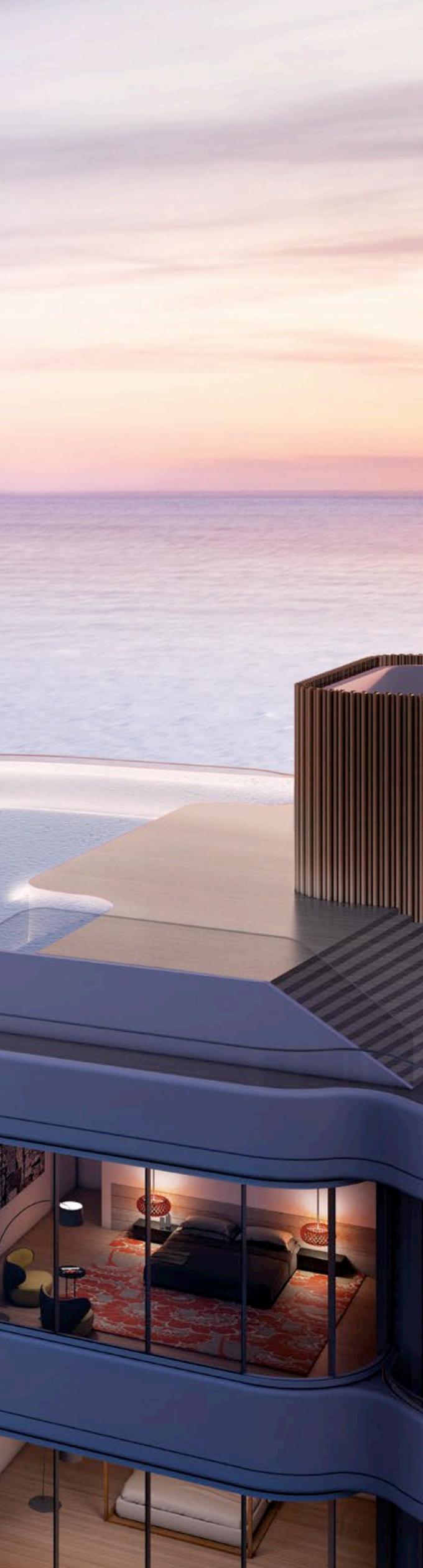# RIPPLE EFFECT

After more than 25 years with Foster + Partners, Brandon Haw has started his own practice as a means of returning to the fundamentals of architecture.

WORDS **SOPHIE KALKREUTH** /
PHOTOGRAPHY **BRANDON HAW ARCHITECTS**

A rt affects our emotions, but architecture has the ability to improve our lives. This is the claim Brandon Haw's father — himself a minimalist painter and conceptual artist — made when Haw was still a teenager. "He said to me 'look: you can say I don't really like that picture or that sculpture, but it's not the same as being stuck in a hospital bed or a school with no light, no air, and feeling miserable,' " recalls Haw, who was born in London but now resides in New York.

