

Ashley Sullivan

The first house Ashley Sullivan ever built was made of hay bales, assembled by hand in rural Alabama, and it provided a lesson she never forgot. Architecture, Sullivan learned early, is inseparable from respect: for the land, for craft, and for the people who will live within the work long after its initial concept is forgotten. That formative experience in Samuel Mockbee's Rural Studio established a permanent orientation toward presence and responsibility. It taught her to listen before acting, to understand construction as a social act, and to recognize that design decisions carry real consequences. These principles continue to anchor Sullivan's leadership as co-owner and CEO of JLF Architects.

Her perspective has been shaped by the landscapes in which she has lived. Formative years exploring the East Coast followed by living in the Rocky Mountain West have cultivated an appreciation of how climate, regional history, and cultural nuance quietly author the built environment. Architecture, in Sullivan's view, does not exist in isolation; it is always in conversation with its surroundings. Each design solution begins with deep respect for a site's historical and cultural heritage and its surrounding environment, allowing new work to integrate seamlessly while responsibly bringing clients' visions to life.

At Auburn University, where she studied architecture, Sullivan absorbed a profound sense of reverence for the land and for the impact of the built environment on future generations. A pivotal moment came when a perceptive professor recognized her ability to translate design solutions through form, prompting a shift in focus from graphic design to architecture. That transition refined her natural inclination toward storytelling, giving it spatial dimension and material form.

A Nashville native, Sullivan has developed a hybrid sensibility that folds Southern charm into her current Mountain West lifestyle. Her

projects are not static objects but stages for lived experience, designed around how families gather, retreat, celebrate, and age together. This narrative is paired with an acute understanding of materiality and craft, embedded in her design-build background and sustained through close collaboration with artisans, builders, and partners who share a commitment to art.

Sullivan's leadership philosophy is guided by a trifecta she returns to often: curiosity, play, and responsibility. Curiosity encourages inquiry, challenges assumptions, and supports adaptability. Play stimulates creativity, builds relationships, and creates space for experimentation and learning. Responsibility forms the core, encompassing ethical decision-making, accountability, and continuous improvement. Together, these values foster a culture that empowers individuals, values creativity and innovation, and cultivates collective ownership.

Outside the studio, Sullivan's time is spent seeking novelty and perspective and honing her sensibility to listen. Immersing herself in nature's deep beauty satisfies her drive to connect with undisturbed spaces in the natural world and the land we rely on for survival. She also enjoys city immersion, where she can engage with people from different backgrounds, learn from cultural diversity, and foster mutual respect. This shared human experience remains a constant teacher, reinforcing lessons first learned at Auburn University: listen with an open mind, engage the natural environment with honesty, and aspire to leave the land, and the people who inhabit it better for the care taken.



“Architecture
possesses a
unique capacity
to transcend
time, connecting
the past, present,
and future.”

— Ashley Sullivan





— Ashley Sullivan

The Work



Photography by Audrey Hall













The Prospective

ARE THERE ANY SUSTAINABILITY OR INNOVATIVE PRACTICES THAT ARE ESPECIALLY MEANINGFUL IN YOUR WORK?

Sustainability and innovation are not treated as additions to my work, but as an underlying sensibility that guides each decision. My projects are conceived to endure — anchored in the land, responsive to climate, and shaped with the intention of longevity that extends well beyond a single lifetime.

Innovation in our practice is subtle and exploratory. We engage in the quiet development of new products and technologies, testing ideas that work alongside natural systems rather than overriding them. My favorite study is fenestrations, whose advancements are often unseen, embedded within the structure itself, enhancing performance, resiliency, and comfort while encouraging environmental integration and allowing the architecture to remain tranquil and timeless.

We are drawn to materials that carry their own history, such as wood, stone and metal that age with grace, and share their stories through their weathering. Design approach is a gentle dialogue between innovation and antiquity, where each project becomes a vessel of time: forward-looking yet deeply rooted, expressing respect for

the land, its resources, and the evolving relationship between people, place, and craft.

HOW DO YOU SEE ARCHITECTURE AS A MEDIUM FOR STORYTELLING OR CULTURAL EXPRESSION?

I believe that humanity has a profound way of creating mediums that express our sense of beauty, our hopes, fears, dreams, and desires through color, sound, movement, feeling, form, and visual expression. Architecture is a testament to humanity's journey, embodying its history and shaping its ongoing narrative.

Architecture and sculpture are my mediums of expression. My art form begins with active listening and then designing my clients' life stories and culture into their built environment. Every stroke of design is a gentle response made in honor and reflection of the client, the landscape, and the artisans' mastery.

WHERE DO YOU BELIEVE THE PROFESSION OF ARCHITECTURE WILL BE IN TWENTY YEARS, AND WHAT ROLE DO YOU HOPE WOMEN WILL PLAY IN SHAPING IT?

Women are ancestrally prone to emotional connection, holistic

approaches, and resiliency. This feminine sensibility does and will continue to transform the architecture profession through fostering relationships and growth, interpreting complex social dynamics, creating artistic responses with sensitivity and skill, and designing spaces that foster connection and belonging.

Women answer the call for the evolving human need for connection and beauty.

WHO HAVE BEEN YOUR MOST SIGNIFICANT MENTORS, AND WHAT LESSONS FROM THEM HAVE STAYED WITH YOU?

