AMT Landscape\_Arch

[00:00:00]

**Anna:** Thank you. Thank you so much, ma ci, well, my name is Anna Maria Torres, and I am an architect. It's what I have been. And I, um, And I love to be an architect. I am originally from Spain and I have been practicing in, in New York for quite a while. And before, um, before I create AT architects with my firm, I was working actually with Deanna Balmori a landscape architecture firm, and I worked with her for eight years.

And that was quite interesting. Um, how to. See things from different perspective. Um, then, uh, that was quite interesting then. Yeah. I define myself as an architect because I believe that architecture embraces, if you are open to it, a lot of things and can allow it to, develop investigate it. Uh, different aspects [00:01:00] of the city, of the space of the light, whatever you are interested.

**Maci:** Right. You, you think. Architecture could be one thing, but for you to say, actually it's many things is good for landscape architects to hear. I think we are very, we're so similar, but we're so different as disciplines.

So when you were working with Balmori and having that, what was that shift may, was there a moment that you thought, oh, these can work together really well? Or was that something you always thought.

**Anna:** \Well, actually, it was kind of interesting because, uh, when I was in Spain before coming here, uh, I came to United States because I was writing.

I got, um, , a special, uh, Fulbright, uh, to come to write about Isamu Noguchi. And my PhD was on Isamu Noguchi open spaces and gardens [00:02:00] then, um, then I was kind of fascinated for me how he was so amazing and masterfully. Uh, work with a scale and how he connected his gardens. There were sculptures, there were no gardens for his point of view and, um, connected and put in a perfect scale with the architecture next to it without no.

Making this monumental gesture sometimes with very small kind of human scale and it's in a perfect harmony. Then I think I was kind of intrigued because I was really an, I am still in love with his work and I think he was a pioneer. And he is, if you tell him that he create a garden, he will tell you no, he create sculpture.

But if you see it, it was a garden or a Plaza, or in addition to his other regular [00:03:00] sculptures, then I think that is kind of how working with Deanna it was a plus it was like another layer added to what I was already curious about it.

**Maci:** That's very cool. I feel like that. I don't wanna say lucky, cuz obviously you cared about it and you were drawn to it.

But I think that's really fortunate that you had these layered experiences of being able to be interested in something and then dive in a little bit deeper in your career, not separate, right? Like it was in your career. So then now that you have your own firm, can you tell us a little bit about your firm philosophy?

**Anna:** Well, uh, I will try to do my, to do my rest, to do my rest. Well, I, for me, I think it's very important. This concept of layering, you know, [00:04:00] um, then I understand then I try to what is kind of interesting and difficult. If you see my office, my office is full of. Plants and trees.

**Maci:** I saw pictures on your website that had like, I was like, oh my gosh.

**Anna:** Well, you, you, you see, you see here, , it's real. , it's a real plant. It's a real plant. I think it's important. And we trying to really strongly, uh, communicate to our clients and more especially. What happened a couple of years ago, how important the outdoor space has to be connected with the indoor space.

How important is to have that possibility in a city like New York, then know everybody, eh, have a chance to have. Penthouse or, uh, roof Terrace or anything of like that. If you can, when you do, uh, even with a [00:05:00] smaller apartment, if it's any possibility, then you create an outdoor space then can be useful with meaningful intention.

I think that that is, um, very important. Then I think that is kind of. The philosophy of trying to. If I love to have plants in my office, I really trying to encourage my clients not to have a tree in their house, but to understand, and to have a, you know, a garden or, or small possibility. For example, we managing one apartment here in, um, in Manhattan, uh, facing the park where it was beautiful.

We managed to put a small vertical air garden in the living. That's lovely because it was to demonstrate, we work with a farmer and it was to try to show them, then it will make the environment of the apartment [00:06:00] cleaner. It will make the environment, the air, everything. And we have this mix of herbs to, um, Not just from aesthetic point of view, but it was really trying to make an statement.

Then you can have something that is alive, um, then is no very high maintenance and can bring you not only beauty, but also can bring you health. Then I think. In a very long way of explaining. I think that is kind of the philosophy. The philosophy is that we need to take care of our environment. We need to be mindful of what we do.

