



# A 50

## The 11th Annual ARCHITECT 50

The ARCHITECT 50 attempts to answer a simple question: Who had the best year? In this latest installment of our annual ranking, after we crunched the data from 182 participating firms and ranked them in three categories (business, sustainability, and design), Lake|Flato Architects claimed the overall top spot. The Texas-based firm combined enviable design chops with a keen sensitivity to sustainability. Oh, and a dog-friendly studio culture. Lake|Flato wasn't the only boutique firm to best the heavyweights. Turn the page to see who else rose through the rankings and made 2018 a year to remember.

TEXT BY ELIZABETH EVITTS DICKINSON  
PHOTOS BY ROBERT G. GOMEZ

➤ For more coverage of the ARCHITECT 50 visit [bit.ly/Architect50](https://bit.ly/Architect50).



# Lake | Flato

is

**BEST**

**IN SHOW**





**2018 was a banner year for Lake|Flato Architects.** The 108-person firm, based in San Antonio and Austin, won a COTE Top Ten Award for the Georgia Tech Krone Engineered Biosystems Building (see page 114 for this year's COTE winners) and an AIA/ALA Library Building Award for the Austin Central Library. Founders Ted Flato, FAIA, and David Lake, FAIA, also received the O'Neil Ford Medal for Design Achievement from the Texas Society of Architects. That award recognized the firm's 35 years of bringing regionally sensitive Modernism and sustainable design to the state, and it felt particularly poignant given that the architects first met at Ford's firm before starting their own studio in 1984. "He was our mentor and he taught us well," Lake says. From the start, "our principle passion has been to merge the built environment with the natural environment, and the contextual and cultural environments as well."

*Opposite, Top Row:*

Partners Greg Papay, FAIA, Matt Morris, FAIA, Andrew Herdeg, FAIA, and Bob Harris, FAIA

*Opposite, Bottom Row:*

Partners David Lake, FAIA, and Ted Flato, FAIA



Associate Partners Jonathan Smith, AIA, Todd Wascher, AIA, JoBeth Thomas, Brandi Rickels, AIA, Steve Raike, AIA, and Ryan Jones, AIA

Associate Partners Joseph Benjamin, AIA, Robert Trinidad, Tenna Florian, AIA, Matt Wallace, AIA, and Bill Aylor, AIA