His father's credo proved persuasive. Instead of enrolling in art school, Brandon Haw attended Bartlett School of Architecture and Planning in London, continuing on to Princeton University in the U.S. where he received his Masters Degree in Architecture. After graduating he worked at the offices of Skidmore Owings and Merrill and then joined Norman Foster's studio, where, over the course of 26 years, he built up the practice from 30 people to nearly 2,000 and oversaw major international projects including the HSBC World Headquarters in London and the Hearst Building in Manhattan.
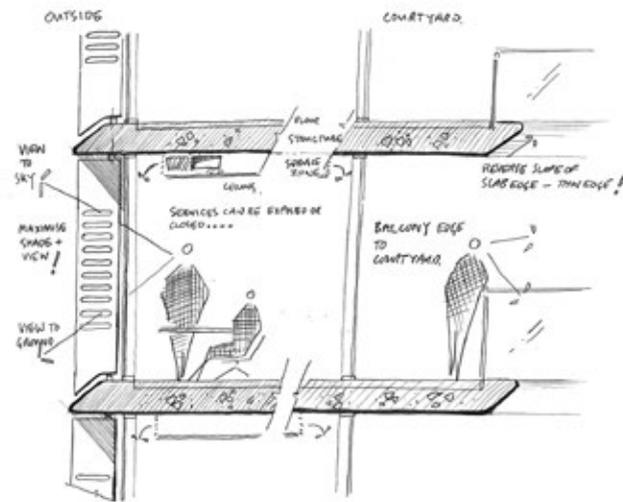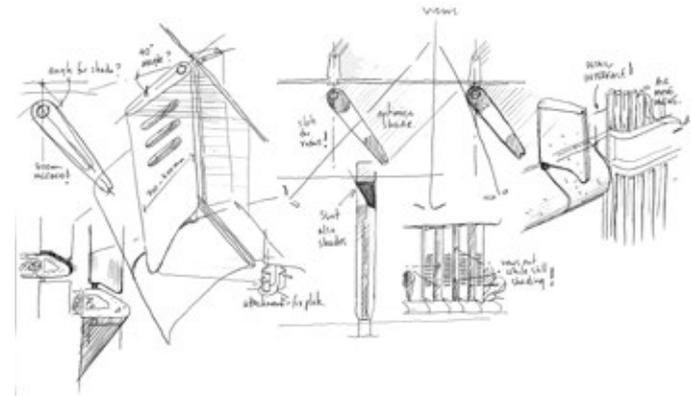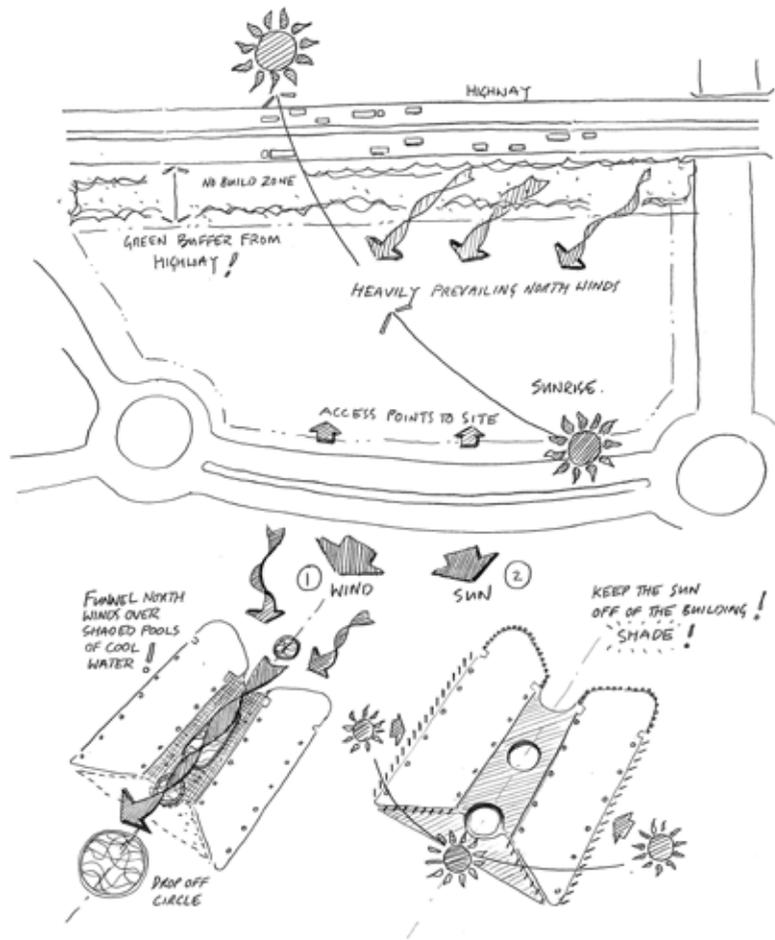
Around two years ago Haw launched his own New York-based practice, Brandon Haw Architecture (BHA), a move inspired in part by a desire to return to the fundamentals of architecture and the principles that his father emphasised many years ago.

"It was a very serious conversation that I've always remembered because it has guided how I treat architecture from a functional point of view, first and foremost," Haw confides. "I don't care about style. What architecture really needs to do is create a better physical environment through design."

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Morning light streams through the east-facing windows onto building plans and paper models. The intense sun finds its way into BHA's new studio located in the iconic Seagram building in midtown Manhattan, casting evident shadows on tables and floors. Inside the tall bronze and glass tower designer by the one and only Mies van der Rohe in 1958 sits the man himself – Brandon Haw.

The 56-year-old sits at a table wearing a crisp suit jacket and tousled salt-and-pepper hair. He is soft spoken as he describes his journey as an architect and retains a British modesty uncommon among his American peers, but he is no less resolute about what matters to him when it comes to the built environment and the cities that inspire him.

"I love living and working in New York. It's such a vibrant crazy place. It's exhausting: the smells, the noise,

the hustle and bustle. It's all about the street. It's a great exemplar of a city with its grain, the hierarchy of spaces, from pocket parks to Central Park," the architect opines.

He is quick to mention that London is also a great diverse city. In a liberal way, he explains: "London and New York are full of vibrant neighbourhoods with different characteristics, which I enjoy very much."

In addition, Haw emphasises on urban responsibility - the belief that architecture should be guided by an understanding of historic and urban context. To discover the design cues for his buildings, one need only look to the urban landscapes that surround them. The parks, the precincts, green pockets and peripheral developments all play a role in completing his design plan.

