WOMEN OF ARCHITECTURE

a collective of unique voices

by Beth Buckley

Anik Pearson | Photograph by Annie Schlechter

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Rendering by Anik Pearson

Anik Pearson

Anik Pearson's life and work are defined by a profound reverence for craft, context, and the quiet endurance of beauty. Born in Virginia but raised among the layered landscapes of Burgundy and the French Alps, she grew up steeped in the textures of Europe's architectural heritage: stone farmhouses, medieval villages, Roman ruins. These centuries-old structures instilled in her an instinct for permanence and the poetry of place. Architecture, she often says, never felt like a career she chose; it chose her.

Her early years were filled with buildings made by hand. A grandfather carved wood and raised a chalet in the Swiss Alps. A stepfather, a French Compagnon du Devoir in ornamental ironwork, restored entire homes by teaching himself new trades — wood, leather, stone — and bringing back to life a centuries-old watermill built on Roman foundations. Living in such layered spaces shaped Pearson's vision of architecture as a living timeline, where each generation interprets and extends what came before.

After returning to the United States, Pearson studied at The Cooper Union in New York City, drawn to architecture as the discipline that best united art and science. Cooper Union's rigor encouraged her to question convention, to see architecture not simply as a profession but as a cultural and philosophical pursuit. That experience taught her to push boundaries and challenge assumptions, an approach that has remained central to her work.

Her professional path was guided by formative mentors. At Cicognani Kalla Architects, Ann Kalla impressed upon her the discipline of process: the conviction that nothing should be left to chance. Later, at Peter Pennoyer Architects, she worked closely with Gregory Gilmartin, whose mastery of classical architecture instilled in her a respect for tradition as a language, one that must be spoken fluently to be reimagined with authenticity. These lessons became the foundation upon which she built her own practice, Anik Pearson Architect, which has flourished since 2001 and delivered more than a hundred projects.

Outside the studio, Pearson finds balance and renewal in pursuits that mirror her architectural values. Martial arts sharpens her focus and underscores the beauty of purposeful movement. Long morning bike rides through Manhattan serve as both meditation and problem-solving, while painting and gardening deepen her sensitivity to color, texture, and the rhythms of nature. These practices remind her to slow down, observe, and recharge her creative spirit — continuities between her inner life and her professional one.

At the heart of Pearson's philosophy is a simple conviction: honor craft, stay curious, listen deeply. She sees architecture as inseparable from life itself, an act of empathy, discipline, and imagination that must hold meaning for generations to come. Her legacy, she hopes, will not only be the homes she has designed, but also the doors she has opened: for clients who discover spaces that reflect their stories, and for women in architecture who can step forward knowing that their vision has a rightful place in the field.

"Architects shape not just buildings, but the environments where life unfolds."

