

Antonio Argibay of Meridian Design Associates Architects PC: How We Plan to Rebuild in The Post COVID Economy

An Interview With Charlie Katz



Charlie Katz [Follow](#)
Dec 8 · 10 min read



Our damage has been very light, and rebuilding will be healing focused. In other words, it is my hope that the process of opening and allowing our company to fully function while remaining safe will heal the damage done during this period. Growth will be based on recognizing opportunities for aggressive expansion to other markets by leveraging the robustness of our organization.

Assess damage, prioritize repairs, and keep your eyes open for opportunities that will speed those necessary repairs. Getting up and running will be critical to take advantage of opportunities.

• • •

As part of my series about the “How Business Leaders Plan To Rebuild In The Post COVID Economy”, I had the pleasure of interviewing Antonio Argibay, AIA, LEED AP, Managing Principal at Meridian Design Associates Architects P.C., an award-winning, global company headquartered in New York, with offices in Miami and Sevilla, Spain. Their portfolio of work runs the gamut of commercial interiors to retail to residential to healthcare.

Since founding the firm in 1981, he has focused Meridian toward a strong social responsibility to find people-centered solutions, an area of great passion for Antonio. His primary area of practice is Media & Entertainment, where he and his team of visionaries plan next-generation spaces to work seamlessly with today’s workflows and remain relevant for years to come through carefully



Photo Credit: Geandy Pavon

projected future scenarios.

Antonio and his staff have proven the innovative quality of their work through projects such as the game-changing Warner Media HQ relocation to Hudson Yards and HBO's LAG Data Center. Meridian's other blue-chip entertainment clients include CBS, CNN, ESPN, Telemundo, A+E, ABC, Discovery and NBC. Antonio and his work has been featured in the Associated Press, Broadcast Engineering, The New York Times, The New York Post, The New York Daily News, EFE News and many other leading publications. He was recently profiled by Hispanic Executive Magazine — <https://hispanicexecutive.com/2018/antonio-argibay-meridian-design/>.

He is an active speaker in the areas of Media & Entertainment, Architecture, Diversity, Leadership and Sustainability at venues including Columbia



University and M Booth.

Antonio received his bachelor's and master's degrees from Pratt Institute. He is a member of the American Institute of Architects, LEED and National Council of Architectural Registration Boards accredited and a registered architect in over a dozen states. He is a member of the Board of Directors of Friends of the National Museum of the American Latino and has been recognized with awards from The Committee for Hispanic Children and Families, Inc. and Upwardly Global.

• • •

Thank you so much for your time! I know that you are a very busy person. Our readers would love to “get to know you” a bit better. Can you tell us a bit about your ‘backstory’ and how you got started?

I’m an immigrant, born in Havana, Cuba. I became a refugee as a child after Fidel Castro took over and my parents sent me to the safety of Spain, where I lived with my grandparents. I was finally reunited with my mother and father when I arrived in the United States as a teenager, not speaking a word of English. Eventually, I learned the language and went on to earn my bachelor’s degree in architecture at Pratt Institute and completed a master’s degree with a full-tuition scholarship while working.

Fast-forward, I founded Meridian Design Associates, Architects about 40 years ago. My love of architecture was formed by my twin passions for social consciousness and my love for design. Meridian is where I get to express my philosophy of putting People First which, to me, is designing space that is respectful of people and occupants on every level imaginable. My design trademarks include practical functionality as well as an attuned sensibility for lighting, acoustic demands and interactivity.

I am deeply spiritual and have many creative hobbies including drawing, gourmet cooking and palmistry. Above all else, my family is my greatest joy.

Can you share a story about the funniest mistake you made when you were first starting? Can you tell us what lessons or ‘take aways’ you learned from that?

In the early days of the firm’s practice, we were tasked with designing a Japanese cultural center which required creating a presentation for the client. The time came for us to present our ideas with boards that had renderings and other drawings to showcase the future lobby and new grand stairway. The Japanese director and representatives looked at the stair elevation cautiously and covered their mouths as they spoke, smiling amongst themselves. The time came to discuss the stairway, and I asked their opinion, somewhat convinced the presentation was a homerun.



The director paused and said, “The balustrade and railing...they mean something in Japanese characters.”

I had to ask — “Well what does it say?” I was intrigued to find double meaning in the design.

