



Green By Design

BY MELEAH MAYNARD | PHOTO BY ERIC MOORE

Though Rosemary McMonigal cannot sum up her architectural style with a single signature look, she can point to one unifying trait among her firm's clients: Many of them embrace an eco-friendly lifestyle.

"Our mantra is healthy living, energy efficiency, and sustainability," says McMonigal of her six-person team that offices out of the former Grain Belt Brewery in northeast Minneapolis. "Ours is a collaborative process." Some of McMonigal Architects' clients have spent months, sometimes years, researching products to determine which kinds of paints, varnishes, and other finishes work best with their particular condition. The firm is known for taking the time to work with people who have environmental allergies or other health issues.

Inspired by the ecological movement of the late '60s and early '70s, McMonigal made being green a priority long before the term became a marketing buzzword. She enjoys working

with clients who are more interested in curbing indoor air pollution than discussing the merits of an open floor plan.

Throughout the design process, her team emphasizes the importance of using energy-efficient windows and wood from local sources rather than "exotic" wood hauled in from elsewhere. McMonigal and company also strongly advocate passive solar techniques, which help keep a home cool in the summer and warm in the winter. "We have some basic standards that we believe in," she says. "We all need to be asking questions like: What does it take to make vinyl siding, and should we be using it or going with something else like wood?"

Talking with McMonigal, who is a consummate good listener, it quickly becomes apparent that her earnest, no-nonsense approach to life came at an early age. As a child, she was always good at math and art. When the end of high school neared, she wondered what she might do that would combine those skills. "I remember I was reading a biography of an

architect at the time," she says. "In the book, he said he did a lot of math and he got to draw a lot. "I thought, Okay, I can be an architect, then."

McMonigal studied architecture and environmental design at the University of Minnesota, graduating in 1981 after five years of learning from notable professors, including modern designer Ralph Rapson. Motivated by her admiration for Finnish architect, Alvar Aalto, McMonigal applied for and won a fellowship to intern with the Finnish architecture firm, Arkkitehtitoimisto Annikki Nurminen. In 1984, after doing commercial and industrial design for just six years (including time she worked during school), she started her own firm. "I thought, I'm young, why not take a risk while I don't have much to lose? It was pretty naïve, but it worked."

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design, most of McMonigal Architects' work is residential. In addition to designing homes for Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity, the firm collaborates with the Minneapolis Public Housing Authority to improve apartment interiors and community spaces in some of the city's aging high-rises.

One of the projects McMonigal is most proud of wasn't an architecture job at all, but it brilliantly reflects her personal and professional philosophy. A few years ago, when construction of the light rail line along Hiawatha Avenue put an end to a community garden used by public housing residents, she volunteered to help find a site for a new garden. Five years and a lot of wrangling later, eager gardeners broke ground at their new site in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood. "A lot of people came together to make that happen because gardening wasn't optional for those public housing residents. It's how they raise their food," McMonigal says. "For me, it's important to do something to help people." **MH**

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