

Hispanic Executive

CONSTRUCTION/REAL ESTATE

Antonio Argibay Has Created a Culture That Empowers Young Designers at Meridian Design Associates Architects

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Four decades into its founding, Meridian is a celebration of what empowerment in design can be for employees and community



More than four decades after founding Meridian Design Associates, Antonio Argibay still treats every day like his professional life depends on it. He's up before dawn; his workout is finished around the time most of us are waking up. He is always one of the first to arrive and sit in a typical Meridian workstation in the firm's open studio.

The last time the veteran architect and managing principal spoke with HE, celebration was more than called for. The successful unveiling of the Warner Bros. Discovery Global Headquarters, including a comprehensive reinvention of a thirteen-story nineteenth-century building that was originally home to the American Lithograph company in Manhattan's Flatiron district, kicked off a string of awards that currently numbers close to 20.

Among the most meaningful to Argibay is the project's WELL Platinum certification, the highest level of a rating system focused on occupant health and wellness rather than just environmental performance. For a firm that has long prided itself on "putting people first," that designation validates years of decisions about daylight, circulation, amenities, and filtered potable water that many clients never see on a plan but feel every day they come to work.



Photo by Vinata Ciputra

A Sacred Profession Passed On

While Argibay's name is listed as the architect of record, he says the project was managed by an outstanding architect who the managing principal has watched develop into a design powerhouse.

"We have talent here like Luciana Machado, an essential part of this firm for many years," Argibay says. "She led this critical project flawlessly. She is incredibly talented, intelligent, articulate, and wonderful to work with."

This is what Argibay means when he talks about passing on his passion to the next generation. He calls architecture "a sacred profession," and one that is entrusted with shaping the physical expression of a civilization. This is what more than forty years has been dedicated to: building the kind of organization that empowers the transfer of that knowledge and allows young designers to develop into leaders in their field.

"When we talk about putting people first, that can't just be about your projects," Argibay says. "Your firm and your practice have to be a machine for mentoring. How do you take young people fresh from school and bring them into this sacred profession?" it's a question that underlies his decisions to foster professional growth.

The Commitment Remains

Outside of Meridian, Argibay's most personal ongoing project is one that has yet to break ground. As a longtime board member of Friends of the American Latino Museum, he helped advocate for the federal legislation that authorized the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Latino in 2020, and he has watched the effort inch through the slow work of governance, site studies, and fundraising, even as shifting politics in Washington have complicated the path to a permanent home on the National Mall.

Even with those headwinds, private support has already reached roughly nine figures, and he views that level of commitment, before a final site or design is set, as proof that the country is ready to see American Latino stories elevated alongside its other national narratives.

For Argibay, the museum is the chance to showcase a more complete history of the United States. He imagines future school trips where American Latino children move seamlessly from the other iconic museums on the National Mall to a building that reflects the American Latino own communities' contributions in art, science, public service, and everyday life. He believes that the simple act of recognition can shape identity and ambition for generations.

Until shovels finally break ground on the National Mall, he plans to keep lending his time, voice, and professional credibility to ensure the museum is built where it ensures maximum impact to visitors and is able to reflect the remarkable lives and cultures that have helped shape our country.

A Wide Portfolio

The firm's size is part of that formula: large enough to deliver global headquarters and complex projects, yet small enough that new hires can work across multiple project types and engage directly with leadership. Within that structure, Argibay is at the helm of Meridian's technically advanced media and entertainment facilities—work that draws on decades of experience designing for the world's leading media and entertainment organizations.

That is one end of the spectrum, the corporate interior commissions that help underline Meridian's reputation as a specialist in what Argibay calls "factories of culture," places where content is created, edited, and distributed in increasingly immersive and technologically complex ways.

On the other end are smaller, deeply human projects that test Meridian's versatility. In New Jersey, Meridian are the architects leading the restoration of Grace Presbyterian Church, a historical church to a fire on August 15, 2023. The entire project, Argibay says, has provided education in how faith communities address hunger, social services, and cultural programming, and how architecture can support those missions.

Another new assignment involves a training facility and garage for Hatzalah, the volunteer ambulance organization. It's not a massive project. But it's done in support of an organization whose impact is so much larger than the sum of its parts.



Photo by Vinata Ciputra

Those projects, when paired with a substantial finance industry portfolio, create a truly full-range experience for designers at Meridian.

As the sun rises tomorrow, Argibay will likely be up before most of us, just like he has been for decades. While his fire still burns bright, the founder says his goals now are different. It's about ensuring the culture that has been built at Meridian remains. That should he ever actually retire, which seems unlikely given his energy, the heart and soul of Meridian is intact. Given what Argibay has poured into it, that seems inevitable.