

P&H

POWERHOUSE MAVEN

*Michelle Todd*

**You're a Powerhouse Maven.** You represent what PHM stands for. You are powerful and an expert in your field. You have demonstrated proven success and influence and your work speaks for itself - so you don't have to. *The present and future is female and she is and will always be a Powerhouse. - CWM*

*featuring*

**MICHELLE TODD**

ARCHITECT



# Michelle Todd is a designer of grand things. Her most notable work is indeed her legacy.

Since 2008, Michelle has served as the Principal and Owner of M. Todd Architect, LLC. She is a distinguished African American architect and dynamic woman who has created architecturally rewarding residential, commercial and public spaces for over 24 years that reflect her expertise and who she is at her core.

*“I have evolved my architecture business to coincide to sustainability practices to combat climate change and share the knowledge with my clients and their projects.”*

## Highlights:

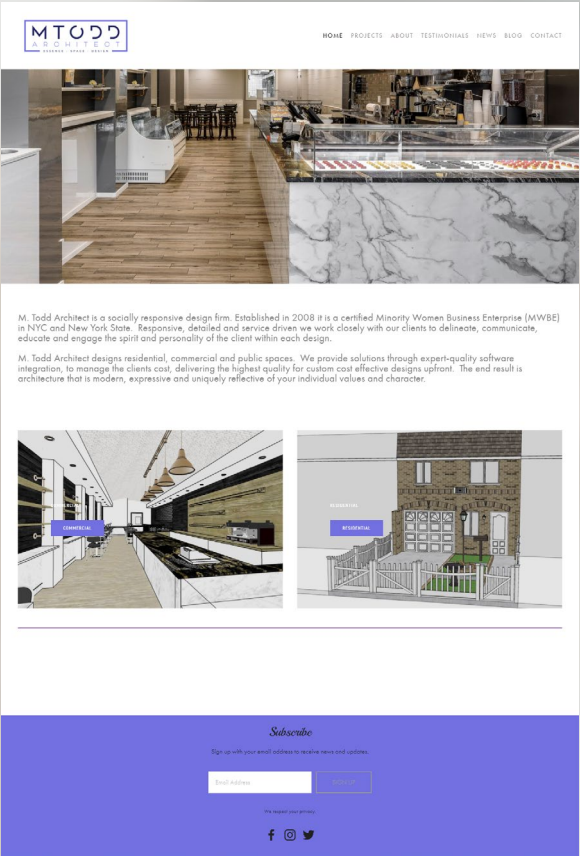
- ◆ Serves as director for her local AIA COTE (Committee on the Environment) / Brooklyn Chapter and as a thought leader for the AIA National Regional in Urban Design Committee and assisting her local community in redistricting mapping for the 56th district.
- ◆ Licensed in New York State and certified as a Minority Women Business Enterprise (MWBE) on the state and city level.

**Notable Projects include:** Office of Emergency Management in Brooklyn, NY; Commercial Bakery Renovation in Astoria, Queens, NY; Residential Brownstone Renovations in Brooklyn, NY (\$2.8M project); Residential Apartment Renovation in Harlem, NY (\$1M project); provide renovation services for Snapple in Red Hook, Brooklyn, NY, and more.

**Edification:** Michelle holds a B.A and B.S. of Architecture from City College of the City University of New York; and a Master's of Science in Architecture and Urban Design from Columbia University, Graduate School of Architecture Planning and Preservation in which her group won the Master of Science Architecture & Urban Design Program, GSAPP Prize for Excellence in Urban Design (1995). She attended the École des Beaux-Arts de Fontainebleau, France.

For more information, visit [www.mtoddarchitects.com](http://www.mtoddarchitects.com).





*Her brand*

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**When did your love of Architecture develop?**

It developed from my environment growing up in Brooklyn, New York Bedford Stuyvesant which at that time was known for having slums, abandoned and burnt-out buildings. I had a creative imagination and would think and design buildings I would place in those abandoned spaces. This experience guided me in the realm to learn more about architecture and become an architect.