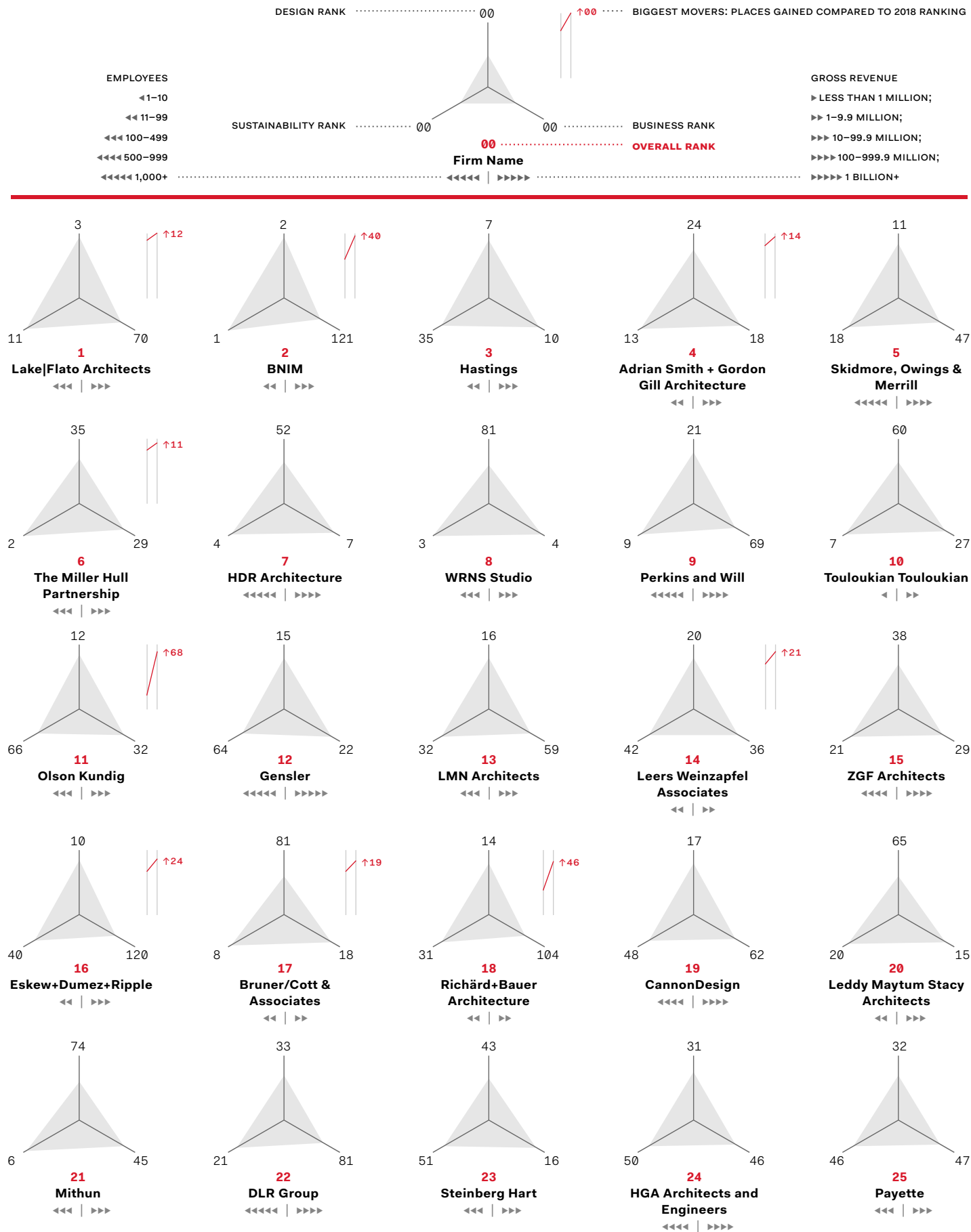
All of which helps explain how Lake|Flato claimed the Number One spot overall in this year's ARCHITECT 50. The firm especially excelled in the sustainability and design categories. "Gorgeous projects, inflected by a western U.S. regionalism," the design judges wrote about the firm's portfolio. "Each feels rooted in its place." That sensitivity to place also impressed the sustainability judges, particularly in regard to the Marine Education Center at the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory, completed last year. Located along the Mississippi coast, the center's previous buildings were destroyed by Hurricane Katrina, and the site was hit again in 2017 by Hurricane Nate. The design team spent months consulting with biologists and site ecologists to find the location least damaging to nature yet most protected from natural disaster. The judges lauded the "ecologically sensitive scheme that considered the holistic impact of the project upon place." The center is expected to consume 46% less energy than the national average for a similar collection of buildings.

Lake|Flato projects begin with an integrated design charrette that includes owners and users, as well as interested

participants and citizens. "We set metrics for building performance, building resiliency, and regenerative principles at the start, and it creates goal posts for us to aspire to in the design," Lake says. "We listen to the potential users. We listen to the land. We really want the best ideas and we have been incredibly fortunate to have owners who share our aspirations."

