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Barnard, Sarah Barnard Design; Adaeze
Cadet, HKS; Wilson Chow, OM; Eric
MacDonald, OM; Melissa Flores, OM
Photo: Cecily A. Brown



Julie Smith-Clementi, courtesy of subject



Adaeze Cadet, courtesy of subject



Sarah Barnard, courtesy of subject

SUCCESSFUL LAUNCH OF OM CHATS: DESIGN DISCUSSIONS FOR THINKING PROFESSIONALS

November, 2019

November 10, 2019, Ontario, CA — Mid-market seating company OM hosted the inaugural OM Chats: Design Discussions for Thinking Professionals at the Helms Design Center in Culver City. With the intention of exploring ideas of interest to the architecture and design industries, OM envisioned this series of conversations to include multiple speakers, span geographies, and build a community of curious, engaged professionals.

Launching with the theme How Empathy Creates Extraordinary Experiences, the initial chat explored the role of empathy in the design of space and products. In front of an enthusiastic audience, OM was joined by architects, interior designers, and product designers from leading firms, including Adaeze Cadet, Vice President at HKS; Julie Smith-Clementi of the newly formed Smith-Clementi; and Sarah Barnard, principal of Sarah Barnard Design.

The presentations utilized case studies, anecdotes, and visuals that support theories of how we understand the nature of place and the people and communities affected by design interventions; approaches to the design process and accountability; and creating an expanded practice of universal design to include mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing.

“We’re grateful for the opportunity to invite so much talent into one room to share their experience with an idea that resonates with so many of us. Almost 100 architects and designers from firms throughout Los Angeles showed up to listen, to talk, and to share their own knowledge and stories with each other. Today’s chat was the first of many opportunities we are planning to bring smart and even offbeat themes into a casual environment and encourage thoughtful conversation,” shares Wilson Chow, president of OM.

Julie Smith-Clementi opened the conversation by sharing thoughts about her practice, including visual and textual diagrams that illustrate how she defines the design process. Julie segued into some concrete examples, beginning with how working on a child care center prompted deep thinking about how one could design for an audience that cannot read or write. Her findings proved relevant to a host of subsequent challenges, each in some way influenced by the awareness that an audience encompasses a breadth of needs, abilities, and preferences that are distinct from the designer’s and possibly distinct within a specific context. For Smith-Clementi, empathy is a critical starting point for every project.

Adaeze Cadet followed with notes on understanding the nature of place. Her practice, as expressed through HKS’s Responsible Design process, focuses on developing awareness of the systems already at play in the places her projects are nested within. This awareness stems from learning about the people and communities affected by her architectural interventions, then using that understanding to define project goals that enhance the human experience.

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Sarah Barnard, Julie Smith-Clementi, Adaeze Cadet
Photo: Cecily A Brown



Empathy in Design
Photo: Cecily A Brown



Event swag
Photo: Cecily A Brown



Werksy® Rocker
Photo: Cecily A Brown

Sarah Barnard took an interiors-oriented approach, offering a how-to on creating inclusive environments for highly sensitive people. Her tenets include a reminder that our job as designers and advocates of good design is to consider the intersections and overlaps of *all* people, and to create spaces that meet the highest possible need across categories. She challenges herself to consider how she can combine elements of known design strategies to create an expanded practice of universal design that includes mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing. Sarah's hope is that we practice a state of mindfulness in creating varied experiences and environments that allow for personal choice, and work cross-discipline and cross-ability to design with empathy, making all built environments inclusive, restorative spaces.

AAHID member Lynnette Tedder, Healthcare Practice Leader for Perkins&Will, was slated to speak but was sidelined by the catastrophic fire that ripped through Southern California last week. Lynnette has been a long time proponent of empathy as a design tenet. Her practice involves understanding empathy as a muscle that needs to be exercised, as well as a state of awareness grounded in a willingness to question one's perceptions.

