

Designer Profile: Mary Maydan

The former journalist turned architect has championed modern residential architecture in California



(Image credit: Mary Maydan)

Mary Maydan fell in love with architecture when designing her first home with her husband after leaving New York for Silicon Valley.

The ultra-contemporary home she designed – unusual in California at that time – kickstarted a whole new career, and 20 years on, she has had built a successful architectural practice that has stayed true to her original vision.

Here, we talk to Mary about house design, and her work, past, present and future.

When Did You Found Your Own Practice?



'Prior to founding Maydan Architects, I was the U.S. Correspondent of the prestigious newspaper, *Globes*, the largest and oldest financial newspaper in Israel. I lived in New York City, where I spent my time interviewing and writing feature stories about some of the most inspiring figures of our time. I had the privilege of interviewing Mikahil Gorbachev, Barabara Waters, Larry King and Jerry Seinfeld, to name a few.

'I relocated to Silicon Valley after meeting my husband. When we were planning our first home, I fell in love with design and with the idea of making my own mark, as opposed to writing about other people who did great things. I designed an ultra-modern house, which stood in sharp contrast to the traditional and Spanish architecture that dominated our

area. It drew a lot of attention and even before it was completed, people came to our construction site and asked me to design for them. I had clients before I even officially decided about a career move!

'In my wildest dreams, I never thought I would be an architect. I was passionate about designing the style I loved and making others see the beauty in modern architecture and what a perfect fit it was for our area and context. I was very, very lucky to fall in love with a style that became so widely popular and to become a leader in this niche.'

Where Does Your Inspiration Come From?



'I find inspiration in design fairs, in showrooms, and above all in buildings. My family jokes that while I enjoy seeing beautiful scenery, I really become wide-eyed when I look at buildings. It's true. I love visiting buildings. The experience inside a space is very powerful and teaching.'



How Would You Describe Your Design Style?



'I call my style of architecture California Modern, which is characterized by clean lines, ample natural light, open floor plan and seamless indoor outdoor flow. When I lived in New York I was used to seeing all the Wall Street guys going to work in a suit and tie. In California it's more common to see engineers conducting even very important meetings in a simple button down shirt. Ties are reserved for more serious occasions.

'California Modern is a house without a tie. The shirt is still pressed, neat, clean cut, but free of unnecessary ornaments. California Modern to me is an unassuming house, a house that is comfortable in its skin, open, airy, warm, inviting and caring about nature and its surroundings.'

What Is Your Key Design Philosophy?



'As a firm our designs are never ego driven. My motto is that the architect is not the important part in the story. We don't want to design houses that shout, that try to attract attention, or are ostentatious. We look for serenity and timelessness, not for noise.'



If You Could Go Back In Time And Give Yourself Any Advice, What Would It Be?



'My advice would be to work only with clients with whom you can build dreams together.'

What Are Some Career Highlights That You're Most Proud Of?



'I think that my greatest achievement is in helping to lead the trend of modern architecture in Silicon Valley.

'When I started designing residences in Palo Alto in the early 2000s, Silicon Valley was leading the world in terms of innovation, shining as an early adopter in everything but architecture. People loved French chateaux and Spanish mansions, Tuscan was the height of style, and arches were a status symbol. The consensus was that modern design was suitable for office buildings but that no one would be interested in living in a modern home.

'I wholeheartedly believed in the beauty of modern architecture and that it would be a perfect fit for our area and context. I was convinced that people would fall in love with the style once they were introduced. At the time, I didn't even think it was brave to go against the stream. I was just passionate about my architecture.

'In hindsight I can see how bold it was to expect people to turn 180 degrees and find beauty in something that they were so used to thinking of as cold and office-like. I am proud that I was loyal to my vision which established our firm as a leader of a new trend and defined our niche – minimalistic contemporary architecture.'

What's On The Horizon For You And Your Firm?



'I am often asked what my next challenge is. Do I want to design public spaces, a museum, or a high rise building? This has actually never been my dream. I love designing private residences. I strongly believe in the power of architecture to shape the way we live our lives and am excited by the opportunity to add to the quality of life of my clients.'

'We did start a new chapter this past year. We have been designing high end residences in California for almost two decades and 2021 was the year

that we started our first project in New York City. New projects have since followed. We applied our philosophy in full to this first New York project. Our objective was to create a space that feels large, open, airy, uncluttered, and that brings the outdoors in. It's a very bright space and seeing the New York City skyline through the glass walls is uplifting.

'In a way I have come full circle and it is such an exciting opportunity for me to work in the city I love so much. And of course on the horizon is always our desire to continue to push ourselves, to leave our comfort zone and discover the next extraordinary idea.'



What Else Drives You?



'I have four amazing kids who are the center of my life. Coming home to my husband and kids at the end of my work day is what makes it all worthwhile.'