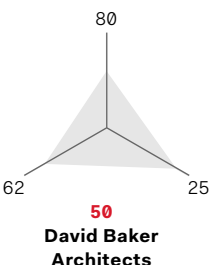
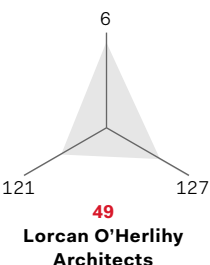
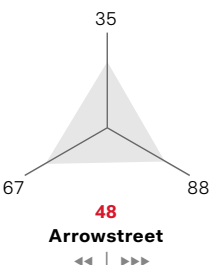
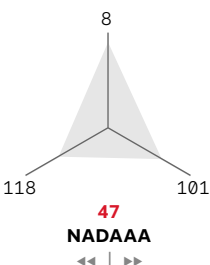
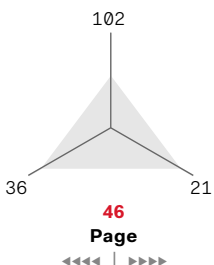
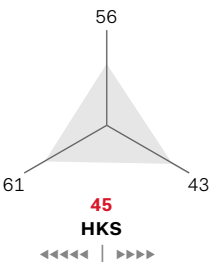
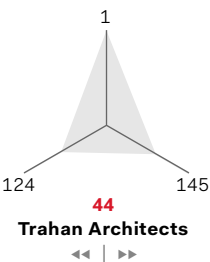
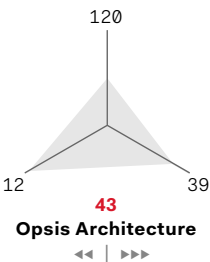
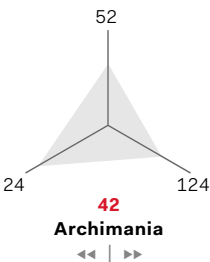
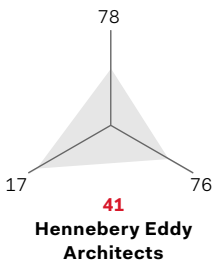
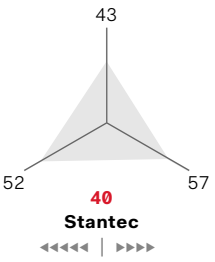
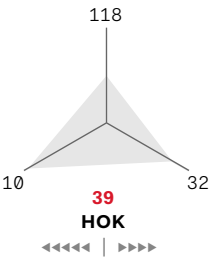
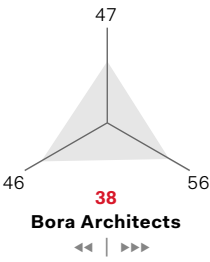
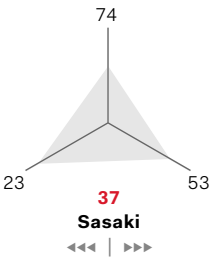
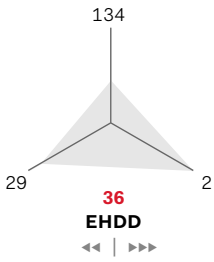
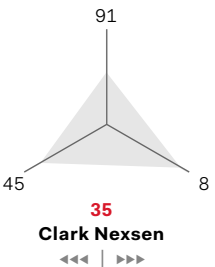
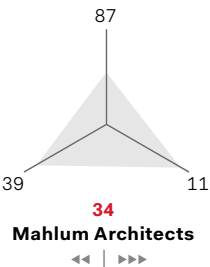
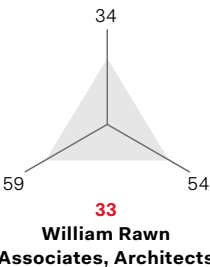
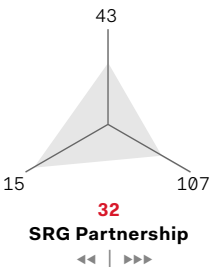
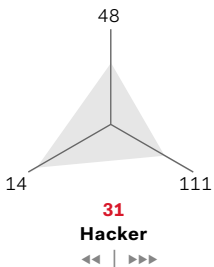
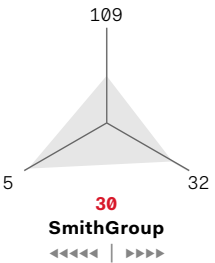
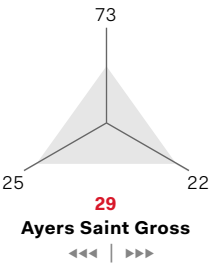
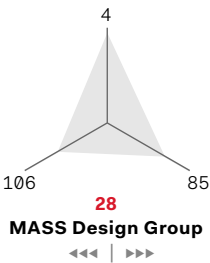
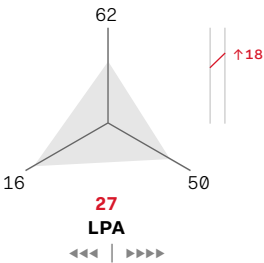
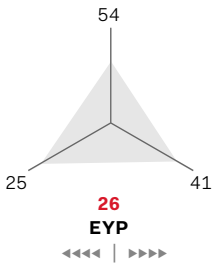
That relationship with owners cultivates a rare commitment to post-occupancy work. Lake|Flato has signed on to the AIA 2030 Commitment, and "the only way to confirm that our buildings are meeting that high bar is post-occupancy," Lake says. The firm maintains a residential energy monitoring program that tracks performance of its projects, and it coaches occupants on how to best use their buildings after handing over the keys.