My journey has been enriched by the profound impact of numerous exceptional mentors: my business partners at JLF, Maja Lisa Englehardt, Samuel Mockbee, and Lori Ryker, to name a few. Their invaluable teaching and steadfast support have been pivotal in my development as both an individual and as an architect. Among the most impactful lessons are the importance of approaching every interaction with love and kindness, the courage to pursue one's true calling, and the belief that genuine connection stems from curiosity and an open mind.

IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU MENTOR OR ADVOCATE FOR THE NEXT

GENERATION OF WOMEN IN ARCHITECTURE?

My aspiration is to pass on the wisdom and insight that has shaped my perspective and professional path. Through mentoring emerging designers, I encourage intellectual curiosity and inspire a commitment to design excellence grounded in craft and practical knowledge. By supporting innate abilities, cultivating creativity, and instilling a sense of responsibility to the built and natural environment, I strive to shape a thoughtful and resilient generation of future design leaders.

HOW DO YOU PERSONALLY DEFINE LEGACY, AND WHAT DO YOU HOPE YOURS WILL BE?

To me, legacy is a lasting influence that one leaves behind which shapes future generations through contributions, guidance, values, and beliefs. I hope to continue passing on the legacy of design excellence I learned from my mentors. I aspire to leave a legacy of grace and compassion, holistic design principles, and an unwavering love for the beauty of diversity.

"I am driven by a deep curiosity about others' experiences and perspectives, allowing my design thinking to expand within a richer human context."

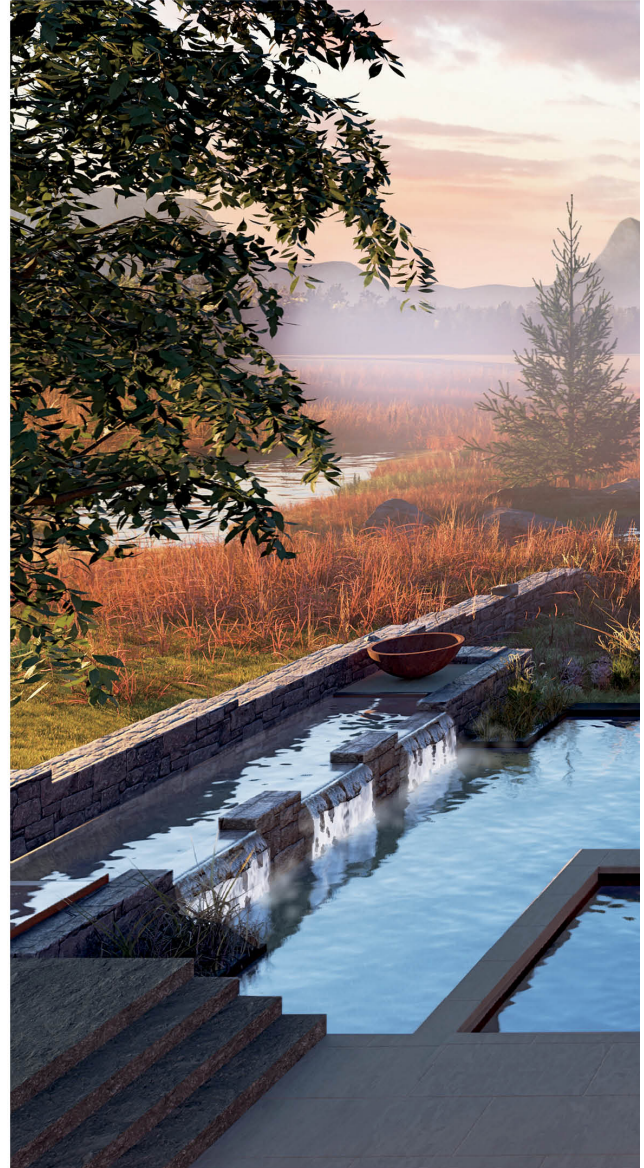
— Ashley Sullivan

I aspire to design a sacred space which provides a haven for one to foster a relationship between their authentic self and the natural world. Often my dream is set into the landscape of the Rocky Mountain West, formed with wood, steel and stone. The architecture is nestled into the land, so it blends seamlessly into its surroundings, creating an immersive experience that invites contemplation and wonder. The building participates with the landscape, allowing the rhythms of nature to influence the experience of space, light, and movement.

Water is integral to the design and key to evoking the senses. Here, a mountain spring flows gently through the retreat, coalescing into a reflective basin near its heart. The sound of cascading water, the play of light across its surface, and the cooling sensation from the rising mist work together to heighten awareness. These sensory moments encourage a conscious, mindful interaction with nature. This space is not meant for passive observation from a distance; it invites engagement with the earth's rhythms and a deeper awareness of being part of its vibrant tapestry.

What inspires me most is to balance the transitions between solitude and connection. The design prioritizes a sense of ease, offering spaces filled with natural light, texture, and form that encourages visitors to slow down, witness their surroundings, shed pretense, and embrace vulnerability. Pathways, quiet alcoves, and open gathering spaces allow individuals to move fluidly between introspection and shared experience. The architecture becomes the guide, gently leading each person to discover their own experiences within its walls.

My dream is that this space offers more than a physical location, yet instead, it is a beautifully choreographed environment that nurtures experience and holds the memories of those who pass through it. It is a place where the ordinary gives way to inspiration, where time feels suspended, and where the unknown possibilities of life can quietly unfold. ♦





The Imagined