

Shaping Architectural Visions

Lea Ciavarra knew her architecture firm had prepared a strong submission for "Big Shoulders, Small Schools," an international design competition in 2000 for Chicago Public Schools. At the time, her firm was just a year old, but this project had clicked with the design team from the beginning, and the results showed it: Lubrano Ciavarra Design LLC walked away a surprise first-phase winner and finalist in the competition. "To be selected 'blindly,' from hundreds of entries, was incredibly satisfying," Ciavarra says.

That win was the big break Ciavarra's small, New York City firm needed to establish itself as a talented new arrival in the world of architectural design. It also led to larger, more varied projects for the firm. Today, the company's portfolio includes six New York City charter schools and a variety of business and residential projects.

Ciavarra credits her experience at SU with preparing her for a smooth transition from student to successful architect. Following her graduate studies at the School of Architecture, she served a two-year stint on the faculty, including one year as director of the pre-architecture program in Florence, Italy. In 1997, she joined the New York City firm of another SU graduate, internationally renowned architect Richard Gluckman '70, G'71. Two years later, after several successful independent collaborations with friend Anne Marie Lubrano, the two launched their company. School of Architecture Dean Mark Robbins G'81 first met Ciavarra through the "Big Shoulders, Small Schools" competition in his capacity as director of design for the National Endowment for the Arts, which helped fund the competition. "Lea at the time was in a group of much more established architects than herself," he says. "I appreciated her interest, as part of a young firm, in a project that had an impact on the public realm. And she's continued to do that, taking on projects for several schools and cultural institutions. She's really one of the more promising architects working today."

Among Ciavarra's recent projects: designing offices for the Richard Avedon Foundation in the new Museum Office Tower at the Museum of Modern Art—a project that won a 2006 Best of the Year award from *Interior Design* magazine; and, currently, collaborating with a Netherlands firm on designing a luxury boutique hotel in Miami.

Ciavarra, who sits on the School of Architecture advisory board, continues to keep her hand in academics, teaching classes in design for several institutions. "It's taxing to do both," she says, "but it's also a great change of pace. I like academia. I could see going back to it down the road. But right now, the practice is going well, and we're enjoying it."

—Carol Boll

