

Leading the way on sustainable architecture

CONSTRUCTION & DEVELOPMENT

This idea of sustainable development resonated with Cindy O'Hara – a young student – as she completed her studies in architecture in Canada, France and Spain. They remain with her today as a business owner of the successful architectural practice Design (Cayman) Limited and they focus now on sustainable architecture and design. The Journal reports.

When she completed her studies Cindy returned to Grand Cayman in 1992 to start her career in architecture as an intern, becoming an integral part of the design team at CGMJ Architects. Always a woman with a vision, Cindy left CGMJ in 2000 to start her own company, but was quickly recruited by OBM International's Cayman Office. There she attained the position of managing director and was part of the international management team, which encompassed eight countries and more than 100 staff worldwide. In the Cayman office Cindy managed a team of 12 professionals and oversaw construction projects with a combined value of over \$150 million.

This experience served her well, allowing her to work closely with her good friend and mentor, Bill Bissell, and to amass an impressive portfolio of high quality projects all of which are a testament to her commitment both to client sat-

isfaction and architectural design. Examples of Cindy's work can be found throughout Grand Cayman, in varying size and complexity. Starting her career with the pergolas, pools and covered parking areas at Britannia; including the high-end, luxurious Villa Zara in Cayman Kai; the technically complex hurricane resistant facilities of Lime's One Technology Square and Breezy Castle – Cayman's first independent disaster recovery suits; Hurley's Market Place in Grand Harbour and culminating, perhaps in Cayman's largest office building, the Government Office Administration Project, for which she is the design manager and project architect.

As a professional woman and an architect whose passion for her career is matched only, perhaps, by her passion for her country – Cindy knew that her architectural journey was not yet complete. In 2007 Cindy O'Hara left OBM to revisit her earlier dream of owning her own company. She opened Design (Cayman) Limited, and, as the managing director and owner of this full services architectural practice, she has found a niche specialising in sustainable architecture and construction projects management.

Design Cayman is small - five experienced employees who have together earned a reputation of design excellence. The group has an active client base with a varied array of projects: business, commercial, institutional,



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residential, hospitality and interior architecture.

Cindy began, early on, to incorporate sustainable architecture into her work. She showed her clients how sustainable architecture would not only meet their aesthetic needs, but would also allow them to develop their property in a way that is sensitive to the environment, economically rewarding in the long term and considerate of the need for future generations of Caymanians and visitors. Sustainable design and architecture starts with the site – how to best position the building so that it receives the most breeze, benefits from natural shade from surrounding trees and yet still receives sufficient natural light. It considers building materials for both the interior and the exterior, and can also introduce a range of energy saving elements from the simple - positioning the house and its win-

dows so that the sun does not shine directly on them- to the complex - air conditioning and water systems that do not operate on traditional energy sources alone.

Cindy pursued and received the prestigious *LEED Professional Accreditation in 2009 – joining a handful of local professionals with LEED accreditation. Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design is a certification that recognises individuals as having the intellectual and methodological tools to support the design and construction of buildings using strategies that promote economic, social and ecological sustainability.

The LEED qualification brings discipline and structure to the principles and longstanding philosophy on architecture and design, which Cindy intuitively implemented in the past. Always a supporter of spaces that are comfortable and healthy while still environmentally

sustainable and energy efficient, Cindy works with her clients to show them how sustainability can be woven into a project from the ground up - before a single line is drawn or a single hole is dug.

With regard to the Government's new administration building, which will be the first in Cayman to be LEED certified, Cindy notes, "The design integrated sustainable principals from its earliest conceptual stages – with the entire parking lot being redesigned to 'save' a tree - and also considered the possible ramifications possible given the harsh local environment, considering hurricane resistance, storm water management and salt corrosion in order to balance the challenges of Cayman's environment with permitting requirements."

Going forward, Cindy hopes to use her LEED accreditation to enhance her local knowledge, permitting expertise and continue to

act as a liaison between all design disciplines and the construction teams for the GOAP. With regards to her business, Cindy will continue on the path she initially set out on.

"With our experience in feasibility studies, renovations, additions and new construction Design Cayman is truly qualified to satisfy the needs of our clients. We provide the full range of work from the refurbishing of a single classroom or office suite to the construction of LEED – certified and technologically advanced new structures. Regardless of the project, we work closely with the entire project team to fulfil our clients' needs and incorporate their vision for the future into our designs," she states.

However, when all is said and done Cindy believes that fundamentally we can all make a difference, even at a household level.

She states: "We can't all build a new house, from the ground up, which incorporates sustainable elements of design and architecture; but, we can all choose to use a clothes line instead of the dryer or a fan and the island's natural breezes instead of AC. Even without a recycling programme, we can deliberately set out to reduce our contribution to the inglorious Mt. Trashmore by reusing more of our products and making better purchasing choices. We can all choose to make a difference every day, in some small way, and I challenge everyone to step up and make a commitment to do today what you can do. Don't wait until tomorrow."