— Anik Pearson

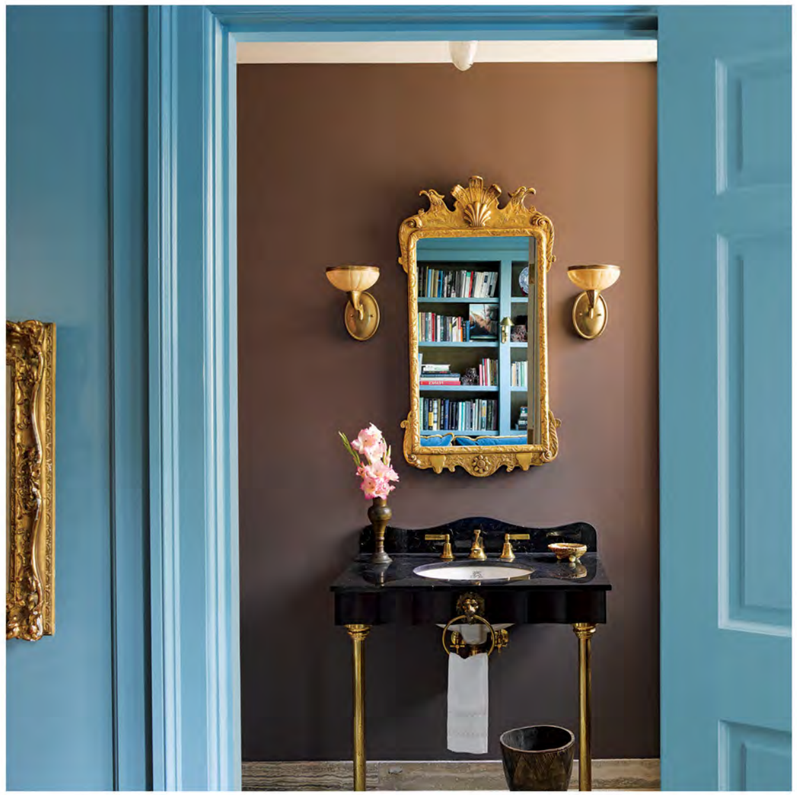
The Work

Photography by Annie Schlechter

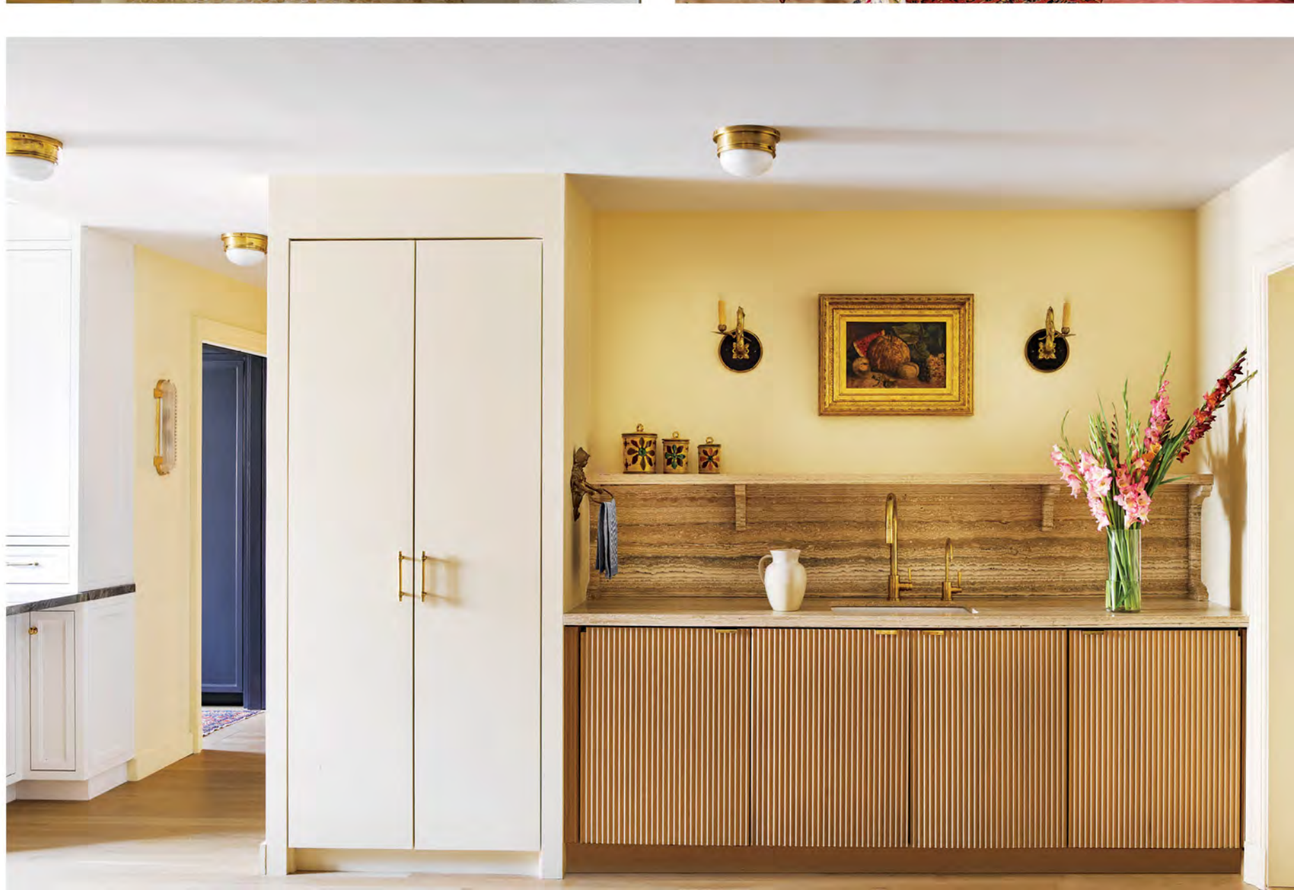
— Anik Pearson

ART
FRANCE

RUSCHA



RUSCHA
TARFIN
ROSE URIACKE AT HOME
DECORATIVE ARTS



The Prospective

WHAT DOES BEAUTY MEAN IN ARCHITECTURE, AND HOW DO YOU DEFINE IT IN YOUR WORK?

True beauty arises when a building feels inevitable in its place, when the proportions are right, the materials are honest, and the space quietly uplifts the people who inhabit it. In my work, I define beauty through craftsmanship, restraint, and a deep respect for nature and tradition. I believe beauty is not a luxury — it's a form of care. It honors the people we design for, and the world we leave behind.

HOW DO YOU THINK WOMEN, SPECIFICALLY IN ARCHITECTURE, AFFECT THE WORLD?

