



# Openly confident, openly passionate

A Q&A with Jane Greenwood

BY RAJAS KARNIK | JUNE 2022

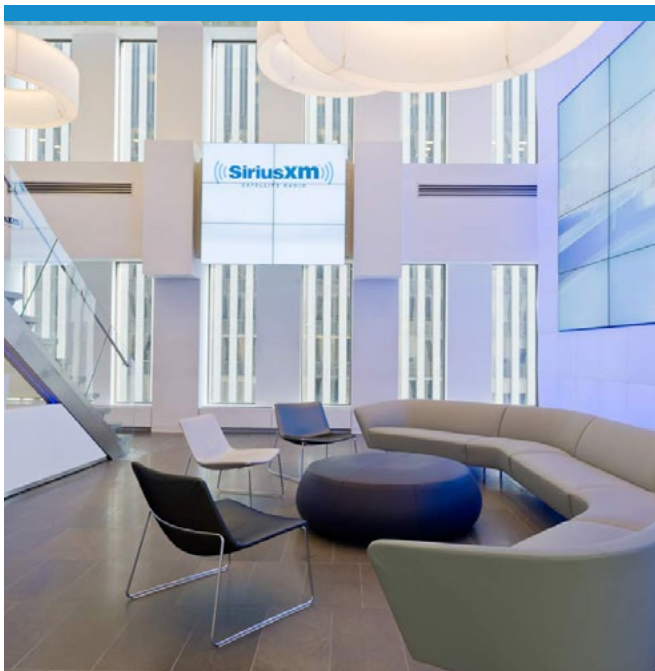
On March 24, Build Out Alliance hosted “An Evening with Jane Greenwood,” Jane is managing principal at Kostow Greenwood Architects. Rajas Karnik, president of Build Out Alliance, interviewed Jane and the following article is a snapshot of their conversation. The video recording of the event may be viewed at: <https://buildoutalliance.org/past-events/evening-with-jane-greenwood>

**Rajas Karnik:** *I first heard about Jane Greenwood in 2017 when OUT magazine announced its annual OUT100, the most influential LGBTQ+ people of the year. Until then, I had only seen celebrities, choreographers, fashionistas, and community organizers on that list. It was a list I would usually just browse. So when I saw an architect, I stopped and*



Rajas Karnik, president & founding member of Build Out Alliance, left, and Jane Greenwood, AIA, LEED AP, managing principal at Kostow Greenwood Architects. Photo: Quinton Turner Photography.

*read through and then researched Jane and, wow! Her career is truly inspiring. She’s been recognized by Build Magazine; as one of the “7 LGBT Design Pros to Know” by Houzz; as a “Woman of Influence” by New*



SiriusXM lobby, designed by Kostow Greenwood Architects. Photo: Courtesy of Kostow Greenwood Architects.

York Business Journal; and, most recently, as one of the 40 “Notable Women in Construction, Design and Architecture” by Crain’s New York Business.

*But more than the accolades she has received, she is a mentor who is actively involved with high school, college, and post-graduate students. She is someone who simultaneously sparks interest in teens and guides emerging professionals, and she is an advocate who continues to speak on behalf of equality in the workplace, not only for women but also for minorities and the LGBTQ+ community.*

*With that, let’s ask Jane: Who would you say is Jane Greenwood?*

**Jane Greenwood:** Thank you Rajas. From the sound of it, I’d say I’m pretty busy. But seriously, I am a woman who is an architect, an out lesbian and, hopefully, I bring a lot of my life experiences to my profession. Ultimately, it is about being who I am and the accolades are the icing on the cake.

**RK:** *As an openly gay woman, how have the challenges and/or opportunities for your career changed over the years?*

**JG:** I’ve been incredibly lucky. I have not experienced

first-hand the discrimination experienced by many openly gay and BIPOC professionals. I attribute my good fortune to my parents, who taught me to be confident, reminding me, “You can do whatever you want to do” and that has been my mantra. I can be who I am. I have the confidence; I have the ability and, hopefully, people consider that I have the talent. I also made some good career choices. I knew that as a woman in this industry I had to find a situation where I could grow. Almost 30 years ago, I met Michael Kostow. In the interview to join his then existing architecture firm, Mickey asked me what my goal was and I proudly responded that I wanted to be an associate. I joined the firm in 1993, proved myself, progressed, and, in 2002, Mickey and I morphed the firm into Kostow Greenwood Architects. The fear of the glass ceiling or not having control of my career was no longer an issue.

**RK:** *You chose to pursue architecture studies later in life. What were you doing before you decided to go back to school? I understand you’re a closeted equestrian.*

## In high school I told my guidance counselor I wanted to be an architect and her response was, ‘Girls aren’t architects.’

