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Jon Cardello, senior principal and architect at Stantec, stands next to a scale model of the Ritz-Carlton Residences Miami Beach, which his firm designed.

## Architecture firm helps Miami towers soar

Stantec, formerly ADD, is designing projects in Miami and around the world

Miami office nearly doubled number of employees in 2014

Diversity plays a key role

BY NICHOLAS NEHAMAS  
nehamas@miamiherald.com

The very first project Jon Cardello's architecture firm designed in South Florida was a tiny toll booth at a University of Miami parking garage. "We needed something to get us going," said Cardello, who'd moved from

Boston in 2005 to open up a Miami office for architecture and design firm ADD. "It took three weeks and I don't think we made any money from it. But it was a start."

Cardello and his wife Rachel, also an architect, were the office's only employees at the time.

Today, the two run a team of 117 people design-

ing some of Miami's tallest new towers as well as projects in Orlando, Dallas and the Bahamas. ADD merged its business with Canadian-based mega-firm Stantec last year, giving the Miami office global reach.

One of the company's local projects is Solitair, a 50-story tower with 438 rental units going up in Brickell.

The design of the building recalls the faceted trunk of a medjool palm tree, said Greg West, president of ZOM Development, which is developing Solitair.

"Stantec has a great bias for design," West said.

"But at the same time they understand what's practical, what can be done and what's cost-effective. They

created a remarkable aesthetic using very simple building components inspired by nature."

West said he had no idea what he was getting into when he first started working with Cardello four years ago.

ZOM had taken over a project initially proposed by another developer. Cardello's team members

were the holdover architects.

"We were so impressed, we decided to keep working with them," West said.

Stantec is also designing a rental tower for ZOM at the Miami Worldcenter project and another in downtown Dallas.

The firm — remembering the housing market crash that left many developers and architects high and dry during the Great Recession — tries to diversify its business.

Today, the firm's focus is roughly 35 percent residential, 30 percent hotel, 20 percent office and 15 percent retail.

"Diversification is a continuous strategy for us," Cardello said.

The debate over whether to specialize in one field or maintain a broader practice has gone on "as long as there have been professional architects," said Victor Deupé, a professor at the University of Miami School of Architecture.

"From a business perspective, markets such as Miami where there was a housing boom really did suffer from the drought that happened after the crash," Deupé said. "It made a lot of sense for architects to value diversity after that."

In addition to the ZOM rental towers, Stantec is designing plans for the redevelopment of the old U.S. Immigration Naturalization Service on Biscayne Boulevard; the mixed-use District 36 project on the border of Midtown and the Design District; the Berkeley Shore Hotel in South Beach; and a six-acre mixed-use redevelopment of the Pointe Nassau resort in the Bahamas.

#### A GLOBAL DESTINATION

The growth of the firm over the past 10 years — its



A scale model of the Ritz-Carlton Residences Miami Beach. Stantec designed the Ritz-Carlton, which is being built on the site of the old Miami Heart Institute.

first big contract was Midtown Miami — mirrors the rise of South Florida as a global destination.

As prices rise and developers roll out decadent amenities to attract wealthy buyers, star international architects have parachuted into the Miami market.

Now local shops like Cardello's are competing with the likes of Zaha Hadid, Rem Koolhaas, Renzo Piano and Bjarke Ingels.

Deupé, the UM professor, said that competition could be a good thing for local architects.

"I think it creates buzz and excitement and a higher profile, and that's all good," he said. "You can think of it like the wine market: Napa Valley benefits when French wine-makers enter the market and start making exciting new wines with California vineyards."

Cardello also said he wasn't worried by big-name rivals.

"I would be more concerned if we were only operating in the Miami market," Cardello said.

### Stantec Miami

**Business:** Stantec is an architecture and design firm based in Miami. It was founded in 2005 by senior principal Jon Cardello as the Miami branch of Boston-based ADO, which merged with Stantec last year. The company focuses on a variety of different kinds of business. Most of its projects are residential and hotel but it also does office and retail work. Current projects include the Ritz-Carlton Residences Miami Beach, Solfair, District 36, River Landing, the Trison Center, Berkeley Shore Hotel and a variety of developments in Orlando, St. Petersburg, Dallas and the Bahamas.

**Headquarters:** 25 S. Biscayne Blvd., Miami.

**Top local executives:** Jon Cardello, senior principal; Rachel Cardello, principal; Eric Holland, principal; Susan LaFleur, associate.

**Ownership:** Stantec is a publicly traded company based in Edmonton, Canada.

**Employees:** 17 in Miami office.

**Revenues:** For 2014: \$42.4 million. They're expected to grow 20 percent for 2015.

**Date founded:** Originally founded as ADO in 2005. Acquired by Stantec in 2014.

**Website:** <http://www.stantec.com/about-us/office-locations/united-states-locations/florida-offices/miami-florida-office.html>

"But part of the reason we merged with Stantec was to expand our operations and give us a real global footing. And I really feel like there's room in Miami for all of us, given how much development is happening."

In 2014, both before and after the merger with Stantec, the company decided to grow, expanding from 60 to nearly 120 employees. That's in part to keep up with what Cardello calls the changing nature of Miami design.

"It's so much more sophisticated," he said.

"When I first got here [during the boom], it was about getting the building up, usually in a pretty minimalist style. We've seen a shift in design terms from looking at what you need to do to get sales to looking at what you need to do to create real, warm, thoughtful living spaces for people."

One of the most complicated projects Stantec is now working on is the redevelopment of the old Mahi Shrine Auditorium on the Miami River near the Health District. The \$300 million project, called River Landing, calls for a five-story shopping mall and two apartment towers on a six-acre lot.

"It really is ambitious," Cardello said.

A major creditor of the project filed a lien against developer Andy Hellinger in September, saying it was owed \$38.19 million. Stantec also filed a lien, saying Hellinger hadn't paid \$1.1 million of a \$3 million contract.

But Cardello said the project was still going forward — and without hard feelings.

"Big deals are really complicated," he said. "I'm sure we will get this worked out."

(Hellinger didn't respond to a request for comment.)

The company also is designing the under-construction Ritz-Carlton Residences Miami Beach, on the site of the old Miami Heart Institute. The developers had to keep the shell of the old eight-story structure in place because zoning regulations would have required a new structure to have fewer stories.

Converting a medical building and hospital into high-end luxury residences wasn't easy. The entire complex of six buildings

had to be connected into one structure and then retrofitted for living. Walls were torn out, balconies added and ceilings raised.

"We basically had to strip everything out and start over while keeping the integrity of the structure intact," Cardello said.

Prices for the 111-unit building start at \$2 million. Architect Pierre Lissone served as a design consultant.

"It's incredible to have a taller building in a low-rise neighborhood," said infomercial king Chuck Khabani, who was checking out the project's sales center on a recent afternoon. "The units are big so it feels like you're living in a house in the sky."

Khabani bought two units at the project, one with 4,200 square feet and the other with 3,600 square feet.

#### CHANGING THE BOYS' CLUB

Another area where Stantec stands out is its commitment to hiring women.

Architecture has long been considered a boys' club. Only 16 percent of American Institute of Architects members are female, according to Architect Magazine.

But 51 percent of Stantec's Miami employees are women, said Rachel Cardello, a principal at the firm.

"Construction and building are definitely hard industries for women to break into," Cardello said. "We're trying to help change that."

Nicholas Nehamas  
305-376-3745,  
@NickNehamas