

## Zyscovich Architecture honored for service to profession

By MARILYN BOWDEN

"Architects," the Society of American Registered Architects suggests, "should be enlightened professionals sensitive to their impact on the fabric of society. Those who make positive contributions to the world around them are those who are involved in the improvement of their profession and their community."

Based on the design of the Midtown Miami project, the society gave Zyscovich Architects its 2015 Synergy Award, which recognizes outstanding service to the architectural profession.

This recognition in turn brought Zyscovich Architects a 2016 Bronze Medal for an Organization from Miami Today.

Founded in Miami in 1977, Zyscovich Architects now has satellite offices in West Palm Beach, Orlando, New York City and Bogota, Colombia.

President & Managing Partner Bernard Zyscovich, author of "Getting Real About Urbanism: Contextual Design for Cities," defines his preferred architectural style as real urbanism — a concept he says harks back to the way cities naturally develop in harmony with their location.

"Originally," he says, "urbanism was not a study. It was just done. This is especially evident in the older cities of the world: Paris looks different from

Prague, which looks different from London."

But this is not how urban places are now built in the US, says Mr. Zyscovich, where there's a tendency towards homogenization.

"Every place used to have its own character," he says, "but when you look at what is going on in the planning of cities across the country, you see a highly regulated world. I've been trying my best to break that with an attitude that's more about what we can do to create character — about who we are."

"Real urbanism is the idea that we should be looking for what is special about a place, to make the environment we live in something we enjoy."

The Midtown master plan, Mr. Zyscovich says, originated as a planning project for the City of Miami.

"The economics showed there was a demand for retail that would be able to attract the demographics of SoBe," he says. "As we began to get involved, we saw there was something missing. That was when we began to think of an inner city neighborhood that could be developed from scratch. But it was a big leap for people to imagine that there would be interest in a mixed-use residential community that was not on the water."

The 56-acre, industrially zoned tract was then owned by Florida East Coast Railway, which used it to store shipping



Photo by Marlene Quaroni

Bernard Zyscovich's firm won an architectural synergy award based on the design of Midtown Miami.

containers and was not inclined to sell. Re-zoning to mixed-use residential provided the railroad with an economic incentive; the developers who purchased the land became Zyscovich clients.

Today, Midtown Miami is one of the largest urban refill development projects in the country.

"It's not uncommon to make a new town in the suburbs," Mr. Zyscovich says, "but it's very unusual to have that opportunity in the middle of a city that's already built. Midtown was and is an incredible place that has its own character — and we made it out of nothing."



Photo by Sergio Alsina

Bernard Zyscovich accepts the award from Richard Gibbs, senior communications specialist of sponsoring Florida Power & Light Co.

## Express Travel recognized based on its multiple awards

By MARILYN BOWDEN

Express Travel was honored as one of The Commonwealth Institute's Top Women-Led Businesses in Florida in 2015, a designation based on impressive records of innovation and workplace diversity as well as significant revenue and employee numbers. The Commonwealth Institute is a nonprofit devoted to advancing businesswomen in leadership positions in Massachusetts and Florida.

Express Travel President & CEO Olga Ramudo also accepted the 2015 Executive of the Year award from the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce.

For these achievements, Express Travel is the winner of a Bronze Award for an Organization in Miami Today's 2016 Gold Medal competition.

Express Travel has grown to its present stature from humble beginnings, Ms. Ramudo says. After she worked as an independent contractor for a small travel agency, she and her sister opened their own travel agency in 1989, working from a garage.

"Later," she says, "we added a third partner. That warranted going out and acquiring commercial office space."

Today, having navigated through major changes in the industry brought about by online booking sites as well as fluctuations in the economy, Express

Travel engages 31 employees working in corporate, leisure, groups and meetings, cruise and study abroad departments.

"The key to staying in business," Ms. Ramudo says, "is being quick, having knowledge and adding value to the services you offer. We offer everything from negotiations and reporting to online booking tools, so that even during the recession years we were able to grow."

Innovations introduced along the way, she says, went considerably further than training programs for new agents.

"We established exclusive offers through our consortium for our customers," Ms. Ramudo says. "We have kept up with the available technology and retained our great staff."

"In this industry you have to keep moving ahead or you're behind. There is no such thing as staying stagnant."

Workplace diversity, she says, is built in. "Express Travel is totally Hispanic- and woman-owned and is an equal-opportunity employer. It's a very open company."

Ms. Ramudo's involvement in the community is extensive and has included two consecutive appointments to the US Travel & Tourism Board by the US Secretary of Commerce. She sits on the boards of the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce; Camacol, the Latin chamber of commerce; and Ana



Photo by Marlene Quaroni

Express Travel President and CEO Olga Ramudo said she started the 31-person company in her garage.

G. Mendez University of Puerto Rico. She chairs the Hispanic Initiatives Committee for the National Tour Association and is a commission-appointed member of Miami-Dade's Tourism Development Council as well as an executive committee member for the Beacon Council.

"I think," she says, "it's important to give back. I love my city, and I love promoting it. I don't know how to do things halfway. I do things full-blast or not at all. That does get your name out there. So you are giving back and at the same time receiving something in return."



Photo by Sergio Alsina

Olga Ramudo accepts the award from Carmen Betancourt-Lewis.