

Arizona Foothills

THE LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE FOR AFFLUENT DESERT LIVING

WE'RE #6!

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE THE
SIXTH-LARGEST CITY IN THE NATION

INSIDER SECRETS:

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CURTAINS UP—

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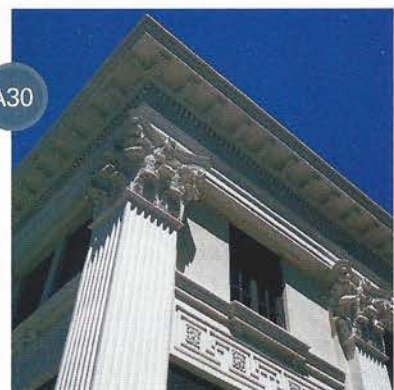
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A12



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A48



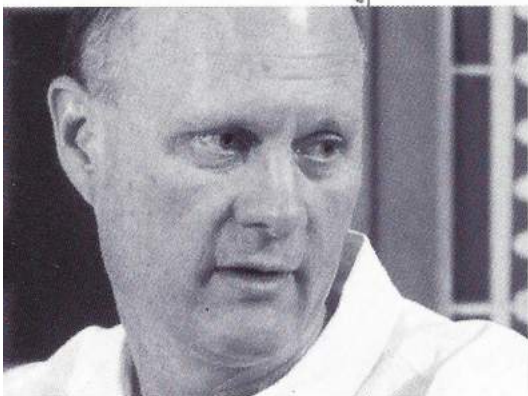
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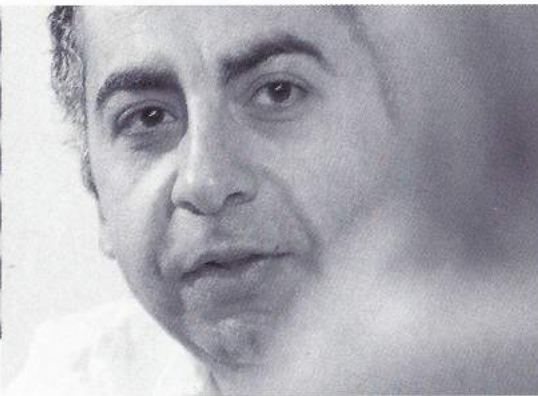
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ARCHITECTS' ROUNDTABLE



RON MCCOY



MARWAN AL-SAYED



WENDELL BURNETTE



JACK DeBARTOLO JR.



CHRISTINE TEN EYCK



WILL BRUDER

Arizona Foothills Magazine assembled some of the Valley's most distinguished architects and asked what's important to them. The discussion soon turned to the city and the public realm—and to what the Valley needs to truly come of age.

EDITED BY KAREN FLAKE WERNER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CASSANDRA TOMEI
LOCATION: THE ROYAL PALMS HOTEL AND CASITAS



1 RON McCOY

McCoy is a professor at and director of ASU's School of Architecture. He received a bachelor's degree in architecture from the University of Southern California and a Master of Architecture from Princeton University. He combines his role as educator with that of partner at McCoy and Simon Architects. His work has been published internationally and has received national and local design awards.

McCOY: The first two points that we will discuss concern this region's legacy of design. If we're going to talk about the current state of design, we have to reflect on its history. The second point is how Phoenix now perceives itself. How is it perceived by others? How does that affect where we are and where we're going?

The next group of questions deals with culture, having to do with where we are and who are the leaders of design.

Lastly, there are some questions about how important design is and what the vision for the future might be. So that's the gist of it, and I think wherever you want to jump in would be good.

BRUDER: I guess logically, starting with the history of the place. I was drawn here by Paolo Soleri. I think the vision of the dwelling was obviously on the periphery of Soleri's early work. And you have that whole phenomenon of the 20's, the Biltmore connections to Frank Lloyd Wright. So there's an amazing heritage here. I've always felt it was a place for ideas.

