

First 500: Anina Mbilinyi

First 500
Author Unknown
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First 500 features Anina Mbilinyi as a Black Female Architect in their directory database.

Anina is a licensed architect – second black female in Wisconsin – with 25+ years of industry experience. Anina has devoted her career as an architect to working on award-winning complex buildings that serve to improve health and save lives across the world. Her expertise includes hospitals, research labs, medical manufacturing facilities, and higher education facilities focused on health sciences, engineering, chemistry, and energy research. As a Lead Project Architect, she takes pride in leading and collaborating with internal and external teammates to meet the client's vision. Anina is a champion of sustainability, and she is passionate about environmental justice and social justice.

Anina followed a nontraditional path to becoming an architect compared to others in the USA. She is a proud Tanzanian, born and raised in Dar es Salaam until the age of 15 when her family moved to Brussels, Belgium.

Anina fell in love with architecture in her single digits, appreciating it in both Tanzania and Europe before moving to the USA to pursue her college education. She attended Macalester College—a liberal arts college without an architecture program—graduating in Mathematics (honors) and Studio Art. Anina's childhood background and liberal arts education shaped her into an informed citizen of the world, enabling her to respect diversity and value people's different backgrounds. Before attending a formal architecture school, Anina's first architectural experience was an internship at MD Consultancy Architects in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Through this two-year internship, she learned to design buildings (including custom furniture and cabinetry), prepare construction documents, and supervise construction.

After her internship, Anina pursued a Master's in Architecture at the School of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee. During her tenure, she advocated for representation of non-Western world architecture in the form of a studio. Her efforts alongside Prof. Van Oudenallen were successful as the Mexico City-based studio continued for years. Anina's own project from the studio received first place in the prestigious 1997 Benn/Johnck AIA Chicago Awards in Architecture. While interning in Tanzania, Anina witnessed first-hand the devastating refugee crisis from the 1994 Rwandan genocide, sparking her thesis topic. Her pre-thesis research revealed that the absence of post-war mental healing perpetuated the cycle of genocide. Anina's thesis, "Architecture towards a permanent solution in Rwanda," included safe temporary towns along a river, each terminated by a permanent structure at the water for mental health support. The building included spaces for therapy, workshops for healing through arts and crafts, and housing for those who needed extra help.

Anina is currently focused on giving back to her community by co-chairing the Wisconsin Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Challenge with Wisconsin NOMA – a collaboration with AIA Wisconsin based on Wisconsin's culture. The Challenge is focused on finding "real micro" changes by examining everyday issues that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in the WI design industry are facing. Wisconsin architecture firms serve as allies by participating in the challenge to create work environments that promote all architects, based on their skills and performance, to leadership roles. The Challenge plays a role in leaving behind a "Legacy of Humanity" for future generations of humankind.

Location:
Middleton, WI

Website:

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