The director snickered embarrassedly and said, “It means... wind.”

Ah. I was so happy! “How poetic is that?” I thought to myself.

My face was beaming, until he added, “Wind you make.”

After repeating it to myself, I understood. We all got the meaning and laughed heartily in unison. BTW — After a minor change, the design was approved.

Is there a particular book that you read, or podcast you listened to, that really helped you in your career? Can you explain?

A solid philosophical foundation is essential to achieve success in one’s business and career. Philosophy is critical because it drives values and they in turn drive the trajectory of a career and business. There are several books that have been very formative for me, but “Meditations” by Marcus Aurelius has been most pertinent for my personal growth.

Extensive research suggests that “purpose driven business” are more successful in many areas. When you started your company what was your vision, your purpose?

When I started Meridian Design nearly 40 years ago, the concept of a “purpose driven business” was nonexistent. However, that is what we were from the outset and continue to strive to be. We used phrases then, such as “We are not only in the business of making architecture, but of making architects,” and we still use them to this day. Even when we started, we defined our design goals around putting #PeopleFirst. These two concepts have shaped the company and our work over the decades and are presently articulated through our present-day values: sustainability, innovation, loyalty, personal development, quality, and opportunity. We are successful because we have followed our purpose creatively and tenaciously through thick and thin.

Do you have a “number one principle” that guides you through the ups and downs of running a business?

That is a great question and one I ask myself regularly! In business and in life, there is only one principle that must be followed in order to succeed: treat others as you would like to be treated.

Thank you for all that. The Covid-19 pandemic has affected nearly every aspect of our lives today. For the benefit of empowering our readers,

Follow



can you share with our readers a few of the personal and family related challenges you faced during this crisis? Can you share what you've done to address those challenges?

My daughter lives in Philadelphia where she is working as a research assistant at a local university in community health and epidemiology. She had to move out of her apartment and scheduled the move for the third week of March. It created a bit of conflict with business travel for me, but I was glad to be part of this father-daughter ritual.

As the day approached, it became clear that if I went, I would be seriously disregarding the ever-increasing health risks noted by public health professionals. I didn't go. Since the quarantine, our family, which is based in multiple cities around the US, has since instituted a weekly Saturday night online meeting so we can play games like Trivia Pursuit, share a virtual glass of wine, and share our company. These nights are priceless for us as we navigate this crisis apart.

Can you share a few of the biggest work related challenges you are facing during this pandemic? Can you share what you've done to address those challenges?

The biggest challenge for us has been collaboration. As a stop-gap measure, the transition to online meetings that provide the ability to virtually draw, exchange design concepts, and represent ideas has been very helpful. Another benefit that has risen from this period of remote work has been a greater emphasis on communication. Everyday consists of multiple meetings with different clients, and these interactions have exposed that there is more to communication than conversation.

A study by UCLA noted that verbal discourse makes up only three percent of the ways we communicate, with voice and tone at 38%, followed by body language at 55%. All the nuanced facial expressions and body language that create communication are intuitively missed virtually, so I have found important to use my camera and let people see me.

Otherwise, one of the biggest challenges we have faced is the closing of construction sites and the corresponding economic turmoil. We are addressing these unavoidable aspects by turning inward and sharpening our skills and training so when we go back to our workplace, we will be stronger and better.

Many people have become anxious from the dramatic jolts of the news cycle. The fears related to the coronavirus pandemic have understandably heightened a sense of uncertainty, fear, and loneliness. What are a few ideas that you have used to offer support to your family and loved ones who were feeling anxious? Can you explain?

Most of our anxiety is regarding what the future will bring. Historical



perspective is indispensable in understanding the effects the virus may have in both the near and far future. This pandemic isn't the first and certainly won't be the last the world will face. The world has seen its share of crises and we have recovered from those, arguably better than we were before. I hold that same belief now — hope for the future, be it radically different or similar to what life was pre-COVID-19, is what keeps me going.

Obviously we can't know for certain what the Post-Covid economy will look like. But we can of course try our best to be prepared. We can reasonably assume that the Post-Covid economy will be a trying time for many people across the globe. Yet at the same time the Post-Covid growth can be a time of opportunity. Can you share a few of the opportunities that you anticipate in the Post-Covid economy?