We need to be mindful of how we design other spaces because somebody else is going to live in it. And I think we forget sometimes how. We are conditioned how our [00:07:00] emotions or our moods are conditioned by the space. Then we are living on it. Then if you have enough light, if you have a little bit of outdoor space, you always will be more rich.

**Maci:** I wanted to go back to something you said about when you have your client and you're trying to show them or teach them how important it is to incorporate green space and green living or green elements.

Can you talk a little bit about that process? Because I think in the world of landscape architecture, we, when, you know, not every client has those values or even just understanding. Why it's important to value green space. So I was just curious if you have some of those same experiences

**Anna:** yeah, of course.

And more in New York where real estate and everybody wants to maximize their. You know, the living quarters because they can sell it [00:08:00] more. It will be with will provide, will have more profits. Um, but eh, sometimes, eh, slowly, slowly, I think. You know, I think I will separate the client, the clients, and we have some are private clients. And then we have the developers clients, the private clients, of course you are more constrained. About their, uh, where is, are already an apartment and it's already set up or a building that is already set up, then it has more constraints.

I have done a, a roof garden in Harlem, um, because yes, they were passionate about it, but at the same time, I remember then we walk into, I walk into the brownstone and they were talking about yes, but you know, the brownstone, they only have light in the front and in the back and nothing on the side, then it was like, I looked the space.

I said, you know, why. Why we don't [00:09:00] create the bald head of the stair completely glass. And then we do the stair kind of perforated metal. Then the, the light kind of goes through. Then you can go and enjoy the roof. Then it was kind of, oh, wow. Fascinating. Then I, then all of a sudden the roof became a part of the project.

 Then that, then it was easier to say, wow, now you have the roof to be entertained. Then that it's kind of give them options. I will say options. And sometimes they didn't, uh, thought about it like we are doing right now. A building a small building, a five story building again in Harlem, but it's a church it's owned by a church.

We were all very kind of, enthusiastic we, we want to use the roof. Yeah. and they were looking at me like, wow. The roof say, yes, [00:10:00] imagine you can. Have weddings, you have your wedding in your sanctuary, and then you bring the party to the roof. And that can be also an income from, for the church.

And if your members, and if your private space, then it gives you more options and more possibilities. Then I feel sometimes is if you present things, um, And maybe a little bit unconventional and give options. Sometimes they say yes, because they didn't thought about that option or they didn't feel then that option was possible.

Uh, in that particular case.

Yes. I think, um, you know, as designers exactly, that's what they, the client hopefully is coming to you for not. because they need someone, but they've chosen you for your ideas. Where do you think that line is between a person presenting new ideas and then slightly business [00:11:00] development?

Because like you just mentioned a whole new business plan for them that no, they never thought about before. And we do that all the time. But how much of that factors into the. Design process. And I know this is, that's probably a little off topic from what we're gonna talk about later, but it, I am just curious about it, cuz that was a brilliant idea.

 But you're not gonna get any credit for that. You know, when they're getting, when they get all of those like wedding venue requests, which is fine, that's why we do it. But it's also, it's a weird line. I feel like.

You know yeah. I, in that way, in that way, You know, the business gets a little bit out of the window, at least on my end.

You know, it's like you give the idea because you are passionate about it. And because really I want to use the roof

a little bit more money because I need to so on the roof. Oh yeah, that's true. You're. It pays for itself when I, [00:12:00] and I need to bring the stirs up and I need to bring the elevator up. I need to get a little bit more budget than because I need to get a little bit more budget than, um, no, you know, sometimes how works personally.

I only can work from personally. Mm. I love what I do. And, uh, because I love oops. We lost very much. And, uh, because I love what about what I do. Um,

it's what is good for the project? Yeah. It's what is good for the client then? Yeah, I will get the credit eventually because the project was well done. Right. And then, then everybody is happy and hopefully they are going to, um, Refer me to some place else. But I think for me, the really importance is that I manage to make it happen.

**Maci:** Okay. So then [00:13:00] now, so if you worked on the roof, you get to try and make as much green space as possible in your firm.

