

Making Waves: Architects Think Deeper. Members of AIA Florida Southwest Consider Many Elements



Designing and building a home in Southwest Florida requires special attention to the elements here. "In South Florida, it is time to take a good look at how we design and construct buildings and homes that combat the greenhouse effect, are more resilient and, inevitably, more sustainable for the future," says Joyce Owens, award-winning architect and

a principal at [Architecture Joyce Owens](#), aka Studio AJO.

Owens is also director at large and regional representative of the [American Institute of Architects \(AIA\) Florida](#), which helps provide resources and education to architects on pertinent topics. AIA advocates for architects and takes stands on issues such as climate change, equity, diversity and inclusion, school design and safety, infrastructure and more. Headquartered in Washington DC, AIA has more than 200 chapters around the world. The organization was founded in 1857 by 13 architects; it now has 95,000 members.

“The benefits of AIA membership are extensive and wide ranging,” says Matt Tinder, senior manager of media relations for AIA. Beyond legislative advocacy at the federal, state and local level, Tinder explains, AIA membership offers networking and access to continuing education courses; it supports architects in their careers and enhances their practices, advances the architecture profession and connects members to exclusive resources, along with opportunities to drive real, transformative change. “AIA Membership offers architects vital resources at every stage of their career,” adds Tinder.

The local chapter, AIA Florida Southwest, is an all-volunteer group made up of and run by architects from Lee, Collier, Charlotte, Glades and Hendry counties. AIA members network, socialize and are recognized for their outstanding designs. They participate in continuing education, lecture series and other events for architects. They also advocate with policymakers on the local and state level and are committed to designing better buildings and environments for our society, country and planet.

“There’s plenty of talk about climate these days, and lots of questions are being asked about the effects of greenhouse gases,” says Owens, who designs modern homes, commercial spaces and minimalist interiors. Climate change is of utmost concern in her designs.

Studio AJO buildings both passively and actively respond to the climate and rising sea levels; for example, AJO buildings are elevated, which creates opportunities for shaded exterior areas below houses, increasing livable, usable space outdoors. "Now that we are home more often, it's a huge bonus. It's like free real estate," adds Owens.

Orientation is also critical to maximize daylight but minimize sunlight, and glazed openings ensure there is a connection to the outside. These areas need deep overhangs to shelter them from the hot sun. Also vital is a cross breeze to reduce the dependency on mechanical systems such as air conditioning units, resulting in reduced energy use.

What must also be considered is the weather specific to Southwest Florida. "Construction practices must respond to South Florida's humid and wet climate where the sun can melt a roof, and the wind and rain can blow at 170 miles per hour," notes Owens. Buildings must be strapped together and tied to the ground to minimize the damage caused by strong winds, she explains. Impact glass in doors and windows resist flying debris that can and will smash into them with incredible force. It's not just potential weather events that architects need to consider; the year-round weather also plays a big role. "A humid climate can wreak havoc and rot any house, large or small, so a thorough understanding of correct materials and proper waterproofing can prevent decay," adds Owens.

It makes economic sense to design and construct low-maintenance and energy-efficient structures built for longevity and a sustainable future. It saves maintenance costs in the long run, reduces running costs and deters insurance companies from increasing premiums when buildings become a risk in this fluctuating climate situation. Studio AJO is committed to these practices that fall into the larger vision of AIA.

AIA's Statement of Values

- We stand for equity and human rights.

- We stand for architecture that strengthens our communities.
- We stand for a sustainable future.
- We stand for protecting communities from the impact of climate change.
- We stand for economic opportunity.
- We stand for investing in the future.
- We speak up, and policymakers listen.



FOR MORE INFO

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