

# MAURITA HARRIS

AIA | LEED AP | NCARB | NOMA

## SCARED, BUT DOING IT ANYWAY



*Maurita joined PHX in 2010. She is a licensed Architect in the State of Arizona and has attained her NCARB Certification. She is also a LEED-Accredited Professional and has completed the Certified Sustainable Building Advisor Program. Maurita is also a founding member and is the Immediate Past President of the National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA), Arizona Chapter. In the Spring of 2021, she was appointed by the Mayor and City Council to the City of Phoenix Alhambra Village Planning Committee.*

***“You are braver  
than you believe,  
stronger than you  
seem, and smarter  
than you think.”***

*Winnie the Pooh  
(A.A. Milne)*

### **HOW DID YOU DECIDE TO BECOME AN ARCHITECT?**

One of my mother’s cousins married an African-American man who is an architect. I did not know anything about architecture at the time. I remember that I really liked their house and he told me that he designed it among many other commercial buildings. He took me to his office in Cleveland, Ohio, and showed me what he did. I was intrigued and thought, maybe I could do that too.

### **CAN YOU TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR CAREER PATH AND THE POSITIONS YOU HAVE HELD?**

I graduated from Kent State University in Kent, Ohio in 1997 with a Bachelor of Architecture and Bachelor of Science. During the third year of the five-year program, I participated in their European Study program in Florence, Italy, and Lugano, Switzerland (Spring 1995). I moved to Phoenix, Arizona in 1997, two weeks after I graduated. In 2004, born out of necessity, four other Associate AIA members and I crafted the ARE Study sessions that are now a regular part of the AIA Phoenix Metro Resources to help those form study groups in their path toward licensure.

In September 2007, I became the 3rd African-American female to be licensed in the State of Arizona. In 2021, I was appointed by the Mayor of Phoenix as a member of the Alhambra Village Planning Committee. In January 2022, I began a two-year term as President of NOMA Arizona (National Organization of Minority Architects), of which, I am also a founding member of NOMA Arizona since 2017. I was promoted to Senior Architect at PHX Architecture in August 2022, where I have been employed since 2010.

### **HAVE YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO BE IN A LEADERSHIP POSITION?**

I had never really thought about seeking a specific leadership position. I think that the positions that I have had were just a part of my journey and feeling that I could make a difference in that particular role at a particular moment in time. I feel that everything happens for a reason, and I don’t always know when or why, but I am open to see what opportunities arise.

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

I have been blessed, to live in Arizona, where the construction

industry has been steady for much of my professional career. During the recession, I was laid off, but fortunately only out of work for four months. During that time, I learned new programs and took courses to add to my skill set to increase my marketability.

### **WHO MENTORED YOU?**

I have had several mentors during my professional career. This is something that I was lacking during school, which is why it is so important to me now. I am grateful for the “seasoned” architects that I have worked with who saw potential in me and my willingness to listen and learn. Chris Doran, RA, Erik Peterson, AIA (my boss), Ron Skoog, AIA (my other boss), Gary Nelson, AIA, NOMA, Christiana Moss, FAIA, Diane Jacobs, FAIA, NOMA, some are now deceased William Cullen, AIA, Jim Burr, AIA, and John R. Williams, AIA.

### **IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY?**

I would have not been so timid during school and put myself out there to attend industry events to network with professionals and actively seek internships to build those relationships early. I was so stuck on staying in the studio all night that I didn't get a lot of exposure to the real world. I would have also liked to work with a General Contractor, as the construction experience makes you a better designer overall.

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

Be teachable. Be flexible. Be humble. Your work will speak for you.

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

Christiana Moss (Studio Ma), Diane Jacobs (Holly Street Studio), and Damaris Hollingsworth (Design by Melo). Although I do not have the desire to own my own firm, I am inspired by them because of their boldness and bravery in holding true to their values and beliefs. They do everything with purpose, never by accident. Always authentic, no matter what. The most extraordinary thing about all three of them is their willingness to elevate other women.

### **ARE THERE ANY RESOURCES THAT YOU FOUND USEFUL?**

“Hidden in Plain Site” Podcast with Sandra Little, RA (Noir Design Parti)  
“Quick Confidence” Book by Selena Rezvani  
“Rising Strong” and “Daring Greatly” Books by Brene Brown

### **WHAT ADVICE DO YOU WANT TO GIVE TO FUTURE LEADERS?**

Step out of your comfort zone. You can do hard things. Don't be afraid to fail. Tap into your Superpowers. Wear red shoes.

### **WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE IS THE RECIPE FOR SUCCESS?**

I don't have one recipe for success. I know that success is measured differently for each of us. I think that when you can look around at what you have contributed to not only the built environment, but also your community, and even more importantly, your family and your heart is full, and it makes you smile, that is success.

## **TIMELINE**

○ **1997**  
Kent State University Graduate

○ **2004**  
Crafted ARE Study Sessions as part of AIA Phoenix Metro Resources

○ **2007**  
Became the 3rd African-American female to be licensed in the State of Arizona

○ **2021**  
Appointed by the Mayor of Phoenix as a member of the Alhambra Village Planning Committee

○ **2022-2023**  
President of NOMA Arizona

○ **2022**  
Promoted to Senior Architect at PHX Architecture