

Awesome Woman Alert: At Age 25, Courtney Brett, AIA's Youngest Member, Has Launched Her Own Firm!

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Lamar Anderson

Courtney Brett (left) was recruited by SOM's New York office at age 20. While there, she worked on Qatar Petroleum in Doha (right). Left photo courtesy of Courtney Brett

Well, if you're counting, Courtney Brett actually joined the American Institute of Architects when she was 24. Which means (still counting!) she started college at 14 and was designing for [Skidmore, Owings & Merrill](#) by 20. And now, with ten years of experience behind her, America's newly minted quarterlife architect is starting her own firm. Let's face it: Gen Y is taking over the world!

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At SOM, Brett spent much of her time on the mixed-use tower at 250 East 57th Street. Image courtesy of Gotham Construction

In an interview with [John Gendall at AIArchitect](#), Brett explains how she went from doodling building sections on placemats at the age of ten to founding her own firm, Casburn Brett Architecture, on the Gulf Coast of Alabama last May. She earned her architecture license earlier this year.

Brett, who comes from a military family, [took every childhood move as an opportunity](#). After skipping ninth grade in Texas, she passed over her junior and senior years in Virginia, enrolling instead at Mary Baldwin College as a 14-year-old freshman. At 16, Brett transferred to Auburn University's School of Architecture,

where she worked on designs for homes in west Alabama with Auburn's well-reputed [Rural Studio](#). "It was a real way for architects to be stewards of a community," Brett says in the AIA interview. "That was a very early introduction to what it's like to have a client, and to meet someone who needs the things we're designing."

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Brett's design for a temporary food stand in Orange Beach, Alabama, is currently under construction. Image courtesy of Courtney Brett

Brett picked up the humanitarian thread again in New York, serving as director of development for [Architecture for Humanity](#) while she was putting in hours at SOM. In 2010 she returned to Alabama to serve as director of design for the developer DHS Ventures, which brought her much closer to the financial realities of designing buildings than did her earlier work.

That financial knowledge will come in handy as Brett establishes her new practice. Currently she's at work on a seven-acre beachfront mixed-use development on the Gulf. And she's been circulating in the community, meeting potential new clients, who generally don't bat an eye at her youth. "People in our profession always ask me if I think I'm at a deficit because I'm younger, and I'm beginning to believe that I think it's a complex within our own field," Brett tells Gendall. "People outside of our field are less deterred by a younger professional than I was expecting they would be."

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