LEARNING FROM HISTORY

On the Caribbean Coast of Colombia Haw recently designed two university campus buildings for Universidad de Los Andes International School of Management that draw on the architecture of Cartagena's Old Town, a nearby UNESCO World Heritage site. The coastal town of Cartagena, which was founded by the Spanish in 1533, features colourful colonial buildings and cobblestone streets oriented toward the northerly winds. Leafy Banyan trees create shaded canopies within the courtyards of buildings, many of which have pools or fountains. The wind, shade and water work together to create a microclimate of passive cooling typical of quintessential Moorish architecture.

3. Faena Mar's cantilevered balconies are designed to capture Miami's ocean breezes.

4. Torino's pastel hues are borrowed from the neighborhood's iconic Art Deco palette.

Haw was inspired by the local architectural vernacular and also aligned his modern campus buildings with the northerly winds. The twin buildings, which feature precast concrete vertical fins to shade the interiors from the intense Caribbean sun, also have central pools of cool water designed to maximise air movement.

"This creates a shaded microclimate within centrally located courtyards, very much a functional interpretation of local Cartagena architecture," shares Haw.

In Florida, Haw's residential designs for the Faena District, an ambitious development on Miami Beach that includes hotels, condominiums and cultural amenities, also exhibits careful consideration of the urban historic context; in this case an oceanfront site comprises pre-war art deco to post-war modern and contemporary buildings.

Haw led the design of the project's first new condo, Faena House, while he was still at Foster + Partners. The building features curved, cantilevered balconies with large sliding glass doors echoing the horizontal lines of the neighbouring Saxony Hotel - a boxy, post-war building designed by architect Roy France in 1948.

The challenge with his latest commission, Faena Mar, is to engage both with the contemporary Faena House to the south, and to the north, the historic Versailles Hotel, which is another one of Roy France's designs but in classic art deco style.

"As all of the buildings are part of the Miami Beach Historic District, the project was an exercise in finding a contextual language for a contemporary architecture where all four buildings would coexist harmoniously," describes Haw.

His solution re-establishes the symmetrical purity of the historic Versailles – Faena Mar's undulating lines echo the rippling façade of the art deco property – but the building also complements the contemporary Faena House with sleek luxury residences designed to optimise ocean views and breezes.

LOCAL FLAVOURS

Haw likens the dynamic between buildings to pieces on a chess set: "Just as the Faena House plays off the old Saxony Hotel, so too Faena Mar plays off the art deco lines of the historic Versailles." And he places great value on 'harmonious layering' where different pieces of architecture built at different times all relate to each another. "The palimpsest of history of architecture creates our environment," he says. "And it is not enough to be pastiche or outlandish."

Miami certainly has its share of outlandish architecture. The city's latest building boom has produced a glut of new towers, many designed by international 'starchitects' eager to leave their mark on the seaside city. Haw is among those taking a more understated approach.

In addition to Faena Mar, his studio is currently working on Torino, a mixed-use parking garage in Miami's South of Fifth neighbourhood. 'Parkitecture' is a growing typology in Miami where the water table is high and digging underground is costly, and a number of new parking structures have been conceived as bold sculptural statements. But Haw's building, which features a car park, four private residences and a roof garden, once again references the local neighborhood's character and scale.

The buildings in Miami's South of Fifth district are known for their pastel hues, a palette used by artists

Leonard Horowitz and Barbara Capitman in the late 1970s. Brandon Haw selected from this colour palette to create a façade that features an outer layer of white vertical fins and an inner skin of vibrant colour. The double skin shields neighbours from car headlamps while also providing interior ventilation. To passersby, the light reflecting between interior and exterior will create an ever-changing wave of colour.

Haw's knack for re-interpreting local architectural vernacular is perhaps aided by his love of travel. "I've always loved traveling," he says when I ask where he looks for inspiration. "It's such an education and has always informed me." In particular, Haw says he is fascinated by the way local architectures respond to different climates and social conditions.

Even when he's not working, you might find him traveling. Horseback riding in Colombia is one of his favourite pastimes, as is dancing to salsa and cumbia with his wife, Mariana. The celebrated architect also loves music. The Italian master Boccherini is his choice for the office, which Haw claims in his opinion as the equivalent to Mozart. He also supports a number of charities that help children from war-torn regions heal and connect through music and dance.

Meanwhile back in New York, BHA is clearly off to a running start. After just two years the studio is working on a number of high-profile commissions in the US and Colombia. But Haw says he is in no rush to expand his practice. "I always like to get to know my clients and I like keeping a very right reign on our design ethos," he says. "I just want to let it grow organically."

5.Faena Mar re-establishes the symmetrical purity of the historic Versailles Hotel.