And it might have to be a public role, a public agency that manages some of these properties to make sure that there is a stock of housing for people that can't afford it.

Because again, like whether or not it makes, I don't know how you make it financially viable, because that's not my business model, but to developers [who] build that sort of thing, maybe layered into another project, maybe with some additional bonuses, whatever.

But it needs to be part of the of the makeup of a deal. And it has to be longer than a 10- or 15-year deal.

Because then they immediately flip over to market rate and then they're not affordable anymore and we don't have the stock. And a lot of—part of it that people are talking about now with HUD, one of the conversations I had with the science advisor was that weatherization of existing stock.

Like the existing buildings tend to be the most affordable because they're already there. And so having a program and creating jobs to weatherize and bring up to [standards], and incentivizing people, like that's going to, you're going to see a lot of push from the federal government on that side too.

I think personally it should be illegal to let some of these units kind of fall into disrepair. And if you've seen what I've seen when I go to projects sometimes to visit for a potential development site, the level of disrepair and the level of squalor that people live in with mold and with water infiltration, that this is happening in our city, with people, I think is disgraceful and I think it should be illegal.

I don't think you're allowed to keep pets, you know, like it just, you shouldn't be allowed to keep human beings in housing that is so, and frankly, if you can't afford to keep your property, you shouldn't be in the business.

That's my feeling. So I agree, I'm all for making profits, I'm all for making beautiful buildings, but hey, what, if you can't, that shouldn't be legal.

Felipe Asena

It's hard here too, with the humidity and everything.

I mean, it's a non—it's like it's like maintaining a cruise ship, you know, it's just constantly deteriorating.

Jacqueline Touzet

I have seen things that would...

Felipe Asena

I'm sure. We've been there too. We always call it adventures in real estate. I mean, there's always...

Jacqueline Touzet

Yeah, but a lot of times it's intentional and it's done because they're intending to sell that property and they just let it fall apart.

And I, again, I personally think that should be illegal.

00:57:38 – Pushing for Innovation in Miami

Ben Hoffman

So, Jackie, let's talk a little bit about, you know...

We met through the University of Miami's Real Estate Advisory Board, the MRAD program. You're always someone that's very positive and optimistic about Miami becoming sort of the center of innovation for climate change.

What are some of the other things that Miami should be doing in order to mitigate sea level rise? What are some of your ideas? You mentioned mangroves. We'd like to hear a little bit more about why this opportunity for Miami? What can Miami be doing? How can we become that innovator?

Jacqueline Touzet

I think there's a lot of, with any great challenge, there's also the opportunity, and we talked about it, to be a leader.

Instead, you know, the Dutch were faced with their little country kind of getting inundated.

And as a result, they became, you know, an exporter of knowledge of how to deal with designing for water and living with water.

I think Miami has a similar, if we can't figure it out with the amount of money and interest to live in Miami and the amount of intellectual capital and creative capital that we have, then really who can?

Brian Ehrlich

So does it make sense to live on the water here in Miami? Or would it make sense in the future?

Jacqueline Touzet

I think it makes sense to live in certain parts by the water, not everywhere. Some areas that are low lying and the ocean's going to be fighting you all the time, maybe not.

Jacqueline Touzet

But again, Miami Beach.

Brian Ehrlich

Some parts of the bay you think would be okay.

Jacqueline Touzet

Yeah, I mean, for example, Miami Beach is an artificial island. So the argument there is that you could rebuild part, as you rebuild it, you rebuild it higher, right? So I don't have any problem with that whatsoever. It's artificial, it always has been, it never was natural. You know what, make it 2 feet higher.

Ben Hoffman

So just Miami Beach. Just so for the out of town folks, it used to be, what was it?

Jacqueline Touzet

It was a mangrove island and I've read biographies of the early pioneers and they used to take a little boat out there, Marjory Stoneman Douglas with the little mangroves and they used to go to the beach, moonlight, you know, but it was a big bunch of mangroves and beach. It was a sandy bar.

And what happened was they, Fisher came up with a way of having a machine that could chop, literally chop the mangroves and clear the land, which was really hard to do until he kind of came up with it.

And that innovation, so innovation, development, allowed for that island to be developed and they filled it. And it's a bunch of piles driven into the ground with fill. And the fill comes from the bay.

Now, we know today that is not wise, ecologically, environmentally, but that's what they did. And now that we know, when you, it's like that Maya Angelou, when you know better, you do better.

So we know better. What do we do better in the future? We should build higher. We should build like if we're in a flood zone, because in fact we all are. And what does that mean? The materials that we use shouldn't be, you know—they should be flood resistant. They should not corrode. Our MEP and our mechanical stuff should be elevated. Our energy, like we talked about earlier, we should be able to withstand a shock and come back and not be shut down. Our elevator should run.

