

ANNIE CHU

FAIA | NCIDQ | WELL AP

CUMULATIVE



Annie Chu (FAIA, NCIDQ, WELL AP) is an architect, interior designer, educator, and a founding principal of the award-winning Chu-Gooding in Los Angeles. In her four decades in practice, Annie has worked extensively with world-renowned museums, cultural and arts-related facilities, and educational institutions, including MOCA, Hammer Museum, The Huntington, Autry Museum of the American West, Studio Museum in Harlem, Southern California Public Radio, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic Association.

To paraphrase
Billie Tsien:
**“Architecture is
both an art and
a service, and if
done with love, it
can be noble.”**

HOW DID YOU DECIDE TO BECOME AN ARCHITECT?

It was 1979, the summer after my first year of undergraduate study, when I visited the Rouen Cathedral in France. I was a pre-med student at the time, but as I sat at the back of the cathedral, soaking in the breathtaking interior, I had an immediate, visceral response to being in that space.

Years later, while working in sculpture studio (an elective art course), I recall my teacher asked, “What is your major? And why are you always here?” I told him I liked art and science, and he suggested I consider architecture. The light bulb went off, and I transferred to the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc) shortly thereafter.

CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR CAREER PATH AND THE POSITIONS YOU HAVE HELD?

My very first job was at Frank O. Gehry’s office when I was still an undergrad at SCI-Arc. Then, right out of school, I spent a year at Oliver Kurze Georges, a firm led by three women (which was incredibly rare in the ‘80s).

After that, I moved to New York and worked at Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects (TWBTA) for six years; as a Senior Associate, I was involved in multiple arts-related and residential projects and got some experience working with sophisticated interiors. I took a year off to study at Columbia (I was already a teaching assistant for Tod Williams at Cooper Union by that time), and after earning my master’s degree—while also working at TWBTA—I began a long and fulfilling teaching career, ultimately spanning three decades.

After returning to Los Angeles, I worked with Franklin D. Israel Design Associates in Beverly Hills as a Senior Associate, working primarily on residential and higher education projects. In 1993, I became a Principal of Israel Callas Chu design associates (also a strong interior responsive practice), where I designed a 150,000-square-foot fine arts facility for UC Riverside and worked on several projects on the UCLA campus.

I founded Chu+Gooding Architects (now Chu-Gooding) in 1996, and my husband Rick Gooding joined me in 1998. We found our footing working with museums, cultural institutions and arts facilities as well as on single-family residential and higher education projects.

I was a pre-med student at the time, but as I sat at the back of the cathedral, soaking in the breathtaking interior, I had an immediate, visceral response to being in that space.

Through our work we became known for thoughtful interior architecture and exhibition design, and I gradually established a reputation as a thought leader in the industry through my academic and professional service: as local AIA chapter director, where I helped establish an annual student scholarship exhibition program; on the National AIA Interior Architecture Committee, where I became an outspoken champion of interior architecture; as Vice President of the IIDA Board of Directors; on numerous design juries, both national and international; and as a Cultural Affairs Commissioner for the City of Los Angeles, where I provided design input for all projects on or over public land.

HAVE YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO BE IN A LEADERSHIP POSITION OR HAS THAT CHANGED OVER TIME?

I didn't think much about it when I was younger—it was really those around me who continually nudged me and recommended that I take on leadership positions.

Practice and teaching were guiding me in one direction, but building knowledge in a specific area also helped me figure out the service component to my work. I suppose the path toward leadership was a bit haphazard at the start, but over time, the direction became clear as teaching, practice, expertise and service integrated under the expanded umbrella of architecture and interior design.

HOW HAVE YOU WEATHERED THE CHANGING ECONOMIC CYCLES AND RECESSIONS WITHIN THE INDUSTRY?

We maintain a small-size firm (typically 8 of us, with a maximum of 12), and some diversity in project types has been helpful. In earlier years, teaching was a supplemental income to allow the office to stay afloat in challenging times. As our practice matured, I decided to stop teaching in the Fall of 2019, and Rick and I worked closely with our in-office Business Director to steer the financial and strategic growth of the firm. During the pandemic, single-family residential projects allowed us to float through a difficult period when institutional projects were slim.