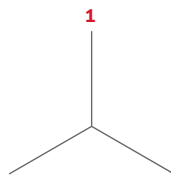
The firm's founders credit their outstanding year in part to a healthy studio culture, supported by strong employee benefits and reflected by the low employee turnover in 2018 of just 4%. Today, Lake and Flato continue to take cues from O'Neil Ford. "What I'm loving is mentoring the future leaders and partners of this studio, who are incredibly talented," Lake says. "We get great joy in watching them progress and evolve."



BIGGEST MOVERS IN % WOMEN DESIGNERS	2017	2018	% CHANGE
EwingCole	20.0	45.0	100+
Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill Architecture	30.0	42.0	40.0
RATIO Architects	27.3	35.2	28.8
WRNS Studio	34.0	43.0	26.5
Solomon Cordwell Buenz	32.0	40.0	25.0
Shepley Bulfinch	48.0	59.0	22.9
Ballinger	32.0	39.0	21.9
Opis Architecture	39.0	46.0	17.9
SmithGroup	39.0	45.3	16.2
CO Architects	40.0	46.0	15.0

BIGGEST MOVERS IN % MINORITY DESIGNERS	2017	2018	% CHANGE
Hastings	2.0	8.4	100+
The S/L/A/M Collaborative	7.0	12.0	71.4
LMN Architects	15.0	25.0	66.7
SRG Partnership	9.0	15.0	66.7
BNIM	7.5	12.0	60.0
BAR Architects	22.0	35.0	59.1
MSR Design	6.5	9.3	43.1
Hord Coplan Macht	14.8	21.0	41.9
Shepley Bulfinch	20.0	27.0	35.0
GGLO	18.0	23.5	30.6





# Trahan Architects

is  
**BEST**  
**IN DESIGN**

**If you had to describe the work** of New Orleans–based Trahan Architects according to only one essential element, it would be materiality. Take the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, where Trahan partnered with sculptor Matthias Pliessnig on the overhaul of a historic 650-seat auditorium. The interior of undulating ribbons fabricated from steam-bent white oak inspired a “wow” from the design judges, who lauded the firm’s “dramatic, sumptuous, and well-detailed” projects that offer “beautiful, compelling spaces to dwell within.” The firm’s portfolio helped Trahan earn the Number One spot for Design in this year’s ARCHITECT 50.

The idea for the Alliance’s design came after an African American member of the community recalled how the theater, which opened in 1968, once had segregated seating. “It was critical to address the issue of equality and diversity, and so we challenged ourselves to shape a space where the lower level and the balcony level could integrate into one unified community,” says the founder of the 35-person firm, Trey Trahan, FAIA.

Transforming complex conceptual ideas into realized physical spaces is no simple task, but Trahan Architects excels at this alchemy. “Sometimes our focus is on the artistry and on shaping things that are beautiful, but at other times the focus is on marrying technology and

our commitment to ecology,” Trahan says. With Alliance, which won a 2019 R+D Award (see our July 2019 issue), “we found, through the use of technology, that we could very cost-effectively build these shaped pieces consistent with the placement of each strand in the digital model.”

Material, Trahan says, is critical to that process. “Buildings should become more harmonious with their context over time and the environmental conditions should result in a patination that is rich and touches us in an emotional way,” he says. “We’re attempting to work from both a cognitive and emotional place.” At the Conservation Foundation Headquarters in New Orleans, for example, their design couples a cast-in-place concrete box with a weathered steel sculpture wall that creates a tranquil and contemplative respite within the bustle of the city’s central business district. That process extends to their robust pro-bono work for clients like Hubbard Street Dance in Chicago. Last year, Trahan helped the company with site evaluations for a new building while completing a concept design for a temporary space.

