



CELEBRATING
55 YEARS

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2025 Women in Construction: Julia McFadden, QA+M Architecture

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Julia McFadden, AIA
Principal

What is one project or achievement in your career that you are most proud of, and how did it impact your organization or community? Sandy Hook School, Newtown. Our team leaned heavily into Biophilic design to uplift, inspire, and engage the students and community, while discretely incorporating security measures. The educational realm correlated these design themes to support the socio-emotional well-being of students, while state agencies published design and security guidelines following these attributes. In 2023, I spoke at an international education conference in Kazakhstan where Biophilia, CPTED, and engaging design attributes are now commonly known across Europe and beyond.

What trends or innovations do you believe will shape the future of your field, and how are you positioning yourself (or your firm) to be at the forefront? Unfortunately, the trends of the bottom dollar have dominated the field for the last 50 years, treating buildings as commodity products, conceived by businessmen and executed with unskilled labor. I'm committing myself to widen the discourse with our clients and the public on how to identify good design, how it impacts inhabitants & communities, and how good design is achieved. I'm also looking to instigate public discussion & public / private investment to train and value construction labor to counteract the loss of prestige and attendant job dissatisfaction for tradespeople and contractors.

There is also a market trend to procure designers, architects, and engineers with less cost and less influence, turning to the global workforce and AI. The positives could be a globally attuned workforce bringing diversity in design ideas and culture, with the potential to develop design ideas quicker. The negatives may be at the expense of real wage growth and a loss of the big picture to ensure good design is holistically approached. I am encouraging our office to explore engaging a global work-force through greater facility in remote collaboration tools. The larger firms have already been leading in this realm and smaller to middle-sized firms will be left behind if they cannot move boldly in this direction.

What's your favorite way to recharge or get inspired outside of work? Ballroom dancing and cabaret singing are outlets that tap into other aspects of my creative self.

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