McCOY: When I got here just six years ago, the Burton Barr Central Library was opening. Some interesting things were happening, and at that time Phoenix was getting more attention than places like Los Angeles.

DeBARTOLO: We should also look at the 40's and at the health reasons that attracted my parents' generation. It's warm, sunny, quiet. It has a beautiful sky and sunsets. It's got beautiful topography. It was unique to the Midwestern and East Coast people who were coming here. A lot of people came just to be healed. The sanitariums that were around were beautiful pieces of architecture.

AL-SAYED: A thing that struck me is the case of the individual coming here and pursuing ideas in a way you can't necessarily do in other places. I think there's an openness to that. The larger issue is, what is it at the level of the culture? That whole issue of health and resort is an interesting one. I think it's something that should be picked up more, in terms of how housing is done in a way that's a lot about place. Most people have strong memories of the resort lifestyle here, even though it's a functioning city.

McCOY: What's the perception when you travel around the country and around the world? What is the perception when people think about Phoenix?

BURNETTE: A lot of us who are practicing architects get résumés from people around the world who are interested in coming to work in Phoenix because of the ideas that are being explored here. I think there's an aura of experimentation that people feel is happening here.

McCOY: What about you Christine? You chose landscape.

TEN EYCK: A lot of people think we're on the forefront of the indigenous plant movement. Visitors are amazed by even the landscape on the freeways. It's incredibly unique, and people are blown away when they see just a simple residence done with native plants.

McCOY: Is it a struggle to detach people from the things they want to bring from the Midwest? To get them to see this landscape?

TEN EYCK: It varies, but most people are pretty into it. I've definitely had to do my share of educating and trying to get clients excited about it, but once they see how it enriches their everyday lives, they're the best advocates.

DeBARTOLO: One of my first trips here was in '68. It was amazing going to a dinner and being from Houston—all the food was outside and the doors were propped open. This was in May, and I couldn't find a fly or a mosquito. The connection with the outdoors was astounding for me. I also think the transplantation of desert trees is a major development. That's a fantastic ability—to discover, preserve and retain massive amounts of desert vegetation.



MARWAN AL-SAYED

Al-Sayed studied architecture at Vassar College and received his Master of Architecture degree at Columbia University. He has been involved in projects around the world, including Phoenix's eco-friendly "House of Earth and Light." He has won numerous awards and now runs Marwan Al-Sayed Architects in Phoenix.



WENDELL BURNETTE

Burnette's architectural education has largely consisted of independent study at home and abroad. His apprenticeship training included three years at the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture. Burnette has earned many honors, including the 1999 Emerging Voice Award by the Architectural League of New York. Today, he runs Wendell Burnette Architects in Phoenix.

BRUDER: I think that factor is more important than any building that's been done in the past 25 years, because it's totally significant to this place maintaining its identity. When I sit in my fourth-level studio in downtown Phoenix, and I'm looking across the tops of all these trees that have been harvested, that's a magical thing. I mean, there's a chance that this place can find its identity, and that's very encouraging.

McCOY: So you're saying that the movement in landscape to reclaim natural plants and specimens was important for the community to recognize the unique quality of the place?

BRUDER: Huge. The fact is that 15, 20 years ago, there was no boxing of desert trees. The indigenous plant movement is really a brand-new thing.

AL-SAYED: I've always felt that we have the opportunity to develop an aesthetic. The plants here are so unique and visually compelling that a whole movement could create something that would be singular in the world. We're on that path, but I don't think we're there yet.

BRUDER: The downside right now is this idea of no-maintenance landscaping. It's a misnomer.

TEN EYCK: That's true. The cities have to invest in maintenance, that's all there is to it. There has to be that love of what it does for your city, and you have to take care of it. What I wish we could do is go back to the early 1900's, when everyone in the country called this place the City of Gardens. Every canal was lined with trees. I wish we could reinvent that.

