

# IT'S A SIBLING THING

CALS alumni siblings share passion for landscape architecture

BY TAYLOR VOLLIN

**A SIBLING IS LIKE** a built-in best friend. They are a shoulder to cry on, a confidant, a partner in mischief, and a teacher. Aside from the occasional fights and bickering, having a sibling offers a friendship difficult to find in anyone else. The luckiest of pairs have a connecting factor aside from the genes they share, such as a passion that shapes their lives. Two groups of siblings discovered their shared passion in landscape architecture.

**TARIQ, YAZAN, and AMER MAHADIN**, three brothers from Amman, Jordan, have a deeply rooted passion for outdoor design. In 1987, their father, Professor Kamel O. Mahadin, a fellow in the American Society of Landscape Architects, founded Jordan's leading landscape architectural firm, MK Associates. While the two younger brothers have found their way back to the family business, Tariq is blazing another trail in the Lone Star State.

The 2011 MSU graduate received his master's in landscape architecture and is currently a project manager with CEI Engineering Associates, Inc., a Dallas-based firm providing services around the country. Whether it's

figuring out the specifics of an airport design, land development, flood protection, hydrology or hydraulics, Tariq said he is always up for a challenge.

"My passion is site grading and addressing the physical challenges of the sites, which is exciting for me because I enjoy figuring out ways to solve problems," Tariq said.

As a current doctoral student of urban planning and public policy at the University of Texas at Arlington, staying stateside offers Tariq the ability to accomplish goals he has for himself professionally so he can continue to best serve his clients.

"My goal is to keep obtaining knowledge about our profession and stay



Yazan, Tariq, and Amer Mahadin (photo submitted)

up to date with new technologies and solutions that help reduce the cost of construction for my clients," Tariq said.

Back home in Jordan, Yazan serves as CEO of the firm their father founded. After receiving his bachelor's degree from Cairo University in Egypt, Yazan pursued his master's degree in landscape architecture at MSU, where he graduated in 2015. He said his passion is using landscape architecture as a means to mitigate climate change.

"My motto is to use landscape architecture for survival," Yazan said. "For years, I've been an advocate in promoting landscape architecture to protect and enhance the environment, so my goal is to continue using my field to advocate and create new ways to save the environment from our current climate crisis."

Yazan's drive to address climate change through landscape design began when he was working on his degree at Mississippi State. He was a member of the team that created a design for a green infrastructure and training demonstration site on the MSU campus, resulting in a second place finish in the 2013 EPA Rainworks Challenge. He was also a team member in the 2015 Come Alive outside challenge, a national challenge to inspire children to spend more time outdoors. This team designed a school garden for Memphis Catholic School in Memphis, Tennessee, which was built in 2016.

Yazan also competed with his brother Amer in two designs for Archicontest—a place where designers from all over the world are invited to develop their ideas in the context of an international competition. The brothers, along with other designers at MK Associates, submitted two designs for a sport center in New York, garnering first and third place finishes. Their winning idea was inspired by the relationship between sports and the community.

"Our first-place design was inspired by the important relationship between

a sports center and its community, where the center contributes to social infrastructure, as well as health. This was reflected in the project by considering how the urban settings resemble the human body. The sports center design is intended to maintain and improve the human body, while also improving human health," Yazan said.

For Yazan and Amer, being able to compete and win together in an international competition fostered a deeper connection within a family passion that is unique to the pair. In the third-place idea, Amer was excited for his team, comprised of students and engineers from their firm, to place in the top three, utilizing a concept that connected the multiple architectural styles in Manhattan.

"The site is situated on Madison Avenue, which encompasses traditional, mixed, gothic, utilitarian, and contemporary architectural styles. We sought to connect the styles surrounding the site by utilizing an iconic yet context friendly design. Our approach was to create a contemporary design using elements from the early 20th century, when Manhattan experienced its largest growth, to remind us of the bygone era," Amer said.