Do you have landscape architects or do you work with landscape architects often? Uh, We have been doing both. We have been. And sometimes we have, because in the firm, sometimes I have graphic designers depends on what is happening. And, but also we collaborate. We collaborate not only with landscape architects, with all my respect to them, but sometimes I collaborate with farmers.

Oh yeah. You know, and I collaborate with, a biologist and I collaborate with. You know with other different trades, not just a, a landscape architect, for example, this green wall. And I was telling, uh, you about it was with a farmer. With a farmer and she had an organic farmer and she loved plants and she was very holistic.

And that is how she determined the planting we were putting. How was the layout? [00:14:00] How was this? How was that? And that is how, um, You know, that is how that project, for example, moved forward and she met the client C cetera, I have, we have another project. This is the reason I was in Europe, in, in France.

Then I work with a biologist for a garden in the north of, uh, one hour from Paris, there is an assisting garden and to how we can save the trees, how it needs to replant, what you know, then, um, It depends. I work with landscape architects with clients and they say, we are very interested in working with this landscape architect and, you know, you need to team out with him or with her, then it's fine.

 It's actually, you always learn. More, you have more opinions, you have more, uh, different ways of doing things. Um, different ways of thinking, and you can [00:15:00] maybe sometimes agree or not agree, but if the person that you are working with is sensitive enough and is, um, and is creative enough, always will bring something interested to the table.

**Maci:** I also feel. Landscape in particular, I think lends itself to all of those different disciplines, right? Farming, biology, horticulture, of course, you know, but even to like music and poetry, and I think there's a lot of influences that can happen in the design world

you kind of don't know who you're getting. I think you can't just say, oh, a landscape architect can help with this project. Um, I think it goes deeper than that. Like you said, if someone's creative enough, then you know, working with them, you're always learning something.

but have you had bad experiences working with landscape architect?

**Anna:** No. Listen, you always have bad experiences. for sure.

Not only with landscape architect. Oh yeah. Contractor with an architect with an engineer. [00:16:00] Sometimes you have, and is what it is. then a, you make the rest of it, but nothing you can do about it. Yeah. That's true. Yeah. Going to happen. Right. You're like contract is signed. I will just, then it we'll we'll work together.

We'll figure it out. Do you let me figure it out, but we'll figure it out. Yes, please. Don do something terribly ugly.

But also one of the things that is beautiful about your, you know, will say your, um, Expertise or your history and the history working with the land and with the farmers and everything is tradition. The practice and the history, the landscape has is quite a very rich in itself.

At the firm I work for our principal, she is our history teacher from our master's program.

Mm-hmm . And so she was probably one of the first people that also helped me, understand [00:17:00] the tradition of working with land is landscape architecture, whether it be gathering under a tree, whether it be farming, whether. Be, you know, a porch, you know, that the tradition of blending outside and people mm-hmm is something that we've been doing for a long time.

Yeah. I think what your firm is doing is a huge undertaking if I'm being quite honest, but also I'm young in the field. I've only been working for a couple years, so I don't know, but it seems like there's a big challenge with integrating all of that, you know, like beautiful, poetic, holistic approach.

 I asked about the clients, but what are some of the other challenges, you know, something that maybe you've experienced that was a deterrent, like what did you go through? And you said, Nope, I'm still, this is still the way it needs to be. This is still the way we should practice.

**Anna:** Well, sometimes not all the clients, like what you say, and then they don't become your clients.

You know what I [00:18:00] mean? Sometimes, uh, they look at you and say, but it's not what I am looking for. I am looking what my neighbor has. And then you, it's your decision. It's completely your decision. If you want to say I am no. Have the capacity to build where your neighbor has. Eh, and I'm sorry, and this is the idea that I have, I just have, for example, a client and I did, um, a garden and a kind of a pool area with a cabana.

And then she saw it and she wanted exactly that this,

, and then I say, listen, I'm, don't even going to give you a contract. I am going to give you an idea. And then if you like the idea, then we move forward. If you don't like the idea, then my idea was very. I thought that really work with the wall with the, with the, with the space, because she had a very interesting [00:19:00] backyard with, uh, actually with a little lake then she was facing on the side, but kind of narrow.