“It’s beyond buildings, right?” says Trahan. “It’s about arriving at a place where you believe that architecture can create or result in an attitude of kindness. ... Architecture has a voice in that.”

1 Trahan Architects  
2 BNIM  
3 Lake|Flato Architects  
4 MASS Design Group  
5 El Dorado Architects  
6 Lorcan O’Herlihy Architects  
7 Hastings  
8 NADAAA  
9 nArchitects  
10 Eskew+Dumez+Ripple  
11 Skidmore, Owings & Merrill  
12 Olson Kundig  
13 Duke Wells Architecture  
14 Richärd+Bauer Architecture  
15 Gensler  
16 LMN Architects  
17 CannonDesign  
18 Substance Architecture  
19 Montalba Architects

20 Leers Weinzapfel Associates  
21 Perkins and Will  
22 De Leon & Primmer Architecture  
Workshop  
23 Kevin Daly Architects  
24 Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill  
Architecture  
25 John Ronan Architects  
26 Helix Architecture + Design  
26 Höweler + Yoon Architecture  
28 Marlon Blackwell Architects  
29 Works Progress Architecture  
30 CetraRuddy  
31 HGA Architects and Engineers  
32 Payette  
33 DLR Group  
34 William Rawn Associates,  
Architects  
35 The Miller Hull Partnership

35 Arrowstreet  
37 Ross Barney Architects  
38 ZGF Architects  
39 Holst Architecture  
40 Solomon Cordwell Buenz  
41 Elkus Manfredi Architects  
42 Neumann Monson Architects  
43 Steinberg Hart  
43 SRG Partnership  
43 Stantec  
46 Mode Associates  
47 Bora Architects  
48 Hacker  
48 ODA New York  
50 Quinn Evans Architects  
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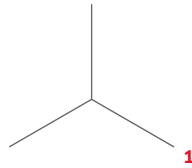
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# Marmol Radziner

is

## BEST IN BUSINESS

Some years, the proverbial ship comes in, and projects that languished on the horizon finally land all at once. That was the case in 2018 for Los Angeles-based Marmol Radziner, which earned the top spot in business in this year's ARCHITECT 50. The 160-person firm enjoyed a 34% increase in net revenue over 2017, and boasted the highest net-revenue-per-employee figure of all the survey participants. "Some of it truly is timing," says managing partner Leo Marmol, FAIA. "Various projects fell into place by chance at the same time last year."

Like most firms, "we see fluctuation in annual revenues because of the normal ebb and flow of the profession," Marmol adds, but the firm's growth "speaks to the unique nature of our office. We have a whole variety of revenue streams from a business perspective."

Founded in 1989 as a design-build firm with an emphasis as a "master builder," Marmol Radziner touts itself as a single-source shop offering everything from architectural drawings and construction documents to prefab, custom cabinetry, fixtures, and furniture. Employees work across multidisciplinary teams of architects, landscape designers, interior designers, furniture designers, and construction

crews. Projects in 2018 included a 64-story mixed-use tower in downtown Los Angeles (still in progress), a Four Seasons resort in Puerto Rico, and multiple private houses. "We had a number of residential construction projects where we were both architect and builder and some were very large scale," says design partner Ron Radziner, FAIA, including the 9,300-square-foot stone-and-wood Bella Vista Residence in Montecito, Calif., completed last year. Tucked into a bluff with ocean views and a landscape of native oaks, the house represents the firm's signature Modernist-meets-landscape style.

As a sign of its expanding reach, Marmol Radziner opened a New York office in 2018 to service a growing number of East Coast residential and commercial clients, including restaurants for Sushi Nozawa Group, boutiques for Vince and Oliver Peoples, and the New York corporate headquarters for Italian eyewear company Luxottica. "We have always had a strong emphasis on office management," Marmol says. "We have a COO that heads up the financial management structure and he has a talented and committed team that keeps all of the accounting managed very smoothly."