Amer's landscape architecture journey began with a computer science degree from the University of Jordan in Amman. After taking a year to work at MK Associates, and with inspiration from his father and brothers, he made the decision to follow in the family footsteps and pursue a master's in landscape architecture. Amer graduated from MSU in 2016 with the degree before returning to MK Associates.

Now, the landscape architect works with his brother, Yazan, and father specializing in architectural, planning, and engineering designing on a variety of projects including urban plazas, roof terraces, residential communities, parks, and resorts. Amer is driven to put the family practice to use by changing landscapes in their

capital city, where the field is less known.

"Landscape architecture is still a field that we need to explore and consider more in our region in the Middle East. My goal is to expand our firm and educate people about landscape architecture," he said.

## BUILDING BRIDGES

**SOME 700 MILES APART**, siblings **KATIE (BULLMAN) BELLENO** and **MARK BULLMAN** maintain their connection through phone calls and the common ground of landscape architecture. The Starkville natives and MSU alumni both have had an interest in the field from an early age.

In their backyard, Katie and Mark's parents—LaDonna and Mark Sr.—built a greenhouse to nurture their children's interest in plants. Aside from the pair's daily competitions to name the most plants correctly, days growing up in the Bullman household were spent propagating vegetation as a family, growing not only an array of plants but also a love of horticulture.

"Our parents played a large part once they saw that we were both interested in the subject. Building us a greenhouse and nurturing those interests was something special they wanted to do for us. They were a big part in helping us develop those interests, and they still are," Katie said.

The pair went on to enroll in a vocational program at Starkville High School, in which they studied horticulture. For Katie, the 2011 MSU landscape architecture major, studying horticulture opened the door for a future in landscape architecture.

"I have always been a plant nerd and love learning the different types of species," Katie said. "My interest developed as we went through those classes, and I wanted to know what I could do in the field. I wanted to make something beautiful through it, and horticulture was the steppingstone for landscape architecture and landscape contracting."

Katie now lives in Libertyville, Illinois an hour north of Chicago working as

Mark Bullman and Katie Bullman Belleno (photo submitted)



an associate landscape architect at Rosborough Partners, Inc. Though she primarily focuses on commercial design, Katie said she is ecstatic to get to dive into more residential design as well. Since her start with Rosborough Partners, Inc. in 2016, Katie has transitioned from Mississippi techniques and practices, to those unique to Illinois.

“The climates and zones for plant material in Illinois are very different than in Mississippi. For example, we plan for cold weather here compared to Mississippi, so we build walls, structures, and elements preparing for a freeze. I also had to learn a new palette of plants that grow here, as opposed to those that do well in the South,” Katie said.

Katie and Mark enjoy being able to explore and compare the differences

between their work, since Mark has remained in Starkville. Mark, older by three and a half years, started at East Mississippi Community College and then moved on to MSU where he graduated with his bachelor’s degree in landscape contracting in 2008. With the same start in the field, pursuing this degree was something he said he knew he would do, considering he felt it came easy to him.

“It was something I always thought I had an eye for, and thought I was good at it. When you enjoy doing something, it also makes it easier to learn more about it, and I’ve always enjoyed landscaping,” Mark said.

The owner of Bullman Yardworks, Mark said his company handles any project including lawn maintenance, landscaping, and irrigation. From brick

paving, deck building, water features, to building complete residential outdoor kitchen areas, Mark has enjoyed every minute of his hands-on, outdoor career.

“I’ve come to really enjoy the hard-scaping, which would be jobs like brick paving, but I also enjoy when we work on big, residential, outdoor kitchens. We have gotten to transform backyards just by adding retaining walls, water features, or other elements,” Mark said. “It’s hard to have one favorite project or one I’m most proud of because I have enjoyed them all.”

Along with his work, the siblings stay connected, calling as often as possible, bonding over their love of the field.

“I have always thought it was neat that we shared this field because we could relate about work and projects,” Mark said. 🐾