

Maxine Ward: San Diego's rock star architect

By Katie Thisdell

Daily Transcript Staff Writer

This year's Open House in downtown San Diego featured 41 buildings – from high rises to historic icons to architecture offices.

The event was the city's first of its kind to allow visitors a behind-the-scenes look at a broad cross section of spaces.

It also was a chance to get the ball rolling on a larger event in 2017, potentially more in line with the Open Houses of New York and Chicago that draw thousands of visitors.

And the "rock star" behind the October event was Maxine Ward, an associate at Studio E and recently named the 2015 Young Architect of the Year, presented by the American Institute of Architects.

"She's just one of those people that, her passion for making things happen is just infectious," said Pauly De Bartolo, current president of the San Diego Architectural Foundation, which hosted this year's Open House. "She throws absolutely everything she has at everything she does. She doesn't do anything half-assed."

De Bartolo, who took over the reins at SDAF in 2015 after Ward held the position for three years prior, said Ward inspires everyone to bring more to the table in all that they do.

"I can't emphasize the words 'rock star' enough," De Bartolo said. "I can't speak highly enough of Maxine."

The AIA honor was presented to Ward in October during the organization's annual awards ceremony.

Judges said about Ward, "Since arriving in San Diego in 2003, this architect has not only produced a strong body of notable work, but is also recognized among peers for major contributions to the increased public awareness and appreciation of the value of design to the economic, social and environmental health of the



Courtesy photo

Maxine Ward was named the AIA Young Architect of the Year for 2015, in recognition both for her body of work with Studio E and also for her contributions to San Diego's architecture community and events to increase public awareness.

community."

Ireland to San Diego

The Studio E office on First Avenue was quiet on a Friday afternoon last month.

Ward was the only designer still there – most of the team clears out early, but her work hours align with her six-year-old son's school days.

He attends a project-based charter school, and Ward said she can tell he's learning about architecture by working on physical things.

As a child growing up in Northern Ireland, Ward didn't know she wanted to be an architect. She didn't build Legos, but she did always have a passion for the artistic side of things, and also for the more logical, mathematical side.

"I feel like my brain is balanced between those two," Ward said during an interview at her Bankers Hill office.

Architecture seemed like the best fit.

She studied at the Edinburgh College of Art, where degree requirements call for students to study for three years, complete an internship year, and then round out the program with another two years of classwork.

Ward spent two years at the University of Kansas, thanks to a longstanding scholarship study abroad program between the two schools, and that's where she met her husband, whom she later married in 2004. Ward also completed a semester at the Rhode Island School of Design.

Upon graduation in 1998, and after a two-year stint with a Glasgow firm, Ward moved to Palm Springs and joined Interactive Design Corp., where she worked on several affordable housing and multifamily projects, many serving migrant farmworkers.

She also loved the architecture of the mid-century, modern houses in the city, as well as the desert landscape – so different from what

she was used to.

In San Diego, after four years with the MW Steele Group and a teaching position with the NewSchool of Architecture & Design, Ward joined Studio E in 2007.

Here, she's contributed to a varied body of work, including several affordable housing projects – among them the recently completed LEED Gold Celadon at 9th & Broadway – along with charter schools and projects on university campuses.

She's served as project architect on six completed projects in the last eight years, and the AIA judges noted she's committed to a "responsible use of resources and a thoughtful understanding of place."

Ward particularly loves working on schools, and said Studio E has been lucky to have such great clients. She was the project manager and architect for High Tech High Learning's three schools on two campuses, as well as for Albert Einstein Academy's middle school in Grant Hill – a project that converted a four-story convalescent hospital into an innovative, urban charter school.

Wacky awnings over the windows presented unique challenges to this project, since it was difficult to discover how they were held up, she explained. Instead of tearing them off, they were incorporated into the perforated metal screens that provide shade, filter light and also offer a more modern look to the building.

The school spaces are open and bright, with technology integrated and spaces adaptable. "There's a lot of visual connections, which, as an architect, is something we love," she said.

