



Executive of the Month: Boddewyn leads BGA, assuring all clients receive the best results through innovation and teamwork

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New York, NY The New York Real Estate Journal recently sat down with Michele Boddewyn, AIA, president of Boddewyn Gaynor Architects for a question and answer session.

568 Broadway - Manhattan, NY

Can you share a little about your firm and how it has evolved?

In 1974, Alan Gaynor, AIA, a Pratt Institute graduate, founded the architectural firm, Alan Gaynor + Co. His vision for the firm was to create innovative designs, tailored to each client's project needs. Following my graduation from Pratt Institute, I joined the firm in 1980 as a junior architect. Since then Alan and I have collaborated on many projects and our complementary skill set has led to steady growth.

In 1993, I became a partner, and in 2010, I assumed the role of president, acquiring a majority interest in the firm. We are certified as a Women's Business Enterprise (WBE) by NYS Empire State Development, the NYC Small Business Services, DASNY Opportunity Program, NYC School Construction Authority and as a DBE with the MTA. In 2014, the firm's name was changed to Boddewyn Gaynor Architects, d.p.c. (BGA).

Over the years, BGA has been privileged to serve a number of well-known commercial, institutional, developer, non-profit, retail and public agency clients, including: The Weather Channel, Weill Cornell Medical College, American Realty Advisors, The Henry Luce Foundation, American Eagle Outfitters and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA).

What are the key influences in your work today?

Technology continues to redefine the home/work/life environment. The lines between work and home have blurred leading to higher tenant expectations, both in the residential and commercial real estate sectors. The demand for more amenities that encourage a sense of community among occupants, has increased the need for wi-fi hotspots, lounge/exercise areas, charging stations, food & beverage dispensaries and outdoor space, where people live and work.

The trend towards densely occupied open-plan office spaces has correspondingly increased the demand for privacy via conference facilities, meeting rooms and phone booths. The more densely occupied work environments, combined with exposed slab ceilings, have created acoustical challenges and issues of productivity due to distraction, which must be addressed in effective ways.

Looking ahead the use of augmented reality technology, in fields such as healthcare and retail, is a fascinating application of this evolving technology.

What steps can clients take to make their experiences more personally rewarding?

Client involvement is paramount to the success of any project. The greater the involvement by clients, in defining the project goals, and the more knowledgeable they are about the design and construction process, the more rewarding the project outcome.

Describe the philosophy behind your firm.

BGA's design philosophy is based on three fundamental principles. The first principle is to create inventive and inspired designs that reflect the character and requirements of each project. We strongly believe that to be truly worthwhile, a design must be substantive, which leads to our second principle...the design must fulfill its purpose beyond aesthetic considerations; it must be fully functional, and it must be effective.

And lastly, our third principle...the design must be totally cognizant of occupancy issues and compliant with established building codes & standards. Safety always is foremost on our minds. BGA's 40+ years of experience and our understanding of the nuances of the building codes results in successfully completed projects consistent with the original design intent.

What do you regard as the greatest success in your career to date?

BGA was retained by RXR Realty to lead the architectural team of a massive historic window replacement project at the iconic Landmark Starrett-Lehigh Building in the West Chelsea section of Manhattan. The project covered the replacement of 5,000 windows. The installation was preceded by several years of research, planning and preparation by BGA and RXR prior to obtaining approval by the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission. The completion of the window replacement work in this landmark building not only maintained its iconic exterior while significantly reducing heating and cooling costs, but improved the year round comfort and the acoustics of the tenant spaces.

How would you describe your clientele?

A blend of entrepreneurs, property owners, facilities managers, tenants, non-profits and public agency representatives. Our clients value our problem solving skills, ingenuity and accountability on each of their assignments, which is why many of our projects are for repeat clients, even as they change firms.

111 Kent Avenue - Brooklyn, NY

What do you strive to create when you're working on a project? What's most important to you?

Recycling buildings and spaces is an ongoing challenge. Finding ways to reuse what's already there to meet current needs. Many BGA projects involve repurposing a building (commercial to residential) or refreshing a property to attract tenants or improving building infrastructure systems. It's my version of sustainability and return on investment (ROI).