BURNETTE: That leads to this issue of respect for what's important. Some influential people in Phoenix said, 'We're not going to line Central Avenue with citrus trees; we're going to line it with palo breas. We're going to give this city an identity.' But then these palo breas aren't being maintained in areas where it's more important to see the AM/PM gas station. There's no enforcement from a cultural perspective that says, 'This is important.' The same goes for some of the city's buildings that lent it character and are now being erased. The development concerns take precedence over respect for the culture.

DeBARTOLO: The community really needs to be more sensitive to the reinforcement of place. What are we doing to bring and reestablish the sense of context and character? I think that's the big picture in Phoenix.

TEN EYCK: It would be great if cities thought of themselves like planned communities. Everybody thinks I've kind of sold out by working with Del Webb in Anthem, but I have to tell you that nobody cares more about the landscape than that developer. Nobody cares more about parks and ways to draw people in.

BRUDER: We have to put value on what is valuable. Right now, we have a false sense that because it's old—pre-WWI or pre-WWII—it's important. It would be really neat for students to do an evaluation of interesting buildings every semester and give the owners a little certificate. It doesn't mean it's protected forever, but just that it's worth something. We have this misconception that stuff from the 60's and 70's is garbage.

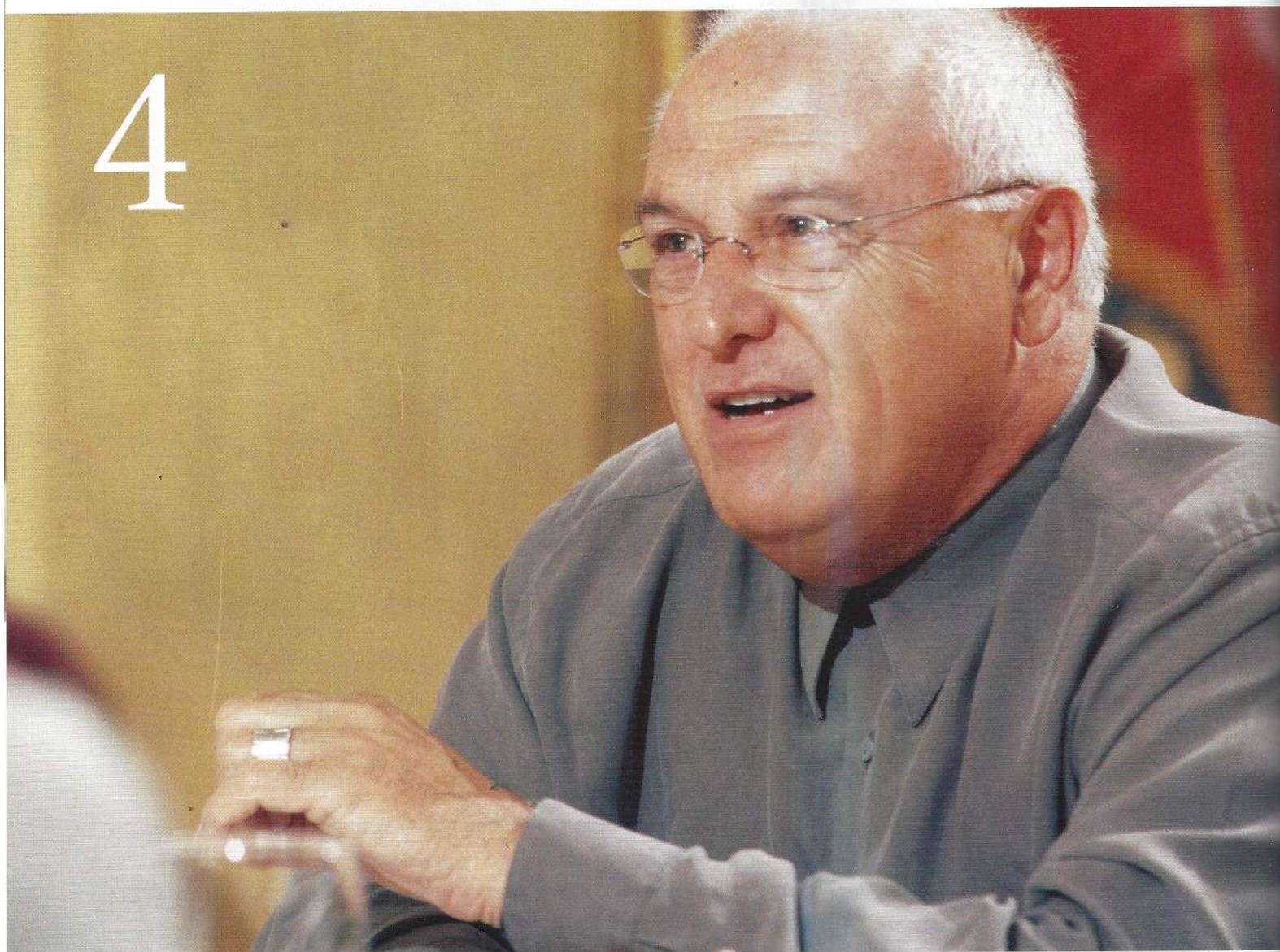
McCOY: You're absolutely right. There's an incredible history in the middle-ground buildings. They're not great architecture, just generic everyday buildings. All the garden-office buildings and some of the housing, you go around and you just sort of discover them, and they're gorgeous. Part of what's killing those is the economy of scale. The contemporary economy of building development doesn't value the smaller scale.