Then my approach was more like a creating, moving the land, creating amount of, uh, of air, creating a playground a little bit later, which moving the earth, opening up to the. To the lake and, but then didn't work. It was not sexy enough. You know what I mean? Then sometimes that happens, but you need to only, you committed efficient.

If many people circumstances are in play. Know, you, everybody has obligations. Everybody has things. And, um, then yes, not everybody likes what you say. I know everybody likes what I say. everybody thinks then is the right approach, uh, is not maybe a profit oriented sometimes, [00:20:00] uh, to the maximum, then they say no.

What kind of advice do you think you'd have for designers, landscape or otherwise, and architectural about practicing with an interdisciplinary approach? What can they do to keep pushing forward?

I think that, I think one of the most important thing is of course, if you are really are passionate about what you have. And I think one fin is important, even though everybody has its CI ego. And you know, maybe the people that work for me, they will say, please, she only does what she wants to do. And she doesn't do anything else.

 which is totally true, but, um, I think sometimes it have the possibility to listen and then you can say, I say, no, it's not. I don't like it, or it shouldn't be this for this, for this, for that. Or have the possibility to give your, your [00:21:00] ideas with a reason why you think then this is work. Not because you say so

 And believe then the other person, if you're working in a team, the other person can improve. Your design sometimes can happen then a difficulty, uh, kind of a difficulty makes impossible to build what you thought at the beginning. And then that difficulty makes you to think more than your next approach is much better and more successful then, um, I think it's kind of to be.

Open to listen and you, because you always have the opportunity to say no.

**Maci:** As women, I feel like we've run up against a lot of, you know, toxic masculinity, you know, like someone calling to tell us that they just wanna use us as the token, women firm, because they need it for, credits [00:22:00] or they.

We're surprised that our stuff was so good because we were like this smaller firm and a lot of like condescending talk and it feels like a very sexist thing. It doesn't feel like a skill level thing, but I'm wondering if you've ever encountered that. And if you have, I'm sure you have. Right. And I just want us to talk about it a little bit because you know, a lot of the designers coming out are women, right?

Like they're identify as women and, and yeah, yeah.

**Anna:** Dealing with, unfortunately you get it. Yeah. And every is, is just sometimes it's very tiring and, um, Yeah, you, I it's, unfortunately, but you get it and you get it in a many different aspect. I have been getting it and no, very, not very, no, no, far away.

Sometimes the office have.[00:23:00] Sometimes I have a mix. Sometimes it's only women. Sometimes it's only men sometimes, you know, whatever. And I remember going to a job site beginning of construction. And it was coming with the person that was working on that project and, um, and then all a sudden, somebody was asking, we were ready.

I was interviewing the drawings, da da, da, da. And then one of the contractors asked him what, who will give the, okay. After this is done, then all they want turn around and say, he will do it. Then I turn around. I say, no, he works for me. I will do it. Then that is a constant, you know, I am the one that get the sweethearts.

Yeah. When I go to your site, sweetie and honey, the sweetheart, like what. My name, you know, and then I don't, even at this point, get angry. I just say, listen, [00:24:00] happy. Then you call me Anna, Anna, Anna Maria. Very happy. Don't have any problem, sweetheart. Honey is for my husband and my friends. , I say, please call me Anna. Anna Maria is fine. Don't have any problem. Right. that is it's. Yeah. It's really unfortunate. And you have it when still, when you have meeting with a structural engineer with this, and then they see, and then it's a small firm and a woman they begin very oh yeah, yeah. Now and yeah, I don't think we have pass that yet. Yeah. I agree. Eventually, uh, things will maybe change, but I think also sometimes society right now feels a little bit that we are going backwards. Oh, in many ways. Yep. I agree. yep. Then he, then he feels like, how [00:25:00] is possible? All the effort, all the rat of this. And now we are like, what? Going backwards.

Yeah. 10, 20, 25 years backwards. And. How the presenting the film and in the movies and in this like, seriously, we are allowing this to happen.

**Maci:** I feel like in both architecture and landscape architecture, I feel like women have very similar experiences because I think the culture around how we're supposed to work and perform is very closely tied to a male, like societal standard, even though I think we.