Some recent projects include:

- The Halsted Building conversion: This 1970's office building in East Orange, N.J. was redeveloped as an apartment building with rooftop terrace, via a complete gut of the building's interiors.
- 111 Kent Ave. apartment building in Williamsburg, Brooklyn: The building owner, American Realty Advisors, had plans to enhance and reposition this property to attract families.
- 568 Broadway infrastructure upgrades: This landmark, 12-story loft building in the Soho Historic District is popular for office leasing. As the building occupancy has shifted from galleries and light manufacturing to offices and medical practices, the passenger elevator capacity had been stretched, resulting in long wait times. Working with Allied Partners, Inc. and Aurora Capital Associates, BGA has repurposed an abandoned freight elevator shaft for use as a new passenger elevator.

Halsted Building - East Orange, NJ

In what kinds of communities do you typically work?

BGA works primarily within the Tri-State area, providing architectural and interior design services to commercial & TAMI clients; educational institutions; medical facilities, retail, non-profit organizations and public agencies. Our urban work is a mix of interiors and historic preservation, while our New Jersey work is heavily architectural—new construction, building conversions and expansions.

How long have you been in business?

Boddewyn Gaynor Architects, d.p.c. has been in business for 45 years.

What was the most complex deal or project you were involved in?

The acquisition of Ludwig Michael Goldsmith Architects (LMG), in 2008, represented a unique challenge in terms of growth and advancement for me and for the firm. Critical issues included blending the organizational cultures, maintaining the LMG client portfolio & relationships and financing the purchase. Clearly leadership skills played a significant role in the successful negotiation and combination of the two firms. I am proud to say that the acquisition was seamless.

What made you decide to get into the design business?

A High School course on NYC architecture and my part time work for The Friends of Cast Iron Architecture. Both experiences lead to the realization that I'd been observing building design and construction for quite some time, and that I found architecture fascinating.

What do you see as the biggest challenges for architects in the real estate industry?

The commoditization of design services has minimized the importance of professional service firms as well as the advantage of long-term construction experience. The notion that "one size fits all" design solutions meet everyone's needs is short-sighted.

The impact of ever-evolving technology on how we work, live, shop and play is redefining the "new normal" on a recurring basis. The ability to work anytime and anywhere changes the parameters for many office and work spaces. The popularity of internet purchasing has greatly impacted brick and mortar retailers, resulting in store closures while also increasing creative solutions for retailers to reach their customers, such as food trucks and pop-up locations.

What guidance would you give to someone contemplating a future in the architectural field?

Architecture is a highly prestigious, yet demanding profession that requires leadership and interpersonal skills. As with many other professions, the field of architecture is prone to the vagaries of the economy, particularly in these times of technological change.

Do you ever truly unplug from work?

I am an avid reader and thoroughly enjoy getting lost in a good mystery. I serve as president of the Friends of the Hastings Library, where we organize an annual lecture series and raise funds to support the library's programs for all ages in the community.

What learning experience or professional development most helped prepare you for leadership?

In cautioning me about the world at large and those that I would encounter, my father, prof. Jean Boddewyn, NYU Graduate School of Business, advised that, "...a laid-back SOB is still an SOB." His advice was essential to me in assessing the character of the many individuals I encounter in my

professional life.

What makes Boddewyn Gaynor Architects unique?

Boddewyn Gaynor Architects, d.p.c. (BGA and formerly Alan Gaynor + Co.) has been creating unique and innovative designs for its clients for more than 40 years. Together, Alan Gaynor and I have seen our firm expand and flourish. We pride ourselves in creating timeless & successful designs that reflect the character and unique needs of each of our projects.

Each member of our project management staff has more than 25 years' experience, mostly with our firm. This speaks to our ability to generate successful solutions to challenging assignments, as well as creating a work environment where ideas and creativity can flourish.

We are passionate about design; we are passionate about architecture; and we are passionate about the profession that we represent. We believe this approach to serving our client's needs is a key ingredient in BGA's success.

How do you define a successful project?

A successful project is one that employs an inclusive approach to project management, involving the client and all members of the team. This approach results in the development of a comprehensive and integrated set of contract documents, satisfies established client goals and meets all landlord and building code requirements. Additionally, a successful project anticipates future needs and BGA incorporates this forward thinking into each and every project.

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