Women in architecture bring a perspective that is both expansive and deeply attuned to nuance. We are trained — by experience and necessity — to listen carefully, observe keenly, and solve problems with a layered sensitivity that considers not just how space looks, but how it feels, functions, and supports daily life. Women often approach architecture holistically, blending practicality with emotional intelligence, aesthetics with empathy.

By championing collaboration over ego and long-term thinking over trends, women have the power to reshape the profession itself, making it more inclusive, sustainable, and human-centered. As more women rise into leadership, they are not only changing how buildings are designed, but how teams are run, how mentorship is valued, and how the next generation is empowered.

We affect the world by designing with care, and by showing that strength in architecture doesn't have to look like dominance. It can look like clarity, integrity, and grace.

HOW DOES THE SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE, OR HISTORY INFORM YOUR DESIGNS?

Whether designing in Maine, Manhattan, or Utah, I ask: What came before? What does this place want to be? History, vernacular craft, and climate all guide the design — visually, materially, and spiritually.

IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU MENTOR OR ADVOCATE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF WOMEN IN ARCHITECTURE?

Mentorship has always been a quiet but essential part of my practice, and since 2019, I've committed to making it more intentional through the creation of Mentorship for Women in Architecture (MWA). MWA is a platform I co-founded with my friends and colleagues Angelique Pierre and Nancy Kleppel to foster dialogue, connection, and support among women at all stages of their careers. We host seminars and discussions with female (and male!) leaders in the field to share stories, and to address not only design, but also the realities of practice: how to build confidence, handle clients, navigate bias, and lead with integrity.

I believe mentorship is one of the most powerful ways to shift the culture of architecture. By sharing experience, offering encouragement, and simply listening, we create space for others to grow, rise, and thrive. It's about showing that success in this field doesn't have to follow a traditional path, and that there's room for new voices and new ways of leading.

HOW DO YOU PERSONALLY DEFINE LEGACY, AND WHAT DO YOU HOPE YOURS WILL BE?

To me, legacy is about what endures beyond one's lifetime — not just buildings, but values, relationships, and inspiration. It's the quiet impact you have on people and the profession through your work, your mentorship, and your example. I hope my legacy will be one of craftsmanship, integrity, and empowerment, designing homes that stand the test of time and fostering a more inclusive architecture community.

I want to be remembered not only for the beauty and durability of my buildings but also for the doors I helped open for future generations of women architects. Legacy is about creating a foundation for others to build upon with confidence, courage, and care.

"I seek out poetry in a stone wall, the elegance of a timber joint, the way light enters a room at just the right moment."

— Anik Pearson

Even in a world without constraints — financial, environmental, or technical — I would still choose to work with them. The best architectural projects are complex puzzles, rich with challenges that deepen meaning and invite true innovation.

A small urban site, for instance, requires every inch to be used with intention, leading to inventive layouts where space efficiency becomes a form of beauty. Strategic hedges, allées of trees, or layered terraces can transform a tight parcel into a seemingly expansive retreat, cloaking it in a sense of seclusion and nature.

Another kind of constraint arises from a client's aspirations. Imagine a home in Maine, requested to be fossil fuel-free, all-electric, and water-recapturing, yet firmly rooted in the local vernacular of stone walls and cedar siding. The challenge is to design a super-efficient building envelope where state-of-the-art insulation encapsulates the house, while still allowing the warmth of natural materials to read on the exterior. A field of solar panels becomes not just a technical necessity but a sculptural element of the landscape. Here, sustainability and regional character are not competing values, but interdependent layers of the design.

Constraints can also come from history and culture. In New York City, a client wished to recreate a true American Beaux Arts studio apartment. That singular vision became our guide: gilded fretwork framing verre églomisé paneling, custom iron balusters in the style of Edgar Brandt, a vintage E.F. Caldwell bronze chandelier, and William Morris wallcoverings. Every decision, from finishes to fixtures, was filtered through this lens, resulting in a home that feels both transportive and timeless.

And at times, a client's philosophy shapes the design. One family wanted a country house that would serve as a retreat, with its own walking trails and views. Though patrons of the arts, they asked that the architecture frame nature itself as the art. Sleeping porches and seamless connections to the outdoors turned the landscape into the central experience of the home.

These examples embody the spirit of my dream project: weaving tradition with innovation, craft with technology, and efficiency with beauty. Ultimately, it would stand as proof that architecture achieves its greatest power not by erasing limitations, but by transforming them into opportunities for authenticity, ingenuity, and resonance. That is why each of my projects is unique. No two projects are the same. Each is shaped by the distinct constraints, contexts, and stories that bring it into being.◆

The Imagined

— Anik Pearson