DeBARTOLO: We can sit around this table and talk, but we need a consistent voice. We need someone who talks about all the issues we've brought up so far, who can articulate them in words that the public can get behind. That's going to be the critical issue, to communicate that and link with the community. Maybe this can be the birth of a voice.

AL-SAYED: But I think the big issue is development and developers, because that's the fundamental reality of what's driving this place.

JACK DEBARTOLO JR.

De Bartolo studied architecture at the University of Houston and Columbia University. His work has earned national, regional and local design awards and has been widely published in the architectural and design press. He and his son run DeBartolo Architects in Phoenix.



BRUDER: Right now the Valley suffers from not thinking of itself as a community at large. If politicians had the vision and courage to limit where growth happens, that could be a starting point. It's about a big-idea vision for this place that we need right now. It's the right time to have it.

DeBARTOLO: We've got to work on the root of the tree, with a culture that really does not have much understanding or appreciation for what we're discussing. We've got to instill that into our children, our universities and the educational system. That way, when people come up, whether they're developers or lawyers, they're still sensitive to community context and environment. I know it's a 25-year job, but if we never start, we'll never get there.

McCOY: I think that's right about the voice and working within the culture. *The Arizona Republic* should have an architectural critic. The major cities—New York, San Francisco, Chicago, Los Angeles—have that kind of dialogue in the industry.

BRUDER: Hopefully somebody can write with approachability about the good as well as the bad. Someone needs to write about the broader base of subjects and be open and humanistic about it.

TEN EYCK: Exactly, because you can turn off people so quickly with arrogance.

DeBARTOLO: To begin to set up a visionary community that wants to accomplish something, that's great thinking.

BURNETTE: What would start this voice is a celebration of places that have character. They're not all distinctive works of architecture or landscape, just things with a quality of place. Say, the Biltmore Fashion Square and the quality of an outdoor shopping mall in this climate, or the beauty of sitting outside on an Arizona night eating dinner. You can start to talk about that kind of fundamental engagement between the climate and this place as being important.

McCOY: That's a huge issue, because we're sitting around talking about importance of place and, at the same time, each one of us probably views that as a contemporary interpretation appropriate for our age. A lot of other times in the community, the first response is a design-review board that tries to put a code of style into place. It ends up being a fake set of historical architecture that tries to recapture an old sense of place and not allow innovation.

BURNETTE: I think many design-review guidelines are well intended from the standpoint of creating indoor-outdoor living and a certain engagement with the landscape, but then there's this cloak of nostalgia, as opposed to letting that evolve.

BRUDER: This issue of design review is overriding. People think it's a safety net. Unfortunately, there's a mediocrity that's built into it. I mean, a group of well-intended people can debate the virtue of the color of the fascia board on a Denny's restaurant for two hours while another 20 acres are bulldozed and developed.