- 1 Marmol Radziner
- 2 EHDD
- 3 Duda|Paine Architects
- 4 WRNS Studio
- 5 Butler Armsden Architects
- 6 Works Progress Architecture
- 7 HDR Architecture
- 8 Clark Nexsen
- 9 ELS Architecture and Urban Design
- 10 Hastings
- 11 Mahlum Architects
- 12 Blair + Mui Dowd Architects
- 13 RBB Architects
- 14 CO Architects
- 15 Leddy Maytum Stacy Architects
- 16 Steinberg Hart
- 16 Carrier Johnson + Culture

- 18 Bruner/Cott & Associates
- 18 Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill Architecture
- 18 PBK
- 21 Page
- 22 Ayers Saint Gross
- 22 Gensler
- 24 Mark Cavagnero Associates
- 25 David Baker Architects
- 26 Goettsch Partners
- 27 Touloukian Touloukian
- 28 Flansburgh Architects
- 29 The Miller Hull Partnership
- 29 ZGF Architects
- 31 Ann Beha Architects
- 32 SmithGroup
- 32 HOK

- 32 Olson Kundig
- 35 Hord Coplan Macht
- 36 Leers Weinzapfel Associates
- 36 Kobi Karp
- 38 Spectorgroup
- 39 Opsi Architecture
- 39 HMC Architects
- 41 EYP
- 42 BAR Architects
- 43 Kirksey
- 43 HKS
- 45 Mithun
- 46 HGA Architects and Engineers
- 47 Skidmore, Owings & Merrill
- 47 Payette
- 49 Studios Architecture
- 50 LPA





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**Mott Community College**  
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Architecture and Engineering Inc.  
Product: Endure Woodgrain  
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1

BNIM

is

BEST

IN SUSTAINABILITY

**BNIM, which earned top honors** in the sustainability category this year, has long been a pioneer of environmentally ambitious design. Founded in Kansas City, Mo., in the 1970s, and now with 86 employees across three offices, the firm was built on a commitment to transform the way buildings serve people and nature. “I went to school during the first energy crises in the 1970s and came out fired up about making buildings more efficient,” says Steve McDowell, FAIA, the firm’s director of design. By 1989, McDowell was among a group of AIA members to present a resolution at that year’s convention called the Critical Climate Rescue, which helped spur the creation of COTE, the USGBC, and LEED. BNIM would go on to develop the Living Building concept of design, and be among the first to earn LEED Platinum for one of its projects.

Last year, the firm, which has signed on to AIA’s 2030 Commitment, demonstrated a robust commitment to energy modeling and began using Tally, a software application (designed by Philadelphia-based KieranTimberlake) that analyzes how design decisions influence the life cycle of a building, including outputs such as carbon. After years of tracking performance to see how their models stood up to real-life scenarios, BNIM standardized their measurements in 2018 by incorporating ARC, a digital platform for tracking building performance, and Energy Star Portfolio Manager into some of their post-occupancy services. They also have a research

partnership with the Salk Institute to test the effects of daylight on human health. Last year, they coalesced their ambitions for green building into a 2020 Sustainability Action Plan, which includes the goal of identifying strategies for disaster planning when considering a project site.

The ARCHITECT 50 sustainability judges were particularly struck by the firm’s Asilong Christian High School in Kenya, a COTE Top Ten winner (featured on page 140) that they deemed “a wonderful project.” Its triple bottom-line design responded to climate, community, and education needs in a remote area. Harnessing the abundance of solar energy, the building operation requires no carbon-based fuels, and local labor was trained in brickmaking and construction and contributed to the completed project.

The green ethos has become so baked in at BNIM that the word “sustainability” isn’t bandied about as it once was. “It’s so much a part of who we are and how we work, it’s almost redundant to use that word. We are truly focused on outcomes,” McDowell says. “Is our work making people healthier? Is our work contributing to a more vital and regenerative ecological system? Is our work helping organizations to function better? Is our work connecting people to nature? All those things mean sustainability. We don’t have sustainability workshops like we used to 20 years ago because our design workshops are sustainability workshops.”

