



2021 Ones to Watch: Nancy Ruddy, CetraRuddy

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Name: Nancy Ruddy

Title: Co-Founding Principal and Executive Director of Interior Design

Company Name: CetraRuddy

What recent project, transaction or accomplishment are you most proud of?

We have so many recent projects that we're proud of—including Essex Crossing, a new mixed-use community on the Lower East Side, where our building holds both residential units and forward-looking office space; Rose Hill, a condominium tower that we are finishing now for Rockefeller Group; 200 Amsterdam on the Upper West Side, where we've done the interiors, and more. Perhaps more than any one project, we're proud of how our thoughtful and creative designers have innovated during the past year-plus. Whether it's designing flex spaces and work-from-home areas in apartments, exploring new ideas in wellness, planning the office buildings of the future, or studying how to convert underutilized buildings into residential assets, we are putting incredible creative energy into planning for the next chapter of urban living.

What led you to your current profession?

I found architecture through art. I've always been an artist, and I studied studio art and then art history in college. While I was at New York University, I fell in love with the city's built environment and began to focus on architectural history. Then I enrolled in the City College of New York's architecture program — which is where I met my future husband and business partner, John Cetra. It was meant to be!

How do you keep your team motivated despite conflicts and obstacles?

Communication and engagement are key. We're a very collaborative firm, and our teams work together closely on every project. Finding ways to maintain that culture of collaboration and the communal atmosphere we treasure has been a challenge during the pandemic, but we've been creative. For example, when the world transitioned so suddenly to remote work last year, we thought about ways to preserve a sense of fun. We created a practice where every morning, a different person would send an email to the whole firm that is was inspirational, humorous, or exciting in terms of sparking creativity. This enabled all of us to begin our day together with a sense of community, as if we were together in the office.

How do you contribute to your community or your profession?

We take community very seriously at CetraRuddy, in all senses of the word. For several years our firm has sponsored a series of architectural design studios at the City College of New York Bernard and Anne Spitzer School of Architecture, for students in the Master of Arch. program. These studios have focused on innovation in housing design, which is such a critical issue facing our city and our society. We feel it's very important to support the next generation of architects in addressing these challenges. For more than a decade, CetraRuddy has also supported Community School 300 in the Bronx, as part of the PENCIL Partnership. Within our own office, we're proud of the supportive and inclusive environment that our team has built over the past 30+ years. Mentorship is a fundamental part of our worldview and approach. It's especially rewarding also that our firm is more than 50% women, and CetraRuddy is committed to supporting women professionals, in our own practice and in the building industry at large.

What did you want to be when you grew up?

I was a painter as a child and young adult growing up in New Jersey, and I imagined myself becoming an artist. As it turns out, that dream came true in many ways — architecture and interior design are incredibly artistic endeavors.

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