**JG:** Yes, I was an equestrian. I took a gap year that became almost seven years after high school. I told my supportive parents, “I don’t want to go to college yet, but I really want to go to riding school in England.” And they said, “Okay.” Training and showing horses became my career until I was in my mid-20s. Then, I parked airplanes. I was a house parent for wards of the court. I got my pilot’s license. Then, finally, a roommate told me, “You need to go to college.” I thought I wanted to be an engineer like my dad. I took a few courses and thought, “This is really terrible.” But across campus, there was a design studio and, after my first class, I was hooked. Ironically, in high school I told my guidance counselor I wanted to be an architect and her response

was, “Girls aren’t architects.” You finally come to what our passion is.

**RK:** *Representation matters, yet the visibility of out queer womxn in the AEC industry is rather limited when compared with out queer men. Did you always feel you could be out, or what barriers did you have to overcome to feel that you could be out in your current role?*

**JG:** I use being a woman as an advantage. I am often the only woman at the table or on the construction site and I embrace that as a positive. I believe that more than half of the students in architecture school are women but is it the lack of opportunity and obstruction that accounts for fewer women being visible in leadership roles?

**RK:** *In the 1990s, you were one of the co-founders of the Organization of Lesbian + Gay Architects and Designers (OLGAD), where you advocated for increased visibility of under-represented individuals in our profession. Can you talk to us about what led to OLGAD’s formation?*

**JG:** A recession. Community will come together when there’s a need to network and be supported. For me personally, I needed to find an outlet for my grief because my brother died in June 1991 of AIDS and I needed to redirect my energies, having cared for him during his illness. I saw an ad in the Center newspaper about a meeting for people in the design community. Sixty people showed up in a room meant for 30! It was crazy. We were desperate for a sense of community,

## We design for a diverse world and if your firm doesn’t look like that, how do you do your best work?

and it grew from there and became OLGAD. We organized industry events and participated in others, one being Canstruction. Our Ken-Ken/Barbie-Barbie wedding cake was rejected by the showroom that was meant to host us. We made a lot of noise about the obvious homophobia and the result was that a more enlightened company opened its showroom to us, and



Top of front page: The configuration of the Reception Hub and Control Room 1 at Verizon Media was carefully considered to balance contrasting work environments. Above: Each control room at Verizon Media has a dedicated audio booth providing multiple positions with visual connectivity to the control room and Reception Hub beyond. Photos: © Adrian Wilson.

we were a hit. But the rejection was devastating, and I realize that this continues to happen across the country. My advice is, get louder. Say what you have to say.

**RK:** *As architects, we don’t always get to choose our projects. What are your views on how to walk the fine line between your ideals and identity while advancing in your career?*

**JG:** I do believe that we should be choosing our clients, especially when it comes to understanding if they are going to be respectful of work and our staff. In our office, we’ve created a culture where everyone feels they can step forward if they feel uncomfortable. How the firm leadership presents itself to prospective clients is vital because the partnership doesn’t really work if you’re not in synch from the beginning.

**RK:** *Kostow Greenwood Architects, which you formed 20 years ago with Michael Kostow, is known for being an example of how diversity across cultural backgrounds, experience and gender can succeed. You’ve long advocated for such in the industry. Based on your firm,*



*why does diversity benefit the work, the clients, and the firm?*

**JG:** I can't imagine it being any other way. As we grew the firm, we cast a wide net to let people know we were hiring. We design for a diverse world and if your firm doesn't look like that, how do you do your best work? I'm proud to say that today, I'm a minority in my office. I'm the only Caucasian woman.

**RK:** *Could you share some of your favorite projects with us?*

**JG:** Glad to. Our firm is known for broadcast arts, performing arts, and preservation and adaptive reuse. SiriusXM is an example of a front-of-house design project that got a lot of attention. We collaborated with Perkins+Will on Verizon Media, where we designed the broadcast studios. We've just been engaged a third time by Manhattan Neighborhood Network and our second project with them was to convert a landmarked firehouse in Harlem into a community broadcast center. Can't wait to begin our new project.

**RK:** *Do you think the times have changed? What is your perspective on the past, present, and future of the design field for queer womxn?*

**JG:** I appreciate the work that those before me and me before you have done, but I don't want to think about the past. The future is what excites me. Visibility is key. I think we should ride the wave of understanding and acceptance happening in our high schools. My wife Maria and I have a 17-year-old son and in listening to him, I realize that his generation is so fluid. It is so refreshing that they don't question diversity. These kids are speaking up and we should listen to and embrace them and support them so that they don't experience our struggles.

---

*Rajas Karnik, AIA, LEED AP, NOMA, COA, is president and founding member of [Build Out Alliance](#), which promotes and advocates for the LGBTQ+ community within the building design and construction industry.*