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GETTING TO KNOW...

Beth Insabella Walsh, ASID, IIDA



By Christina Kim, Student Member ASID

“I was the only girl in the class...”

A defining moment in the life of Beth Insabella Walsh was realizing that yes, she was the only one. Let's just say this is a recurring theme in Walsh's career.

Well-respected in the New Jersey design community, Walsh is the principal and founder of InsabellaDesign, a busy interior design firm based in Red Bank, New Jersey specializing in corporate, healthcare, educational and governmental design.

“I didn't want to go to college and my mother said, ‘You have to go to college.’ I wanted to go to Europe and look at art history,” remembers Walsh.

She listened to her mom and headed for the architecture department at the University of Delaware. It turned out that Walsh was acing her classes there and soon upped the ante by transferring to Drexel University. She found her home in its well-regarded, if not stringent Five-year co-op program.

Drexel's co-ops are branded as “the Ultimate Internship” and

she credits the program for giving her the chops she needed to succeed. Students typically take on 18 months of an internship along with their studies. It was at Drexel where she set her sights on technical mastery: engineering, architecture and drafting. For Walsh, mastering the technical aspects of the work was important and gave her the confidence to go head-to-head in rooms where again, she would be the only girl.

Fresh out of school, she landed a job at a large architectural firm as a junior designer. Twelve years later, she was the Director of Design and Senior Associate.

I worked in a man's world in architecture-that's the way it was. I was the only female and I knew I had reached the glass ceiling. They were probably never going to make me a partner, so why was I wasting my time?"

Architects would come to her at the end of a project to tell her what every designer knows in their gut: “ [They said] Ya know, Beth, we could have designed a box and it wouldn't have mattered because it's the interiors that everyone comes to look at...It's how they feel inside that's the bottom line,” remembers Walsh. Something clicked.

Walsh would go on to start her own firm, a move whose pay-off came in the form of clients that included Pfizer Corporate Headquarters in New York City, HealthSouth Rehabilitation Hospital in Tinton Falls, N.J. and Monmouth County Child Advocacy Center in Freehold, N.J.

Her advice for a student coming into the business? Know your stuff, basically.

“A lot of people think they can become an interior designer because their mother has good taste and a lot of housewives become interior designers because they think they have a knack. I've interviewed so many people. Some of them are just not enthusiastic. Make sure this is what you really want to do.”

Walsh, a recipient of the ASID NJ Gold Award of Excellence and an active member of ASID and IIDA, also stresses the importance of networking to become part of the design community where “everybody knows everybody.”

Last question: how does she manage a successful design business, a husband and three kids?

“I always have a lot on my plate. A lot of days I'm exhausted,” to which she adds that she always knew she'd be like this...“I've always tried to look outside the box. As a designer, you have to.”