Have so much to offer in holistic thinking and creativity and different perspectives. Um, not to say that men don't right. Like, I just think that we have so much to offer, but. Think the numbers are pretty staggering on how many women leave the field [00:26:00] before they reach, you know, like leadership roles or years it's like,

**Anna:** yeah, because it has been, you know, it's for some, it is, you know, we have inconvenience, we have children, we get emotional.

Um, And then there are different cases for different people, but they are list from a level of the architecture firms. There are very little architecture firms I am talking about in the, the ones. And they are say the more prominent ones. Mm-hmm, the ones. And they are in the hundred people staff. Then they have women.

They are very limited amount of women on, on, on. Partially because even the, the, the firms facilitate for the women to stay home or when they have kids to facilitate for the men to stay in place. And I think that is the mistake. I think the mistake is that the, when, when you are judging the people by their [00:27:00] sex and instead of, uh, judging them by they're a human being, then yeah, show me, then you are a human being with capacity.

Then you are a human being with capacity. if you have the capacity, I want to work with you. If you don't have the capacity, I don't want to work with you we just, judging you. Are you, are you have integrity? Do you have loyalty? Do you have a creativity? That is how you will judge as a human being. Yes. And especially in the, when we're designing. For people, right? Like that seems like the, the logical step is to say we are people and we're more than designers, but also the fact that we are designers.

Gives us a way to contribute our life experiences back into the world in a built way. You know, we're able to incorporate our world into like someone else's everyday world. And that brings [00:28:00] me to my, one of my last questions, which is actually that since we are more than just our jobs, you know,

**Anna:** thank, god.

**Maci:** What? Yeah. Like, so then. What other things in the world do you enjoy? Maybe it influences your perspective on design. Maybe it doesn't, but I'd love to hear more about Anna Maria.

**Anna:** I love to travel and travel is one of the things that then I always inspire me to, you know, when I travel and I come back, I always have these ideas.

Uh, traveling gives me that sense of, um, Possibilities then traveling, discovering things, kind of, you know, a bit like a child in front of a can store. Woo. I want try that. I wanna try that.

then, um, I think travel is one of the most, most important thing. And the other thing is [00:29:00] seeing. The creativity in others, the amazing, um, drive like a person like a Nachi or Marham, or they have, and nobody couldn't stop them and nobody could, um, you know, even they were breaking barriers, they have different races, they have different point of view.

Nobody could. Tell them and they couldn't do what they were doing. And, um, and I think that is that fascinates me, that, that determination of an and a need to do what you have to do and nobody can stop you. I think that is, I think that fascinates me and I love that. I love that too, because I think one of my favorite.

I don't know if there's an [00:30:00] emotion for it. One of my favorite emotions is feeling in awe of someone else. Mm-hmm whether it be their work or maybe just their personhood. I love that feeling of just looking at someone and saying you're amazing. You're so cool. And wow, I'm so lucky to be able to. See that and experience that, you know?

And travel travel does that for me, especially for small scale. Things like someone's home, someone's garden, some artisan, you know, they're doing something that I've never seen before, and it's only in this one spot and I may never see that again, you know, so you're like, I gotta enjoy it.

**Anna:** Yeah, totally. No, I think it's very important and not so only that, um, Uh, it's so much, like, for example, a person like, uh, um, you know, James for example, and yeah, he's very big, but when you have the opportunity to [00:31:00] talk with him and kind of begin to see he's so many things. To learn, you know? Yeah. So many things to learn is like, wow, wow.

He has that. That is the way he's thinking. Wow. I really never thought about that in that way. You know, I remember I, um, And I don't want to try to belong, but I, we did, uh, a, I organized a conference in, in the, you know, all these, uh, fairs are first and they have one in Madrid every year or couple of years Arco.

And I invite actually a mix of people. I have an architect, I have a client, I have an artist with Marjetica . I have, um, Sculpture then in, it was two round tables or four people, and each one was different disciplines in talking about, um, talking about [00:32:00] basically kind of. Everything and nothing but everything together.

And it was so interesting because Maria was propo was showing her point of view and she works a lot on the more at the beginning of her work, a lot of kind of investigating and reviewing the SLS of the cities. Like it will say the barriers in Brazil, the, the Han towns in, Johannesburg all of that and how it was constructed then?