- 1 BNIM

2 The Miller Hull Partnership

3 WRNS Studio

4 HDR Architecture

5 SmithGroup

6 Mithun

7 Touloukian Touloukian

8 Bruner/Cott & Associates

9 Perkins and Will

10 HOK

11 Lake|Flato Architects

12 Opsis Architecture

13 Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill Architecture

14 Hacker

15 SRG Partnership

16 LPA
- 17 Hennebery Eddy Architects

18 Skidmore, Owings & Merrill

18 GWWO Architects

20 Leddy Maytum Stacy Architects

21 DLR Group

21 ZGF Architects

23 Sasaki

24 Archimania

25 EYP

25 Ayers Saint Gross

27 Ballinger

28 Dattner Architects

29 EHDD

30 Kaplan Thompson Architects

31 Richärd+Bauer Architecture

32 LMN Architects

33 ELS Architecture and Urban Design
- 34 CBT Architects

35 Hastings

36 Fergus Garber Young Architects

36 Page

38 Behnisch Architekten

39 Mahlum Architects

40 Eskew+Dumez+Ripple

41 Kirksey

42 Leers Weinzapfel Associates

42 Weber Thompson

44 ZeroEnergy Design

45 Clark Nexsen

46 Payette

46 Bora Architects

48 CannonDesign

49 Studio Ma

50 HGA Architects and Engineers



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## METHODOLOGY

ARCHITECT advertised the ARCHITECT 50 program in print and online, and also sent direct invitations to firms that either requested entry forms or that had participated in previous years. In all, 182 firms qualified. Data was from the 2018 fiscal year and was self-reported. Projects completed or in progress during the calendar year were included. Data was checked for consistency, and outliers were fact-checked. Karlin Research, a third-party research firm based in New York City, compiled the ranking and assured the confidentiality of the data. The ARCHITECT 50 ranking is based on scores in three separate categories: design, sustainability, and business. To see which data points were used to generate scores in each category, see below.

### DESIGN

**14%** Licensure, as measured by the percentage of designers licensed in their respective fields, the average percentage increase in salary or bonus paid upon licensure, and how the firm mentors young designers

**7%** Pro bono work, as measured by participation in Public Architecture's 1+ program, the percentage of billable hours dedicated to pro bono, and the scope of the pro bono work

**4%** Design awards, including awards issued by ARCHITECT and prominent institutions such as the AIA and the ASLA

**3%** Research, as measured by the percentage of profits invested in it and its scope and significance

**72%** A design portfolio, scored individually by the following three judges. Their scores were combined to create an overall score.

**Lawrence Scarpa, FAIA**, co-founded Los Angeles-based Brooks and Scarpa, which won the 2014 Smithsonian Cooper-Hewitt National Design Award. He has taught at numerous institutions and currently is on the faculty at the University of Southern California.

**Dan Wood, FAIA**, co-founded New York-based WORKac with Amale Andraos in 2003. He has taught extensively, most recently at MIT and the University of Toronto, where he held the 2017 Frank Gehry International Visiting Chair in Architectural Design.

**Jennifer Newsom, AIA**, is a co-founder and principal of Dream the Combine, based in Minneapolis. The firm's installation, Hide & Seek, was winner of the 2018 MoMA PS1 Young Architects Program.

### BUSINESS

**49%** Net revenue per employee

**12%** Profitability (positive change in net revenue from 2017)

**24%** Business practices, including the percentage of women and minority designers and principals, the firm's approach to diversifying its staff, the percentage of new full-time positions, and voluntary staff turnover rate

**15%** Employee benefits, including ARE benefits, stock options, and the value and scope of other fringe benefits

### EQUITY DATA

The charts on page 105 are based on firm responses to the questions: *What percentage of your firm's principals, architects, interns, and design staff are women? What percentage of your firm's principals, architects, interns, and design staff are racial or ethnic minorities?* List limited to firms with 50 or more employees. All participating firms were included, not just firms that were ranked in the Top 50.