During a moderated question-and-answer session, OM asked the assembled architect-designers how they explained the burgeoning interest in empathy as a design tenet, how they imagine the practice evolving, and what challenges they face bringing empathy into play in project solutions. While all agreed that the interest in empathy is a natural offspring of seismic rumblings in the culture at large, challenges abound – foremost among them being budget, of course, as well as awareness bias. Awareness bias was explained as the habit of seeing only what you need to look for, explaining how it is, for example, that an overhead walkway could be designed with a glass floor. These misses can be so obvious as to leave us shaking our heads, but they also serve to remind us that we are all biased in our own ways. The practice of empathy then, is the invitation to consciously and thoughtfully consider experience, space, and object through the eyes of others. In a closing remark, the audience was offered an impassioned reminder that, “When you have a seat at the table, speak up. You’re there for a reason – use it. Be a champion for empathy.”

OM has a reputation for smart conversation and a curiosity about the ideas and practices that inform the spaces in which we work and create community. OM Chats marks the beginning of a more active and in-depth involvement in supporting these conversations in a public forum.

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OM is a national leader in mid-market seating solutions for small and large businesses, healthcare environments, educational and governmental institutions, various public and private organizations, and anywhere work happens. Founded in 1986 on an egg ranch in San Marcos, CA, OM has grown from a regional provider of ergonomic task seating into a nationally respected and sought-after source for seating to support today's work spaces.

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Speaker bios

Julie Smith-Clementi, product designer and architect, Smith-Clementi

AIA, IDSA

Julie was integral in the development of countless award-winning projects at Rios Clementi Hale Studios. She is at her best when uniting her passions for buildings, spaces, and objects to create holistic environments. Julie works to erase boundaries between disciplines on all projects, and looks for the best means to express design ideas. She regularly employs empathy in her role as a “disciplinary agnostic” working to curate great teams and challenge them to find new ways to work beyond their expertise to create unique, client-specific experiences.

Julie’s experience in crafting acclaimed interiors persuaded her that her firm should also design, manufacture, and sell furnishings that bring rooms to life. That conviction led in 2001 to the formation of notNeutral, with Julie as its President and CEO. Under her leadership, the notNeutral brand quickly developed a national reputation and a retail presence worldwide. Whether developing a product or brand that has never existed or re-imagining a venue brand that has been around for 100 years, Julie works to make the mission clear and legible and the associated product or space beautiful.



Adaeze Cadet, HKS
Photo: Cecily A Brown

Adaeze Cadet, Vice President, HKS

AIA, LEED BDC*

From a young age, Adaeze held a passion for architecture and design. After working in multiple HKS offices and traveling abroad, she is proud to use her creativity to design beautiful, functional and sustainable projects. As a designer with more than years of experience working in all phases of architecture, her primary focus is on hospitality, high-rise residential and mixed-use work. She also creates design solutions on various design competitions throughout the year. Adaeze brings a fresh perspective to design, encouraging innovation while maintaining functionality.

Adaeze holds a Master of Architecture and a Bachelor of Science in Architecture from Prairie View A&M University and is a registered architect in the state of Texas. She is NCARB certified, is a LEED Accredited Professional Building Design + Construction, and is a member of the American Institute of Architects.



Sarah Barnard,
Photo: Cecily A Brown

Sarah Barnard

Sarah Barnard Design, WELL + LEED

Sarah Barnard, designs healthy, happy, personalized spaces that are deeply connected to nature and art. With a contemporary approach that employs traditional vocabulary, Barnard’s range of style is innovative yet time-honored. The ideas most essential to her practice and design process are wellness, historic preservation, and the infinite ways in which design can enhance life.

Barnard has been featured in publications internationally and was named a “Ones to Watch Scholar” by the American Society of Interior Designers. Barnard holds a Master of Fine Arts degree from Claremont Graduate University as well as undergraduate degrees in Art and Interior Architectural Design.



Julie Smith-Clementi
Photo: Cecily A Brown

Barnard is a member of the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID), is certified by the National Kitchen and Bath Association (NKBA), She has served on the Santa Monica Conservancy's board of directors and has lectured at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), California State University Northridge (CSUN), Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising (FIDM), Queens Museum, Pacific Design Center and the California Preservation Foundation.