Opportunity has two sides: what is an opportunity for one is a loss for someone else. For example, tenants may have greater opportunities in the rental market as rental prices decrease due to lower demand. On the other hand, landlords will suffer losses because of the drop in rent values. During the COVID period, we should seize the opportunity to assess values and set priorities. This will allow us to see the opportunities as they arise in the post-COVID period.

How do you think the COVID pandemic might permanently change the way we behave, act or live?

If we look back at the 1918 Influenza pandemic, which came in 3 waves over two-year span, what has **permanently** changed? That pandemic killed the equivalent of two million people in today's US population. Citizens faced mandatory quarantines, facemasks and economic turmoil, which are the same as what is happening in today's crisis. What I continue to ask myself is this — what radically changed about the ways in which society functioned once that crisis ended?

The pandemic has exposed how fundamental globalization and technology are and will be in crises to come. For me, it is no surprise that the pandemic happened — the last administration foresaw the likelihood of a future with some sort of biological emergency.

What is a surprise for me, however, is how technology has united people on all social fronts during a period where previously it would not have been possible. Employers were able to radically adapt the ways in which business was done. Remote work served a very large segment of the population on a worldwide scale. Families — mine included — adjusted to being far from loved ones but not out of touch.

I have no doubt that the pandemic will have implications for the way we go about living for some time. I believe that in immediate future, we will be much more aware of other people's health and the fragility of our own. Designing offices and public spaces will adjust as we make our way back to familiar yet

unfamiliar territory. It is my hope, and general understanding as I look back to other biological crises, that these changes will not be forever, and that keeps me inspired even amongst a depressing near outlook.

Considering the potential challenges and opportunities in the Post-Covid economy, what do you personally plan to do to rebuild and grow your business or organization in the Post-Covid Economy?

Our damage has been very light, and rebuilding will be healing focused. In other words, it is my hope that the process of opening and allowing our company to fully function while remaining safe will heal the damage done during this period. Growth will be based on recognizing opportunities for aggressive expansion to other markets by leveraging the robustness of our organization.

Similarly, what would you encourage others to do?

Assess damage, prioritize repairs, and keep your eyes open for opportunities that will speed those necessary repairs. Getting up and running will be critical to take advantage of opportunities.

Can you please give us your favorite “Life Lesson Quote”? Can you share how that was relevant to you in your life?

“The only wealth which you will keep forever is the wealth you have given away,” by Marcus Aurelius of course! I have found the greatest satisfaction in life by giving — and the joy that comes along with it.

How can our readers further follow your work?

One quick way to see our design work is at our website www.meridiandesign.com. Additionally, there have been a few articles and interviews that can help get a better understanding of who and what we are which are also found on our webpage.

Thank you so much for sharing these important insights. We wish you continued success and good health!

• • •

About The Author: As Exec. Creative Director, Charlie Katz spearheads the full gamut of creative marketing for [Bitbean Software Development](#) in Lakewood, NJ. Charlie has over 20 years experience in major NY and west coast agencies, including Dancer-Fitzgerald-Sample, now Saatchi & Saatchi, D'Arcy-MacManus & Masius, and Wells, Rich Greene. Starting as a junior copywriter and moving up to Exec. Creative Director, he developed creative strategies and campaigns for such clients as Colgate, R.J. Reynolds, KFC, and Home Depot. Along the way he won numerous national and international awards including the NY Advertising Club 'Andy'.

Business



WRITTEN BY

Charlie Katz

Executive Creative Director at Bitbean Software Development

Follow



Authority Magazine

Leadership Lessons from Authorities in Business, Film, Sports and Tech. Authority Mag is devoted primarily to sharing interesting feature interviews of people who are authorities in their industry. We use interviews to draw out stories that are both empowering and actionable.

Follow

Learn more.

Medium is an open platform where 170 million readers come to find insightful and dynamic thinking. Here, expert and undiscovered voices alike dive into the heart of any topic and bring new ideas to the surface. [Learn more](#)

Make Medium yours.

Follow the writers, publications, and topics that matter to you, and you'll see them on your homepage and in your inbox. [Explore](#)

Share your thinking.

If you have a story to tell, knowledge to share, or a perspective to offer — welcome home. It's easy and free to post your thinking on any topic. [Write on Medium](#)