For us, the solution is not to rely too much on a singular project type – and to always be on the lookout for expanded institutional opportunities outside of Los Angeles.

WHO MENTORED YOU?

Heather Kurze.

My SCI-Arc studio instructor and first employer out of school at Oliver Kurze Georges (OKG), Heather affirmed my potential and gave me the confidence to establish a personal design methodology.

Patricia Oliver.

A former partner at OKG (and current Dean at the College of Architecture + Design at the University of Houston), Pat introduced me to Billie Tsien when I moved to New York, and when I later returned to Los Angeles, she hired me as a design instructor at Art Center College of Design in the Environmental Design Department—a position that opened up a broader knowledge base and gave me the ability to work interdisciplinarily.

Billie Tsien.

For nearly 39 years, Billie has been a consistent source of encouragement, shared fine arts and literature interests and resources, put my name in the hat for prestigious jury appointments, and continued to mentor me as a friend – even long after I finished my tenure at TWBTA and returned to California.

We call each other for advice in tough times, and together with Pat Oliver and others, we maintain an annual tradition of a four-night retreat in the California desert: an opportunity to check in with one another about work, life, spouses, children, and now (for some of this group) grandchildren.

WHO DO YOU LOOK UP TO AS A LEADER AND WHY?

My role model has been and continues to be Billie Tsien. I am forever inspired by her kindness, generosity, loyalty, and thirst for lifelong learning through art, architecture and literature... uniting her intrinsic poetic tendencies with the work she does, who she serves, and how she does it all with full acknowledgement of our humanity.

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY?

Perhaps I could have left academia sooner to focus more on my practice – but at the same time, the work I was doing felt meaningful. My last position was a full-time teaching position at Woodbury University, where I helped establish a graduate program of Interior Architecture (an emerging discipline) and build a national reputation for the department.

Prior to this nearly eight-year stint at Woodbury, I was at USC School of Architecture, where the assistant dean emphasized how difficult it was to be a full-time teacher and have a thriving practice. As a new empty nester, I figured I could handle it, but it ultimately took a lot out of the practice. Part of me feels like I am forever playing catch-up... sharpening our focus, elevating our craft, developing new systems and better ways of working, and finding new project opportunities for the firm.

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT QUALITIES AN ARCHITECT SHOULD HAVE?

Passion for architecture. Strong ethics. A love of service to humankind.

“Walk through open doors when they present themselves”

ARE THERE ANY RESOURCES THAT YOU FOUND USEFUL REGARDING LEADERSHIP?

- Subscribe to the “Practice Disrupted” podcast (with Je’Nen Chastain and incoming AIA President Evelyn Lee) to keep current on the pulse of the industry.
- Live your life. As IIDA Executive Director and CEO Cheryl S. Durst once said, “We cannot design for the world if we are not of the world.” That puts the responsibility on us to engage as much as possible with the world... to participate in initiatives and events both within and beyond our industry.
- Service. Find service opportunities with the AIA and other allied nonprofits that align with your values.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU WANT TO GIVE TO FUTURE LEADERS?

To paraphrase Billie Tsien’s Architecture Firm Award speech at a past AIA conference: “Architecture is both an art and a service, and if done with love, it can be noble.”

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE IS THE RECIPE FOR SUCCESS?

- (1) Walk through open doors when they present themselves.
- (2) Be open to new experiences and learning from other disciplines.
- (3) Maintain your friendships. They are not merely your network; they are special people in your life that you can learn from, lean on, build up, and grow with.

TIMELINE

1990
SOM Traveling Fellowship

2000
Board Director,
AIA Los Angeles Chapter

2010
Appointed Cultural
Affairs Commissioner,
City of Los Angeles

2014
IIDA Leadership
Award of Excellence

2016
Fellowship, American
Institute of Architects

2024
Commencement
Speaker, USC School
of Architecture

1989
Start of 30-Year
Teaching Career
at NYIT, Parsons,
UT Austin, UCLA,
SCI-Arc, Art Center,
ASU, USC, and
Woodbury University

1997
Founding Principal,
Chu+Gooding Architects

2010
Chair, AIA Institute
Interior Architecture
Advisory Group

2012
Professor, Interior
Architecture Dept.,
Woodbury University

2016
AIA Presidential Honoree
Educator Award

2017
Vice President,
IIDA Board of Directors