



JULY:

# SPOT • LIGHT

Alyson Mandeville  
Practice Leader | Gresham Smith

## 01

### How did you start your career in the design industry?

My Mom is an artist and a designer and used to sew a lot of clothes for me when I was young. I think my love of design started with fashion when I was in about the 7 years old. I would dream up articles of clothing that didn't really exist and she would endeavor to make them. A highlight of every year growing up was picking out the fabric/pattern and design for my Easter dress each year. That eventually translated into a career in interior design.

## 03

### Which women designers have inspired you?

Shortly after I graduated from college, fashion designer Natalie Chanin and started Project Alabama in her hometown of Florence, Alabama (not too far away from where I was living and working at the time). She was at the front of the forefront of the zero-waste movement, employing local women to create handmade garments while preserving the region's dwindling tradition of quilting. Her company's approach influenced the fashion industry by demonstrating that luxury can coexist with sustainability and ethical practices.

I am also inspired by India Hicks bohemian island-chic interiors with British influences. I love her use of natural materials, neutral palettes, and carefully curated vintage finds. Her spaces feel like a sunny breeze where you can taste the salt in the air.

## 02

### Tell us about the accomplishments in your career path and personal life?

I have always been competitive, beginning with gymnastics and swimming in my youth. Relay events were my favorite, because each team member had to contribute individually to the greater good of the team. As I have evolved in my career, I've worn many hats, from interior designer to project manager, and now practice leader of the Gresham Smith's Education & Research practice. That competitive spirit has carried me through my career, but I have always had amazing team members who have contributed to the success of projects and pursuits and pushed me to grow and learn.

## 04

### What would be the one advice you'll give to all women in architecture and design out there?

Surround yourself with people who are honest with you, and who challenge you. Understand that intuition isn't something that should be ignored, even if it doesn't make sense on paper. Get comfortable stepping outside of your comfort zone.





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## 05

**What remarkable project you would refer to as a precedent for your students that has positively impacted their learning process?**

Well, I don't really have students, but there are younger team members that I have mentored, and I would say to question and challenge the norm, be present in the moment and find some delight in their work every day.

## 06

**Pancakes or Waffles? Wine or Beer? Paperclips or staples? Cats or dogs?**

Fluffy pancakes. I prefer the soft texture that can cut with a fork over having to use a knife. Depends on mood, and place. I like both. Paperclips, they are easier to undo. Definitely dogs. I love to hear my dogs thump their tail when I call them by name.

## 07

**Podcast you enjoy listening to and/or book you recommend.**

A friend and colleague turned me on to How I Built This by Guy Raz, and I highly endorse it. It's captivating to hear the intimate details of vulnerability, the sacrifices, determination and amazing finales of some of the most successful entrepreneurs of recent times.