



MKDA founder, Kleinberg, passes away at age 97

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Milo Kleinberg

Manhattan, NY Architecture and interior design firm MKDA said that Milo Kleinberg, the firm's founder, has passed away at the age of 97.

The firm's partners Michael and Jeffrey Kleinberg issued the following statement: "We are deeply saddened by the passing of our father and firm founder. Milo was a true visionary in the world of interior design, and an unrelenting philanthropist who had a remarkable passion for giving back to the communities where he lived and worked. The firm's partners, friends, and employees, whose lives he touched, mourn his loss."

Kleinberg and his family emigrated to the United States from Vienna, Austria in 1939 after the Nazis marched in. After settling in Brooklyn, he sold handkerchiefs on street corners to help his family make ends meet. As a young man, he became the sole associate for a New York architect, where he learned his highly regarded design and drafting skills.

Kleinberg established MKDA, originally Milo Kleinberg Design Associates, in 1959 as a one-man shop. He set out to create an innovative interior design firm that would marry American practicality with European beauty – an approach developed from his youth living in both Vienna and Brooklyn. He applied the firm's founding principles of commitment, focus, excellence and integrity to each and every client and design project, earning his firm a strong reputation in its earliest years.

Kleinberg would then go on to transform the landscape of New York's interior design industry forever. During his illustrious career, he innovated the concept of landlord services, being one of the first of his kind to work hand-in-hand with the commercial real estate community, including real estate brokers and owners, to use architectural design to help market buildings and their available space, and to craft successful lease agreements.

In one shining example, he was able to help a Garment District building owner lease an entirely vacant building within six weeks after subdividing a floor to show prospective tenants the potential of the space. Fashion brands that never before hired an interior designer suddenly wanted to hire Kleinberg to design their showrooms. He became affectionately known as the "King of the Garment District" in the 1960s for designing a large number of showrooms for esteemed fashion designers of the time, including Gloria Vanderbilt, Jonathan Logan, Bobby Brooke, and Ellen Tracy. He had the unique ability to develop new, unprecedented garment displays and floor designs, devising spaces that were open, but efficiently separated by interesting dividers, including the early use of glass partitions.

Kleinberg leveraged his knowledge of the apparel industry and applied it to other sectors to diversify the firm's services and expand its reach. He began designing retail stores for high-end brands such as Royal Copenhagen and Georg Jensen as well as financial institutions Citibank and Sterling Bank. As a result of his strong relationships within the commercial real estate industry, MKDA was often referred to building tenants to design their new offices. Some of his most notable designs over the years included Lufthansa, Polygram Records, Merrill Lynch, Apple Bank and other leading brands.

Kleinberg dedicated his life to building MKDA into the well-reputed organization it is known as today.

His relentless passion for design and his innate ability to connect with clients, industry colleagues and employees elevated MKDA to unparalleled heights. Under his visionary guidance, the firm became a paragon of excellence, setting new standards in innovation, creativity and technical excellence. His commitment to the firm's values shaped the very foundation of the company, which has been further formed by the second and third generations of the Kleinberg family.

Kleinberg's impact extended far beyond the walls of MKDA. His belief in the power of design to transform spaces and enrich lives has left an indelible mark on the industry as a whole, while his commitment to philanthropy has made a significant difference in the lives of many. He employed his talents to offer pro bono design consulting services for the Riverdale Jewish Center and contributed to SAR Academy in addition to being involved with Israel Bonds. He was also honored by Ronald McDonald House and Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem.

Today the firm has offices in four key markets along the east coast and Mid Atlantic, including its New York headquarters, Stamford, CT, Miami, FL and Washington, DC. While workplace and commercial office building interior design remains the core competency of the firm, it has expanded across its studios to include architecture and interior design in the hospitality, multi-family, mixed-use, and retail sectors.

Michael and Jeffrey said in their statement, "As the company moves forward, together, we will honor his memory by shaping a future for the firm that would make him proud."

To learn more about the life of Milo Kleinberg and the history of MKDA, MKDA published Milo Kleinberg and MKDA: Six Decades in Design, a book that shares the story of Milo's birth through the recent history of MKDA.

Donations in Kleinberg's memory can be made to Jewish Adoptions and Family Care Options (JAFCO).

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