Yeah, it was poverty, but then she was showing and how she was showing it was. And it's beautiful. And, and she was like, look at her. It's beautiful. And in her round table, it was sitting there, the Spanish architect, Carmen Pinos, I dunno if you heard of her, she was furious. She was,

people is suffering and Marjetica will looking at her [00:33:00] and you need to. Two women, one very Latino , dark hair, you know, with the gestures of the Spaniards and from Slovenia, very small, totally blonde blue eyes. Totally like it Marjetica with no, no point of emotion say, but I see it as a beautiful thing because I see them, they are resourceful.

Then they. Go and convert it and make them their own by painting it. And pink and car was like a, because you think then you paint in pink then do you think it's beautiful? The poverty doesn't disappear because it's pink. You know what I mean? Then it was interesting to see how the same. From one, it was a sense of inspiration and beautiful beauty because it was a sense of inspiration.

And she had that completely logic to why [00:34:00] without no minimizing the hardship from a society point of view or the hardship of the people, she was not trying to not make fun or no. Um, minimize how hard it was for the people to live on. But from a point of view of aesthetics, a point of view, a new way of living, a point of view, of new ways of creation.

She had her logic and for Carmen was like, this is unbearable. You cannot have people living under these conditions, you know? Yes. Um, yeah, I think that is kind of that I think is the most important part of the. Yeah. Of the interaction between people, the, yeah. The different exposures and different perspectives.

Critical even if they make you angry, I think it's so important. after you go to have a drink of wine. Yeah's fine. That's fine. [00:35:00] Um, okay, so then I have two more questions and you can answer them together or not. Um, one is what is something. Within the industry, whether it be design, architecture, landscape, whatever, are you excited about?

**Maci:** Whether it's a project or, or an idea, and then what's something not in the industry at all, something else that's just Ana Maria interest level. What are something you're excited about?

**Anna:** Okay. Well, I dunno if it's in the industry or not, but I am interested. I have an interested for some time in writing children's book.

**Maci:** Yes. I love that. I love that about,

**Anna:** but about artists, no, about architect, but about artists. Yeah. Um, then I am curious, even though I am taking a class just to motivate myself I love it then. [00:36:00] Yeah, I think I am beginning my class. I don't know how I'm going to do it, but I think I am beginning my class in a couple of weeks or so.

**Maci:** You'll do it. You'll figure it out the time.

**Anna:** Really? I do this. I cannot wait. You have to tell me, you have to tell me how it goes. Update me. Yeah, I have been trying to, you know, I, I have imagined this children book, then it has a popup in the and a sculpture is going to show up, whatever in the center and fascinating for the kids book, but I like books then, then I think that is.

And then the only thing is kind of related. And then I am excited because I am meeting to more and more and more collaborating with, with other things, with other people in different parts of the world. Then, it kind of, I like that. I, we are right now [00:37:00] collaborating. We have been, we have been collaborating with a foundation in, Dubai doing carpets.

Now we are collaborating with another architecture firm and design in Portugal. Then, um, we are beginning to collaborate with another client of ours in France. Then is this idea of to trying to find connections, then you can begin. Maybe something that's small, maybe it's nothing major, but, uh, it kinda invested, I think at this point I want to interact with people.

Yes. Yeah. I feel like, especially after the past couple years it's been, I crave people and I love that we're more globally connected than ever before. And it's an opportunity for us and I, I think we would be. Upset with ourselves later down the line. If we didn't [00:38:00] try to work with as many people and as many disciplines as we could, uh, you know, from around the world.

**Anna:** Maybe you try, we travel together.

**Maci:** Yeah, let's do it. I'm so I need to update my passport. That's the only thing I have to do.

Um, Good to go. Yeah.

**Anna:** We can find a project and do something. Hey, we can organize this and this. And then we will go to some place. Yes. Let's have an idea. Share it and we will figure out how to make it happen. Anytime. Anytime that sounds good. Thank you. Was very nice meeting you and talking with you. Nice talking with you.

Have a great day. You too. Bye bye. Bye bye.