AL-SAYED: What's also happening is that a lot of immigrants are moving here. You can go down to 19th Avenue, and there's a whole Vietnamese community. There's a vitality going on there that I miss from other cities. That's a big issue—how it ties into all the development that's going on in the north, and how it ties into what a larger community is.

BRUDER: Would it be too much to ask for an attitude about vision that says the boundary is defined now and look at what's inside? We're all sort of coming of age and hoping we can make a little bit of difference. It's now or never.

AL-SAYED: It's not a question of money; it's a question of information and education and visibility.

BRUDER: People love architecture. They get this magazine because they're interested in lifestyle architecture. People want to see how other people live and how they can live. You can bring people in to see what the phenomenon is and be critical of it and positive about it.

TEN EYCK: I know that the Guggenheim in Bilbao is over-discussed, but to me that's a great thing about what architecture can be. Not so much for the building itself, but how it's affected that city. It used to be this ugly little port town, and in some ways it still is, but that building has helped give that group of people pride.



CHRISTINE TEN EYCK

Ten Eyck received her Bachelor of Landscape Architecture from Texas Tech University and continues her involvement in academia as a guest lecturer and critic at several universities. She received the Congressional Commendation for Historic Preservation award, among many others, and has been published in a variety of books, magazines and journals. Currently, she is principal of Ten Eyck landscape architects.

BRUDER: Being who you are, Christy, and doing what you do, I'm really interested in what clues you could bring to make more people want to live downtown and really enrich them. What would be some of the strategies and suggestions you'd have?

TEN EYCK: First of all, I'd like wonderful pedestrian lengths everywhere. I would love big, wide walkways, so people could jog. Right now, there's not a continuous sidewalk for people to stroll with their kids or walk their dogs. I think the linkages and the shade trees are the things that could connect everything.

AL-SAYED: When I first moved here, what I saw were the canals. I imagined that if this city had been built around the canals as an initial premise, we would have had one of the most unique cities in the world. What's amazing about them is that they take you off the grid and connect you to the larger landscape in a way that the grid does not. I think there are still amazing opportunities, whether it's through landscape, or public art or even programs along the canals that could create connections between communities.

BURNETTE: This city was built around them originally. It was known as the Venice of the Desert; there were postcards that said that at the bottom. You could drive from Chandler to Phoenix in shade along the canals.

BRUDER: I remember walking along the canals in my neighborhood. The cottonwoods disappeared after 1970. It all just went away, and it had been so cool. Now, here are a bunch of renegades who say, 'Let's start planting again. You blew it.'

BURNETTE: You take the canals and look at what Scottsdale's proposing, and you can applaud it at one level, but then on another level you say, 'What about a simple idea? Just re-plant the cottonwoods.' They were cut down because they were drinking too much water, but then they realized that the water they were drinking equaled the evaporation rate that they weren't allowing because of the shade. Just the simple idea of lining the canals with cottonwoods would create place.

AL-SAYED: My biggest criticism of this place is the isolation of individuals. As much as we like to be here for the landscape and the climate, I sense there are a lot of people just wandering around trying to figure out how to connect. It's one thing about this city that I've always wondered: Where do you go to see its citizens? When you look at the larger picture, there's a reason coffeehouses are so popular for suburban kids. It's a place where they can go and see other people.

BRUDER: Great cities have great housing where people come together. We're so polychrome that it's scary who that neighbor might be and what might be there. I lived in my house two days, and I went to a community picnic in Margaret T. Hance Park. In those two days I knew more people than I knew in 28 years of living in the desert, and there again was this wonderful, interesting mix.

BURNETTE: I think one thing that's interesting is what's happening down in the Central Corridor. Five years ago, there were 600 units in the Central Corridor, and now there are more than 10,000. It's an explosive growth. Now the question is, what is the quality of what's being built? Are those places building community?

