



Executive of the Month: Macaluso, founder of MJM + A Architects: Blending the practical with the fantastic to address clients' needs; Creating beautiful drawings complemented by a "boots on the ground" philosophy

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In 1976, when Michael Macaluso first opened his small architectural firm in a storefront in Queens, he meticulously crafted his business to blend the practical with the fantastic to address the individual needs of his clients. Since its inception, Macaluso has continued to grow his firm in terms of staff, services provided, technology, and client base. Its current iteration, MJM + A Architects, PLLC, includes long-time and trusted colleagues John Scheschareg, Keith Lucas, Ryan Scipione and Frank Szatkowski as partners, with Macaluso performing the duties of managing director. The firm provides design and consulting services in architecture, planning, and interior design, as well as construction administration and project management.

"I've always had an uncompromising belief in the free flow of ideas," said Macaluso. "All options are explored and subjected to the extensive experience, knowledge, and technical insight of my team of architects, project managers, designers, and artists in order to achieve extraordinary results."

Beginning with a breakthrough project for a major restaurant in Rockefeller Center, Macaluso quickly became the "go to" name in hospitality design. Several restaurant and hotel projects followed, culminating with Ink48 Hotel, a former printing plant on Manhattan's West Side that was converted to a boutique hotel with a 2,200 s/f rooftop terrace, contemporary loft design, and magnificent views. Commensurate with his growth in the hospitality industry, Macaluso was commissioned to design several residences in the metropolitan area, from an 8,000 s/f Forest Hills home to 25,000 s/f mansions in Princeton, N.J. and Long Island's Gold Coast. For urban clients, he created several mid-rise residential condominiums in Chelsea and the Meatpacking District.

Macaluso's philosophy has been to create beautiful drawings and construction documents, complemented by a "boots on the ground" philosophy of following through the actual construction process to deliver the project that the client has envisioned.

"Architects are really the psychologists of space, where the interpretation of the third dimension is even more important than a good floor plan," said Macaluso. "I can't design the right space for our clients if I don't truly know them. So at the start of each project, I interview the owner to find out their passions and dreams, as well as their lifestyle and needs. Even something as simple as the time they retire to bed can influence our design. The design team considers all manner of light as a major design tool with sustainability and energy efficiency a primary point of focus. Each environment is crafted with the attention of a bespoke suit of clothes. No detail or need is left undone."

Macaluso then translates this information into a design-based solution that incorporates both artistic craftwork and cost value. "Every decision made within the design studio should provide added value to the project. No idea is too inconsequential, no ambition too great. This insight into the techniques,

priorities and perspectives of the various personnel in a design project has been one of the most influential factors for success."

Macaluso also specialize in landmark and exterior restoration. One recent example is the Carriage Houses campus residences on Balint Dr. in Yonkers. Management had asked Macaluso to find a solution to mitigate the moisture intrusion of the aging brick façade. Rather than using standing brick replacement and "pointing," an advanced "rain screen" system was installed that not only protects the façade from wind-driven rains but provides an attractive syncopation of colors, forms and textures. The solution was both technically sound as the building received a new "rain coat" and more aesthetically pleasing, with greater curb appeal and pride of place.

Another innovative solution was developed for the Fashion Institute of Technology, which was seeking greater security for the point-of-entry turnstiles at the campus' main entrance. As this was a "fashion" client, Macaluso developed a solution that was as innovative and creative as the client. He was also asked to configure various interior spaces throughout the FIT campus.

If there was ever a project that combines the practical and the fantastic, it's the proposed Hudson Spire, a 110 story, 1,800 ft. high tower in the new Hudson Yard neighborhood. If built, it would become the tallest building in North America. Macaluso was retained by the property owners to create the conceptual designs that incorporate a combination of upscale restaurants and retailers, office space, three separate high-end hotels, and 25 floors of luxury residences.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," said Macaluso. "As an architect, my job is to interpret the dreams of others. The creative geniuses in our design studio came up with a stunning vision of a vibrant glass structure that literally jumps from its bases and soars to the stars. The composition, color and reflective properties of the glass are varied, with lots of intersecting angles that play off one another so that sunsets and city views look different on one face of the building than others. Hudson Spire would become a focal point, or better yet an exclamation mark, on the Manhattan skyline for years to come."

Macaluso is a graduate of Pratt Institute in New York City and is a devoted student, university advisor and instructor in the fields of architecture and design. He is an active member of the board of advisors for New York City College of Technology. He also created and taught an innovative restaurant design curriculum for the Parsons School of Design that is still modeled today.

A recognized leader in the design world, Macaluso has served as president for several architectural organizations on both the local and national level. His firm currently has 22 associates and is now located in midtown Manhattan, with another location in Portland, ME.

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