### SUSTAINABILITY

**18%** 2030 Commitment: Participation in AIA's 2030 Commitment program, submittal of a report of predicted energy use of active projects to AIA in 2018, percentage of predicted energy use intensity reduction and predicted lighting power density reduction from the baseline reported, and whether those two submitted percentages represented an improvement over the numbers submitted in 2017

**18%** Energy and water metrics: Percentage of the total square footage of projects that were in design during 2018 that met or exceeded the 2030 energy target (70% better than a baseline building as measured by the 2003 Commercial Building Energy Consumption Survey or the 2001 Residential Energy Consumption Survey) and percentage of the total gross square footage of interior design projects that were in design during 2018 that met or exceeded the 2030 target (25% improvement in lighting power density—LPD—as measured by the baseline established by ASHRAE 90.1 v2007); percentage of the total square footage of projects that were in design during 2018 that achieved a 20% reduction or greater in regulated potable water use than the standards of the U.S. Energy Policy Act of 1992; that incorporated simulated energy modeling to determine the energy use impacts of the project, and the percentage of those projects that used modeling during the conceptual or schematic design phase of the project; that used daylight simulation modeling to reduce energy consumption by electric lighting or enhance occupant health or comfort; that used life-cycle assessments as a tool for reducing the embodied carbon footprint of a project or that took into account embodied carbon when making material selections; for completed projects with sufficient energy data available, the percentage for which firms gathered data to see if they were meeting the project goals and/or predicted performance; and finally, a firm's approach toward resilient design, the use of material ingredients reporting to avoid chemicals of concern when sourcing materials, the approach to reducing embodied carbon in a project, and the scope of post-occupancy work

**6%** Employee certifications: The percentage of a firm's design employees with Living Future, Passive House, WELL, Green Globes, Green Roof Professional, or LEED AP or Green Associate credentials (and the specialty LEED credentials represented at the firm), as well as the percentage increase in salary given to employees who achieve LEED AP accreditation

**20%** Building certifications: Points awarded on a sliding scale for projects that in 2018 were registered or certified for LEED, Living Building Challenge, Green Globes, Net Zero, Green Guide for Health Care, Energy Star, Passive House, and other leading certifications

**38%** A score for the green project that best demonstrated a firm's commitment to sustainability and how it is an inherent part of the design process in three areas: energy, materials, and site ecology. Projects were scored individually by the following two judges, and their scores were combined to create an overall score.

**Margaret Montgomery, FAIA, LEED AP BD+C, WELL AP**, is a principal and global sustainable practice leader for NBBJ, a global design firm based in Seattle. She leads initiatives and projects that are focused low-energy, high-performance design. She has served on the board of AIA Seattle and co-chaired its What Makes It Green program.

**Jean Carroon, FAIA**, a LEED Fellow, is principal at Goody Clancy, a Boston-based firm. The 2019 president of the Boston Society of Architects, her practice focuses on the creative reuse of existing places and buildings to shape a resilient world. Her book *Sustainable Preservation: Greening Existing Buildings* was published by John Wiley & Sons in 2010.

The weight assigned to each data point was formulated after consulting with industry experts. Using the weights, scores were calculated and then normalized so the top-scoring firm in each of the three categories would equal 100. The overall ranking was created by adding together the normalized scores from the three categories. Those scores were also then normalized, with the top firm given an overall total of 100.

Each firm's performance was calculated relative to the performance of other firms. The firm with an overall score of 100, for example, did not necessarily top out on every indicator and category; it accumulated the highest composite score. Any ties in the overall list were broken based on which firm achieved the better design ranking.

## AuralScapes® SOUND ABSORPTION ceiling tiles

U.S. Patent 9,175,473

New from **modularArts®**, these t-grid ceiling tiles combine to create a stunning and continuous sculptural surface. Highly sound absorbent and light emitting, for any rectangular cloud configuration. 24" by 24" lightweight aluminum w/PET baffles (available in a variety of colors) and dimmable LED light.

## AuralScapes® SOUND DIFFUSION ceiling tiles

U.S. Patent 9,175,473

The magnetic ceiling tiles attach to t-grid configurations, entirely masking the grid for a continuous surface. The active multi-directional topography scatters reflected sound and softens typical "slap-back" echo from hard surfaces, while retaining a live sounding space. Borders available in walnut, birch, or maple.

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