Part of the thrill Ward's had during her career is seeing projects actually being completed.

"I say I'm like an all-rounder," Ward said. "I've had the experiences from the early stages right through to taking the project to construction and opening day. That's a real benefit, and I feel like I'm lucky to have that."

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Convention

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impact to eclipse \$1.2 billion, based on \$708.1 million in direct attendee spending.

"The upcoming year will be our strongest on record when it comes to attendance and room night generation, which is great news for the convention and meeting industry in San Diego in the months ahead," Carol Wallace, Convention Center president and CEO, said in a statement.

Nearly 902,400 attendees are expected to visit the Convention Center in the coming year.

Sixty-six primary citywide conventions are expected to attract 673,800 primary attendees, surpassing the 2008 record.

"Primary attendees are the most sought after as their events require overnight stays that bring greater benefits to the San Diego region," the report said. "Current numbers are

expected to increase as the year progresses."

Forty-two secondary events could draw 228,500 local and regional attendees.

About \$25.6 million in tax revenue is expected to be generated by attendees, the forecast said.

Approximately 856,000 hotel room nights are projected in 2016, beating the previous high mark set in 2003.

The forecast said medical meetings once again remain a top market. Fifteen such meetings are forecast to generate \$458.1 million in total regional impact. More than 148,000 attendees could come to these meetings, accounting for 353,700 hotel room nights and about \$9.7 million in tax revenue – all the highest figures since 2007.

Comic-Con International is expected to remain the top economic generator, bringing a \$140 million impact to the region and 130,000 attendees.

Ward

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Current projects include an affordable housing project in Talmadge, where construction should start in the first quarter, along with a new adoption center and kennels for the Helen Woodward Animal Center in Rancho Santa Fe, though fundraising is still needed. "That will be exciting when it starts," said Ward, whose family adopted a labradoodle mix from the shelter.

San Diego's Design Community

It wasn't just Ward's design portfolio that led her to be named the Young Architect of the Year.

"Good work is a key element, but we're looking for a broader spectrum of contributions of the business of design and the public's appreciation and awareness of design," said Bastiaan Bouma, executive director of AIA San Diego.

A board committee reviews the submissions – this year there were two strong candidates, Bouma said. Young is also a relative term, he said. Nominees must be AIA members and have been licensed to practice for 10 years or less. Bouma said winners of the award are typically go-getters who actively manage their careers and build their brands.

"You see people that are savvy and that are drawing attention to their work," he said.

In addition to organizing the Open House San Diego event this fall, Ward previously helped orchestrate the return of the Orchids and Onions in 2006 after a four-year hiatus.

These kinds of events not only highlight projects, but also help educate the community about what's around them.

"I think people are realizing the built envi-

ronment has a real influence on your quality of life," Ward said. "You see a lot of public health issues, walkability, greenhouse gases – I think people can't really avoid it. I think architects and planners are more outspoken, and are trying to get more involved."

About 80 volunteers helped put on the Open House event, and while Ward doesn't know how many attendees there were – she hasn't gone through the data yet – everyone that came was excited and said they'd like to do it again. The most popular site was the Lane Field Hotel, and one person even visited 10 sites, she said.

"People in San Diego are all in their little silos, their little groups, and we're trying to do work across those and do collaborations with people," she said.

De Bartolo of SDAF said it takes a certain kind of dedication and passion to not only put together such a large-scale event, but also to have such a sizeable committee of volunteers. "She gives people roles and responsibilities and allows them to shine," he said.

Ward hopes that San Diego realizes its own opportunities to be in the spotlight.

"It should look outside of itself," she said. "It should think more on an international stage."

Ward, who likes to go to dog beaches with her family and to kid-friendly beer gardens and restaurants, like South Park's Station Tavern and Quartyard in East Village, said San Diego seems to finally be "getting it."

"We have this great weather; we're creating these cool outdoor spaces where people can hang out, you can bring the family, you can drink really good beers – what's wrong with that?" Ward said. "These places exist elsewhere, and San Diego can do so much better [than them] because of the weather."

