

Illinois Tech alumni win awards, celebrate success

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Three Illinois Tech alumni who currently work for the IBI Group - Gruzen Samton in New York City have been pushing boundaries and winning design competitions across the country. Maria del Mar Granados Santiago, "Mar Granados," graduated with her Bachelor of Architecture degree in 2000 and is now a Senior Architect at the IBI Group. Gabriel Espinoza also graduated with a degree in architecture in 2015 and Meriem Sakrouhi, also an architecture graduate, completed her Bachelor's degree in 2016.

Within months, Espinoza and Sakrouhi brought in awards for their company at different design competitions in the country; Granados supervised both projects. Espinoza is a Project Architect who worked on the AARP 2016 Memphis Design Competition where the aim was to "rethink how an existing home can live and grow with a family as the family evolves in life." The team won first place at the competition with their "Inter-Active Living" design, responding to the requirements set by the challenge: "to generate universal design solutions and build an attractive, adaptable and affordable home of the future that speaks to and showcases livability, by promoting both aesthetically and functionally appealing designs for better living." Asked what was most special to him about winning this award and working on this project overall, Espinoza says, "I had the

amazing opportunity to collaborate with a non-profit organization to bring the design to life, and that in itself posed new challenges that I wouldn't have been able to overcome without the necessary background that IIT provided me with. For the first time I had to manage and design a project which had a lot of stakeholders, and that experience is invaluable, and I feel very proud of what we accomplished." More information about the team's winning design can be found at homemattersamerica.com/design/2016challenge/winners/.

Sakrouhi, a Junior Architect at the firm, worked on the Habitat for Humanity Challenge 2016. The goal was "to create an affordable and flexible home that engages outdoor living and adjusts to the homeowner's needs, while mitigating the humid Florida Climate." The challenge was to design an affordable 4-bedroom, 2-bathroom home in a maximum of 1300 square feet and with a budget of \$150,000. The team won second place. Sakrouhi says, "The greatest takeaway from the Habitat for Humanity design competition was to be able to design with a very specific purpose, which is to make a great house for everyone, whatever the needs of that person can be in the future. This principle of universal design is something that is taught at the College of Architecture at IIT." More information on the competition winners can be found at aectrends.com/design-challenge-winners.

Granados, who supervised both projects says of her involvement in the projects, "My role was to listen to their ideas

and push them to answer the questions that were presented; to focus their thinking towards the problems and challenges, and to give advice on aspects of their own designs." She adds, "In both projects I wanted them to explore how the house would react through different stages in life, and different users. Our motto was: everyone deserves affordable and quality living, and this needs to be flexible and engaging and it needs to improve life."

Turning her focus to architecture students, Granados says, "there is no real barrier between student and office work when it comes to the way we analyze architecture: there is always room for innovation and principles. Any barriers there are, we are creating ourselves. We need to keep pushing for critical thinking, for wonder, and need to keep including the principles of quality into architecture. Many times architecture is a response to a problem or a commentary in the world, it is up to us as architects to keep pushing this conversation forward." Adding to that, Espinoza said that one of the most important things he hopes students take away from this article is, "when we enter our respective professions, our fresh and new perspective is an incredible asset to any company, it should be something that outgoing students are proud of. A perspective I did not have when graduating, it was somewhat the opposite, I thought I couldn't bring much to the table because I didn't have the experience." In her time at Illinois Tech, Sakrouhi learned that while critical thinking is an extremely important skill she learned from the College

of Architecture, her IPROs taught her that, "it is as important to sell your ideas, to make sure people can understand your stories," adding, "learning how to pitch ideas, designs or yourself—when interviewing for a job—is crucial."

Finally, TechNews asked Granados, Espinoza and Sakrouhi if they had any words of advice for current students at the university. Granados says, "My advice to students at IIT right now is to remember that this is a time for exploration. IIT is one of the best architecture schools in the world. You are lucky enough to be inhabiting history by occupying Mies' Crown Hall, and fortunate to have some of the most visionary architects as your teachers, take advantage of this. Learn from their wisdom and always wonder, keep questioning and always remember that the future is not written yet, and that you part of that conversation." Espinoza adds, "the 'real' world needs future generations to be proactive and innovative so we can break the mold of what is standard, which is what our competition projects are trying to accomplish, and it's an amazing thing to be part of." Sakrouhi, who moved to the U.S. as a transfer student in 2013 ended with, "Before moving to the U.S. one of my goals was to be able to watch American movies with no subtitles. This was only three years ago and what I am trying to say with this is that you can do anything you want, and through being around incredible teachers, students and guest speakers, IIT is opening many doors for you, all you have to do is decide which ones to use."



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