

Saint John architect Monica Adair receives national award



Monica Adair, principal architect at Acre Architects. She's one of 16 entrepreneurs across Atlantic Canada named to the Entrepreneurial Leaders Program.

Photo: Cindy Wilson/Telegraph-Journal

SAINT JOHN • Her path in life wasn't a straight line, but it still brought her national recognition.

Monica Adair, co-founder of Acre Architects in Saint John, received the 2015 Young Architect Award from the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada.

Adair, 37, is still processing the honour.

"I really haven't had time to let it sink in, what it means to me," she said.

The award is given to an architect under the age of 40 who has displayed an excellence in design, leadership and service to the profession.

Born and raised in Saint John, it took her a while before she discovered she wanted to be an architect. She originally received an undergraduate degree in psychology and Spanish from UNB Fredericton. But her travels are what shaped her.

After graduating high school, Adair went on an exchange to Spain, where her mentor was an architect. Later she travelled to Taiwan to teach English. It was there she applied to the University of Toronto to study architecture.

"It's interesting to get this award. It's not about what you did recently. It's interesting because I haven't thought about all the things that kind of helped me become what I am today," adding they've all shaped her architecture practice as well.

Adair said the award is not only good for her but also a nod her company, which is only four years old.

"It recognizes me as a young architect under 40 but I think it's still in the work of our practice."

Acre Architects has offices in Saint John and Brooklyn, where she and her partner, Stephen Kopp, used to live. The company was born on a rooftop there one evening.

The idea was that the two of them, along with their architect friends, would continue to work on projects together after they split up. They moved around, working on solo projects while trying to stay connected, and eventually opened up their own practice in both cities.

“(Brooklyn) is a small office but it’s nice to have access to the market,” she said.

Despite the company being located in Saint John she said they treat it as if it’s a global enterprise.

“We don’t see this as boundaries or a limit of where we work, although we call New Brunswick home.”

The Port City has been good to the Adair and Kopp, who have two sons together named Hugo and Valentino. The youngest was born just four weeks ago and both go to work with mom and dad.

Acre Architects has brought together a group of people who try to find the unconventional solution. Adair describes their style as storied architecture, which combines the province’s past and future.

“I think we have great heritage buildings and a great history of architecture here, but what we want to promote is also what our future looks like.”

Adair’s leadership and creativity are what the five-person jury noticed when her application came across their desks.

The executive director of the institute, Ian Chodikoff, said there are many reasons why Adair was the perfect choice.

“She is tenacious and she is a very dedicated to the profession,” he said. “To an outsider it might appear that everything she did just fell into place but that’s not the case. It’s very difficult to do what she’s done.”

Chodikoff and Adair have been friends for a number of years and he said he’s thrilled she has been recognized for her hard work.

“Saint John is a wonderful place, I’ve been there many times. But it’s not an easy market for a young practitioner to gain traction in the architecture world.”

Adair will receive her award at the institute’s architecture festival, which takes place in Calgary in June.

“The years that brought me to this award are built by my family and friends and the amazing people I’ve been so fortunate to work with,” she said.