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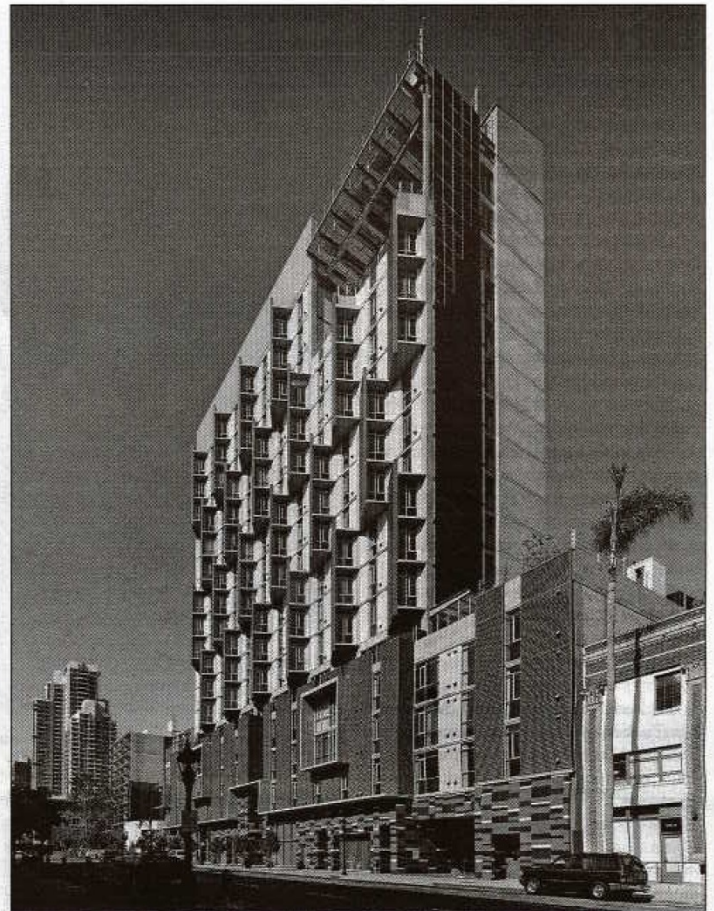


Photo courtesy Studio E

Maxine Ward of Studio E was among the team designing Celadon at 9th & Broadway, a high-rise affordable housing development that opened in May. The \$74.3 million property was developed by the nonprofit BRIDGE Housing and includes 250 affordable rental units.

El Nino

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"We've been preparing for this, especially with new projects, for months now because project schedules need to be taken into account in terms of the amount of days we can't work because of rain, and the amount of money we have to devote to storm water measures for both new and existing projects," Klein said.

"Making sure the storm water that leaves the sites is clean, according to federal, state and local environmental regulations. We do that by working with the project team, establishing a perimeter that filters the storm water before it leaves the site and any inlets on site that may discharge water into the storm drain system."

Silt fences – the orange or black three-foot-tall fence made of mesh with a plastic coating that keeps sediment on site – tend to do the trick, he said.

Klein said he's seen letters from the county to property owners warning that the Regional Water Quality Control Board is planning to increase its enforcement measures given the

predictions of higher levels of rain.

One of the secondary effects of the expected surge in precipitation that Roherty is preparing for is a backlog of equipment.

"We have one job where we have to put some big HVAC equipment up on the roof, so we have a big crane, and all that has to be done when it's dry," Roherty said. "You have a piece of equipment like that where there's only one or two in town... it requires scheduling and looking forward."

He said Pacific Building Group is typically looking at least a week or a week-and-a-half in the future at weather predictions and projects, trying to time work around the weather as best as possible.

Klein and Roherty said while they only have access to the same meteorological information as everyone else, this seems to be shaping up to be a doozy of a season.

"From what I've read from NOAA, they say it will mostly be a January through March event, and at the moment, it's the highest temperature the Pacific Ocean has been in the one section that causes the El Niño, ever," Klein said.

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