

HEALTHFUL INTERIORS
NA+AA designed the Jain residence to provide a direct connection with nature, in accordance with traditional Vastu Shasta principles.



Natalye Appel + Associates Architects

ARCHITECT, TEACHER, AND CRITIC ENJOYS AN ARRAY OF PROJECTS WHILE RETAINING THE CHARACTER OF A SMALL FIRM

by Julie Edwards

As a small, collaborative partnership, Houston, Texas-based Natalye Appel + Associates Architects (NA+AA) works with projects ranging from civic, institutional, commercial, and art-related facilities to a large and varied body of residential architecture. Since its inception in 1987, the firm has achieved significant national and international recognition for its work due, in large part, to its commitment to a client-focused process and site-specific design excellence.

"Our firm is devoted to design that lifts the human spirit by its simplicity," says Natalye Appel, FAIA, principal with the firm. "Imaginative manipulation of fundamental architectural elements reveals

inherent qualities of materials, elevating forms and spaces to a position of accessible grace. Careful attention to context—including natural, physical, and social—gives our projects an appropriate sense of place."

Appel began her architectural journey more than 20 years ago, and she brings a wide diversity of experience to her practice. Since establishing NA+AA in 1987, she has produced more than 100 projects, and her work has been recognized through both national and international publications, national exhibitions, and numerous awards, including a 2010 Good Brick Award from the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance. "NA+AA

has produced a significant body of work, but our primary goal has always been to produce quality work [that is] custom designed for each individual client and site," Appel says.

A graduate of Rice University's School of Architecture in Houston, and the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Fine Arts in Philadelphia, Appel has complemented her professional career with a commitment to education, serving as both a teacher and critic at universities across Texas. In 2000, in recognition of her accomplishments in the profession and her service to the community, Appel was elevated to the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architects, a prestigious honor given to the top professionals in the field.

"A huge influence on my career direction was my education in the Schools of Architecture at Rice University and the University of Pennsylvania, where I worked with some of the best practicing architects who were also academics," Appel says. "These experiences led me into academics after graduation, where I was able to explore all types of projects with my colleagues and students while beginning a small practice of my own."

Appel says her first important commission was a beach house for her parents, completed during her



FIRST FLOOR

THIRD FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR

PHOTOS OF RESIDENCE: MARC GREEN/MGP2

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NATALYE APPEL, FAIA, PRINCIPAL



Jain Residence

Southside Place, TX

This 6,500-square-foot residence for an extended family brings together modern and traditional Indian styles. The home wraps around and under the canopy of a mature, live oak tree in the rear, while maintaining a street edge and frontality common to the neighborhood. Interior spaces and circulation are designed to provide a direct connection with nature, in accordance with the Jain religion's traditions, and materials are modern takes on Indian residential construction. Planes with punched openings alternate with column-and-lintel framing, providing contrasting views of the outside world.

first full-time teaching position at the University of Texas at Austin in the late 1980s. She also notes that this project was one that influenced many of her future projects. "My parents' beach house in Galveston, and also our latest completed house, the Sherman Ranch in Colorado County, Texas, are two projects that stand out," she says. "One is tiny, and built on sand, but has withstood a few hurricanes and served as headquarters for family gatherings for multiple generations. The other is comprised of several structures, and meanders across acres of gently rolling land covered with trees and packed with wildlife."

Appel notes that despite their scale difference, these two projects are linked for her due to their close relationship with nature and the use of ver-



nacular forms in modern compositions. "The first inspired the last and, hopefully, all of our work, as we strive to connect people with their environment," she says.

Besides specializing in residential architecture, NA+AA also has worked on art and photography spaces, religious and educational architecture, and even public art. "I believe the variety of projects we've encountered sets us apart from those who only design residences, as each project type influences the others," Appel notes.

NA+AA primarily works in Houston and the surrounding area, but Appel says she will go anywhere a project needs. "We have done everything from a federal-style townhouse renovation in Washington, DC, to a master plan for a live-work home and photo studio in the Malibu Hills of California," she says. "We love to collaborate with friends across the United States, to make things happen remotely. Our commitment is simply to make the best homes that fit our clients, no matter what the cost. It can sometimes be challenging to focus on the most appropriate choices, but we believe we do an excellent job because we strive to work with our clients on the right focus at all stages of the project."

Because NA+AA is a smaller firm, Appel says she tries to "remain flexible enough to grow a bit when needed" but strives "to stay small enough to keep the character of [the firm's] work intact." As for the future, Appel says she would love to see NA+AA's continued growth through the increasing leadership potential of her younger partners, Stuart Smith and Stephanie Millet. "Stuart is a member of a punk band in his spare time, and Stephanie is a photographer," she says, "and I love the diverse influences these extracurricular interests bring to our practice." ■