



Courtney Brett, 24, recognized as youngest member of architect institute

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DAPHNE, Alabama -- "Congratulations to Ms. Brett on being the AIA's youngest active Architect member."

The June 26 email to 24-year-old Courtney Brett from the American Institute of Architects was something that she'd been waiting for since being handed graphing paper and drawing tools at age 10.

Born in Honolulu to a military family, Brett was constantly moving when she was young. But at every stop, teachers recognized that she was extremely bright.

In fact, by the time she began high school in San Angelo, Texas, she jumped straight into the 10th grade, skipping ninth. And when 10th grade was over, said Brett, she found herself bored and looking for a challenge.

That challenge soon arrived when her parents pulled up stakes to move again.

Instead of starting at a new high school, Brett, straight out of 10th grade, went on to Mary Baldwin College in Virginia via an early admission initiative, the Program for the Exceptionally Gifted. She was a 14-year-old freshman.

At age 16, she transferred to Auburn University's School of Architecture, being one of 40 students selected from among more than 300 applicants.

The next year, 2005, Brett participated in Auburn's acclaimed Rural Studio, which builds innovative homes and other structures in impoverished areas of west Alabama.

"Architects learn to be stewards of the community. It really had a big impact on me as a designer," Brett said.

She graduated from Auburn in 2007 with a bachelor of architecture degree.

Her rapid rise and relative youth have garnered attention.

"Quite often, young graduates pursuing registration as an architect have many obstacles that delay them: career hurdles, family obligations, financial issues, and the like. It is a real tribute to Courtney that she established registration as a goal and accomplished it early in her professional career," said Cindy McKim, executive director for the Alabama Board of Architects.

Right out of college, Brett was recruited by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, one of the largest architectural firms in the world. She spent the next 2½ years with the firm in New York, on projects such as the New York Jets' training center, schools and hospitals, and a petroleum complex in Doha, Qatar, that she described as "a new city in the desert."

In 2010, Brett headed back South, to the Gulf Coast, marrying husband Daniel and starting work for DHS Ventures as a director of design. Now, two years later, she's branched out yet again.

"I was really ready to be on my own as an architect," said Brett, of Daphne, who established her Casburn Brett Architecture firm this year, and has started taking projects within the past several months.

Matt Tinder, head of media relations with the American Institute of Architects, spoke words of praise for Brett's accomplishments. "Courtney is in the unique position to bring a level of diversity to the profession not often seen; her intelligence, skill, and talent matched with her youthfulness will provide her clients with a perspective that is rarely encountered," Tinder said. "We are excited and amazed at the potential Courtney possesses and will serve as an inspiration to an entire generation of architectural students entering into the profession."

Said Brett, "I just knew, since I was 10 years old, this is what I wanted to be. I believe design is problem solving. It helps me come up with creative solutions to problems in every aspect of life."

She is applying that creativity to her own life, as well. Brett said that she's setting out to design a house for her and her husband.

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