

## EXECUTIVE PROFILE

# 'It was a challenge to bring new ideas'

## YOUNG SONG ON HOW SHE'S HELPED CHANGE THE FACE OF SOUTH FLORIDA

**Y**oung Song has designed some of the most stunning municipal buildings in South Florida as she treats her architecture like an art form.

A former art student, Song is a licensed architect, interior designer and structural engineer who founded Song + Associates in 1988. It now has 25 employees in its West Palm Beach headquarters and Orlando office.

The company is best known for its local government projects, as Song said 75 percent of its work is in the public sector. Completed projects include the West Palm Beach City Hall and library, South Florida Science Center and Aquarium, Riviera Beach Marina, Manatee Lagoon FPL Discovery Center in Riviera Beach, and the LINK building at Florida Atlantic University. It has also designed numerous public schools in Broward and Palm Beach counties.

Song is now working with the cities of Palm Beach Gardens, Boca Raton and Sunrise on master plans for their municipal facilities.

**When did you realize you wanted to become an architect?** In Asian culture, the woman was not encouraged to be in the workforce. They were very much encouraged to have a higher education because they believed the woman was behind the man's success and the children's success. When I was in high school [in South Korea], my brother was a university professor in Milwaukee and visited me and he said: "I think the U.S. is a women's country. You need to come here because you will have a better life." I went to college for year and a half and transferred here. My brother said to study medicine and become a doctor or study math and become a professor. I was very good at math, but I didn't enjoy doing math. I was an artist and I always loved art. So I wanted to think of a way to use my math and art skills together. Architecture was the way.

**Was it a difficult transition to attend college in English?** Yes, it was. I'm not that talented in language. It was very difficult. What is more important is not English, it is the culture. You can't be a good architect until you understand how people live and culture and how the society works. I had hard work and a tough skin. If you didn't understand, you had to ask. I really wanted to learn, and it was a fascinating country when



Architecture was the way to use math and art skills together, Young Song says.

JOCK FISTICK

## YOUNG SONG

**Age:** 63  
**Birthplace:** South Korea  
**Residence:** Tequesta  
**Current position:** Principal in charge, Song + Associates  
**Current board:** WPBT2 Board  
**Previous boards:** 1st United Bank, Economic Council of Palm Beach County, Florida Stage, Palm Beach County Historic Preservation Board  
**Education:** University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

I came here. This is the only country in the world that would open its arms and embrace you, no matter who you are.

**What architects inspire you?** Andrea Palladio was a crafter architect in the 16th century. I learned from old architecture. Frank Lloyd Wright. I studied in the Midwest, so he was a very prominent architect. Something I struggled with in Florida is everyone thought architecture is exterior and interior design is interior, and Frank Lloyd Wright, when he designed a building, designed everything from beginning to end. He designed the furniture, he designed the rugs, he designed the landscaping. Someone I really admire and enjoy is Charles Rennie Mackintosh, a Scottish architect. That is more of the design side where I got inspired. I am inspired

by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. He is "less is more."

**How has the architecture in Palm Beach County changed over the last few decades?** Everybody will agree Florida is a little bit behind in appreciation of good architecture. Yes, everyone talks about [Addison] Mizner and Old Florida architecture, and we have a lot of mansions and vacation homes, but most of them are all in one style. It was a challenge to bring new ideas and new ways of looking at the space and bringing new materials. We made an incredible change here. I see a lot more variety of architecture and different styles. More people are open to exploring new materials now. It's a good improvement, but still a long way to go.

**Which project has been the biggest challenge of your career and how did you approach it?** The city of West Palm Beach City Hall and library and the [South Florida Science Center] museum and the two garages in the complex. ... It was a major process and a lot of challenges. ... We had as our clients city employees, elected officials and the public to work with. We did a public workshop with 440 people and they expressed how these buildings would be used. We had a lot of opposition ... so we had to deal with those political challenges ... We have not a single complaint [about the completed buildings].

**What is your favorite local restaurant?** Where I like to eat a lot is the Palm Beach Yacht Club. It's on the water, very low key, comfortable and the food is always good. Many times, we architects are working long hours and we sometimes lose how important it is to have time with colleagues and share your life. So we try to encourage having lunch together, or have happy hour and bring some wine, cheese and fruit here.

**What activities help you relieve stress?** I love watching movies and I love reading books. I like old movies like "My Fair Lady," "The King and I," and "Citizen Kane." I read a variety of books. I'm now reading all about how St. Petersburg has been built and how Russian culture was formed. Some of my favorite authors are Russian. I love Lee Child thrillers. I love skiing. And I play golf because my husband loves golf.

- Brian Bandell