You know, like that's water, sewer, all that stuff, you know. A water sewer has to be looked at really carefully because we have a lot of septic in Florida. And so as we decommission those septic tanks and go to sewer, you know, that's a whole process of a whole, that's a whole, we could have a talk dirty to me podcast.

Ben Hoffman

Talk dirty to me. I like it.

Brian Ehrlich

And I think on that, we made it to end.

Ben Hoffman

I love it. So what are some other ideas in terms of, you're talking infrastructure? What else do we do to help us barricade ourselves from the...?

Jacqueline Touzet

I think that the advice I would have is to look at your particular elevation. It's hard to give a global answer to something that is block by block, neighborhood by neighborhood. It really is granular so it really needs to be looked at like that.

You know, in some areas, yeah, you're going to have to buy back those lands, let them submerge, let that become a park. Maybe the lowest area, the lowest parcel in a block becomes a greenway and that's absorbing water like a sponge for the rest of the neighborhood. You really need to look at it almost like that. And it is being looked at to some extent like that, but the...we need to get busy.

The other aspect of it, the one that I'm focused on because this can be very vast. And the part that I know that I feel like I have something to offer is on the material side.

So once we get through the nonsense of whether we need to and how we have to, so then people are going to say, well, what do we do? And that's where architects, I think, have to have some answers. And the answers are, the materials have to be flood resistant. The concrete cannot be concrete as usual. You know, like, let's talk about carbon, okay?

And the envelope, which we did really, really well in South Florida, we did it with wind, okay? We have a history here. And that's the other part about Florida, which I find inspiring.

Brian Ehrlich

After Andrew or..?

Jacqueline Touzet

After Andrew, when I graduated from Cornell, '92, Andrew hit, so I saw firsthand what happens when a community galvanizes to say, we're going to have a lot of problems, but not this one again.

And so, what happened was South Florida took the initiative away from even the state, and they rewrote the codes for wind. And they did so much on the wind side that are, look at what happens when there's a hurricane, very little damage from hurricanes now.

Look at the panhandle: they didn't embrace the South Florida building code, and there are photographs of that, wiped out. So there's no question that codes matter.

So that's, as an architect, my focus is, what can I do to help push, you know, people that are making decisions to embracing tougher codes where they're warranted, and I think they are for the water side now. Let's be real, the water's rising. And on the design side, it's a little bit of discernment where and how to build.

If you're going to, if you're already in for a property and you're invested in it, what can you do to adapt it? Can you mitigate? And over time, it's what's the long strategy on that, on that parcel?

So it's not, it's not—I wish I could give you a one-size-fits-all, but there's a material science side, there's a there's a standard side, a code side, and there's a performance side.

Like let's, as a community, I think we also need to talk to FP&L. Hey, should we have the switch gear rooms below flood because your trucks can't access higher? Or shouldn't we be lifting them up by now, you know?

And let's talk about solar. I mean, why, if Germany and Austria and Switzerland that are, they don't get as much sun as we do, if they've embraced solars and green roofs, why can't we?

Why can't we do much more in solar? There's a lot of things that as a community, we can start to ask some questions of our utility company, of our leaders, of our people that are writing codes, and ask for better performance. And let's not be afraid to have that conversation.

I know that we have, compared to Houston, for example, FP&L was like ASIS. They come in, they, you know, they fix, they patch us up, you know, from a response time. We have a, we know how to deal with hurricanes. We have to do the same kind of learning on the other side. What?

Brian Ehrlich

Innovation, not so much.

Jacqueline Touzet

No, not yet. Not yet. But there was a time like in Hialeah and South Florida was like the leader in concrete. I'm really focused on reinventing that. Like what does that mean now in the future?

Should we be doing stucco or are we going to be looking at delamination? What are the skins that are appropriate when we're talking about increased heat and increased water? What does that look like as an architect?

That's my wheelhouse. I can't really speak to the policy side, but I can nudge.

Brian Ehrlich

It sounds like you have some ideas on the policy side.

Jacqueline Touzet

Well, I nudge. I nudge on the policy side. And you know what I try to do with the real estate, which have been our clients, we deal with private sector A lot, is I'm trying to help them understand what the issues are so that they don't advocate against themselves.

So sometimes they think they're going to save some money by not having regulations. But if we all agree on some baseline safety measures that we need for our community, we're all going to be in a better place.

Felipe Asena

It's amazing. Well, I think it's a perfect place to stop. Thank you so much for your time.

Brian Ehrlich

This has been incredible. Thank you, Jackie.

Jacqueline Touzet

Thank you, guys.

Felipe Asena

We'll be talking again soon.