**The École des Beaux-Arts de Fontainebleau, France. Is a program that helps students discover new ways of visualizing and creating architecture. What did you gain from your attendance and how do you apply it to your overall esthetic of design and conceptualization?**

Attending the Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Fontainebleau broaden my perspective of architecture by exposing me to other realms of the arts such as sculpture, photography, sketching and planning. Attending the Ecole des Beaux Arts exposed me to French culture, but also other students from other European countries and broaden my outlook to other cultures and how they lived. This experience is why I base my business mantra of Essence, Space and Design by observing and encompassing the spirit of the client, their vision and applying it to the space or project they want to design into reality that goes beyond their expectations.

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**Do you find it hard to turn off your design brain when traveling and find yourself often standing in spaces considering what you would have done differently?**

Personally, when I travel, I truly just take in in all the surroundings. I find it fascinating to be in spaces that so much thought, care and detail went into it the design and just appreciate what the designer was trying to convey. I respect other designers and their visions because that is what makes us all unique and impactful in this world.

**What is a project, in the U.S. or abroad, that you didn't work on but wish you had?**

The ROOKERY Building is a historic landmark building in Chicago completed by architects John Wellborn Root and Daniel Burnham in 1888. It has a unique construction style of exterior load bearing walls and interior steel frame and considered one of the oldest standing high-rises in Chicago. However, the interior ground floor space is so amazing and just makes one say WOW!!!! Having those reactions from people at all ages and generations is so impactful and why I wish I had worked on it.

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**As a woman and an African American in your industry, did you encounter much negativity when you first started as a minority in a field dominated by people who didn't look like you?**

Yes, I encountered a lot of negativities from the profession because there were hardly any women who looked like me and encountering individuals who felt I did not know what I was talking about and really downplayed my experiences and knowledge. Today the industry has improved but it still has a long way to go. Currently in the United States, there are 532 licensed African American women architects out of a total of 113,554 licensed architects which is 0.46 percentage! The industry must do better.

**Outside of your career, what is life like?**

I have a very quiet life. When I am not working, I am enjoying time with good family and friends and experimenting cooking vegan dishes. I enjoy running and am training to do 10ks in the future. I do volunteer work in my local community and other organizations close to my heart.

**Any hobbies or other ways you explore your creative side?**

A hobby I enjoy is photography especially black and white photography because it trains my eyes to really place my subjects in the perfect lighting to convey the feeling at that moment in time. This helps me to take time to see things with more clarity and detail which are useful skills as an architect.



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**What is one lesson you may have learned the hard way, that you would share with a new graduate in your field currently entering the workplace for the first time?**

While you are still in school, obtain some work experience either an internship or part time job in the field before you graduate. I was so focused on getting my college degrees that when it came time for me to find employment, I could not find anything for 7 months because everywhere I applied stated I did not have any work experience. The concept of a gap year I feel is so important to have, to not only get some work experience before you graduate, but also to see if you really like this profession or not.

**In your own opinion, what is your superpower?**

My superpower is patience. My capacity to accept or tolerate delays, trouble or suffering without getting angry or upset truly sums up what I have experienced in my professional life to get me to this point. It has not been easy, but it has aided me to build my character and my business to a level where I take that superpower and apply it to my clients and other areas of my life.

**As a Powerhouse Maven, what are you most proud of and tell us about any upcoming projects?**

I am most proud that I created my own architecture business. I took a leap of faith in myself to offer my skills and knowledge to individuals who needed help to make their own visions come true from a design standpoint. My upcoming projects are geared toward green architecture/design which minimizes the harmful effects on human health and the environment which is a topic so relevant in today's post COVID world.

My upcoming portfolio of work entails solutions with the use of green design for landmark buildings, new additions, and urban design. I am also very proud of being co-director of the local AIA (American Institute of Architects) Brooklyn Chapter and assisting the creation of the COTE Committee (Committee of the Environment) it is a passionate topic that I described in my own practice and hope to share and have other members in our chapter to share and be a part of. I am also excited to be a member of the National AIA Regional Urban Design Committee Leadership Group which coordinates thoughtful and impactful symposiums about important issues to address in the world and the profession. This year's theme is called "Migration Immigration and Emigration" which will bring together practitioners, educators, and theorists to reflect on the dynamics of population movement and speculate on its impact to contemporary urbanism. I am very excited about this because I will be day one moderator for the three-day virtual event which will be in October.

**For more information on Michelle, her firm and endeavors, please visit**  
[www.mtoddarchitects.com](http://www.mtoddarchitects.com).



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