BRUDER: They're building at the point of least resistance, not the best place, but the place where NIMBYs aren't going to shut it down. They want to get the housing up, but a lot of it doesn't have quality.

McCOY: You can look at it optimistically or pessimistically. Like the recent housing on Roosevelt around Central—at the ground level, a lot of it is beginning to recognize some pedestrian activity.

DeBARTOLO: I'm really fascinated by the whole Starbucks bit, with a sidewalk out front and this desperate interest in plaza. There's a Starbucks on every corner, and it's still not enough to support what the public wants. There's this hunger of where to go to connect.



WILL BRUDER

Self-trained as an architect, Bruder has a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in sculpture from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He followed this with a full architectural apprenticeship under Gunnar Birkerts and Paolo Soleri. Bruder's architecture has been published in more than 1,000 books and periodicals in the U.S., Europe and Japan. He has won more than 50 awards and has exhibited and lectured widely.

BURNETTE: The boundary of the city is constantly expanding, so you're trying to create specific places to see and be seen, but it's so diffused across a vast area. It's a fundamentally bad planning decision. The absolute ground-zero point of this metropolis is more commercially viable as a parking lot than a building. The city planner for Phoenix should be at the mayor's right hand. It's not about being a dictator; it's about assisting the community developers in making good planning decisions for the city's future—which isn't necessarily having a 24-pump gas station or a Walgreens on every corner.

AL-SAYED: Good design can be good business. Not just in terms of making money, but in terms of making a positive impact. There must be developers out there who are more enlightened, but perhaps they don't have access to how to go about it. I think there's a big disconnect.

TEN EYCK: At the AMC Theaters in Ahwatukee, there's a tiny little fountain that kids just adore. Why don't we have 50 of them?

BRUDER: Exactly. There's a developer who is doing a good job and creating market share.

DeBARTOLO: I've spoken with these developers, and they're out there trying to find the detail, the tile corner, the entry gate, the little doodad. They have no idea of the depths that are available. There is a starvation for information and knowledge.

BRUDER: I'm now living in a 55-year-old house, and I'm amazingly comfortable with the lack of design around me. I think what matters is a sense of community.

TEN EYCK: And that's not so different from the person buying in Anthem. It's not the house that's driving where people live; it's the community. Can their kids walk to school? Are they safe? I hate bashing the developers. They're trying to make a living. How many of you as architects have attempted to work with these developers? One of you guys should work with them and just know that you're not going to change the company overnight, but you might make some strides that are pretty incredible.

McCOY: I agree. It is possible. But then again, that takes us to an institutional leader who has a commitment to the city to set the ground rules for the development community.

DeBARTOLO: It comes down to what good design is. Design is a broader idea of community. It's the streets; it's the sidewalks. And then we'll finally come down to the detail of architecture. Design is extremely important, but I think it starts with the big picture of community.

BRUDER: The Valley is still a place with opportunity. It's still a place that can be, that isn't what it has been.

DeBARTOLO: And the wonderful context of our environmental region that is asking the question, 'What am I? What can I be when I grow up?' I think we're trying to talk about and identify what pieces we can grab to start helping us grow up.

AL-SAYED: The Valley is more interested in becoming than in being. There's still this newness and comfort with change. It's not defined, and I think that is what makes this place exciting.

BRUDER: Light rail holds a lot for the future. It will take more than light rail, but just the energy that will happen in the next three or four years. The light rail will be in place and then there'll be a synergy about the streets and about where they are located.

AL-SAYED: Even small-scale things, like right around the corner from me, in the Arcadia district, two developers have taken over an old post office. There's a graphic-design studio, a little sandwich/wine bar and a Pilates studio. It's a new generation of developers and mentality that's coming in.

BURNETTE: There are a lot of exciting projects. We talked about developers; well, one of the developers is the municipalities. In many cases, they are visionary. It's up to us, as Christy made the call to engage with developers. The Rio Salado project, the light-rail project, the Civic-Center project, there are many things where the city is creating a forum for great architecture and great ideas to be put forth in it. 