

Architects of Tomorrow

Perspectives from the Visionaries

Immerse yourself in a refined dialogue where the future of architecture unfolds with quiet clarity. This exclusive interview is part of our “Architects of Tomorrow” series—a carefully curated encounter with the visionaries who are redefining the built environment.

At Zora, we celebrate the thoughtful intersection of experience and vision, inviting you to dive into this exclusive interview with Sonia Magdziarz — Senior Architect at Zaha Hadid Architects — and engage with a legacy of architectural excellence.



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Interview With Sonia Magdziarz

Would you share insights into the country and cultural context you come from, and the experiences you gained prior to embarking on your professional architectural journey?

I would describe myself as a child of the golden era of the European Union, before Brexit changed the order of play. Growing up with parents who had experienced life under a communist regime, I was raised with a sense of optimism and reminded—sometimes to the point of exhaustion—that, unlike them, I had a passport and should make sure to use it.

I grew up in the north of Poland, in the city of Szczecin, which, before WWII, was part of Germany. The city's layout is reminiscent of Paris, with a network of roundabouts and star-shaped streets linking multiple areas at once, like blood vessels—making it a dynamic and easy place to navigate. However, it was the city's proximity to Berlin that exposed me to modern architecture and global culture, offering a unique blend of local heritage and international influence.

From a young age, I was naturally drawn to drawing and painting—probably because, as an only child, I spent a lot of time in my imagination. My father, Artur, a master photographer, filled our home with photo albums, which we would scrutinize and study together. He also gave me my first camera at an early age, a gift that sparked my passion for architectural rendering and animation.

While I never dreamed of becoming an architect, stumbling upon the Bartlett reinvigorated me. The Bartlett was not just an architecture school but an art school—one that offered a gateway to a range of creative career paths.



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Interview With Sonia Magdziarz

You completed your academic studies at two prestigious universities, UCL and Westminster. How did this journey begin, and what were your experiences as both a student and a teacher? If you have any valuable insights from this path, please share them with us.

They say London is a city of endless possibilities, but during my time at the Bartlett, it felt like our world existed entirely within those walls. Late nights blurred into early mornings, fuelled by ambition (and an alarming amount of coffee), as we debated, designed, and pushed the boundaries of creativity. Looking back, I realise those years weren't just an education; they were an evolution.

The Bartlett wasn't just about architecture; it was about learning to think—boldly, critically, and without a safety net. If you could dream it, you could build it. And if you built it wrong? Well, you'd be told, in no uncertain terms, exactly why. The tutors were equal parts mentors and taskmasters, challenging us to refine our ideas with the precision of a sculptor chipping away at marble. Their feedback was brutally honest, but always invaluable.

I arrived at The Bartlett in 2013, fortunate enough to receive an EU scholarship and be recognised as a home student. Back then, it was a place where borders felt irrelevant, where talent mattered more than nationality. But as we all know, Brexit changed everything. The scholarship programme vanished, and with it, opportunities for so many students like me. One day, we were part of the fabric of the school. The next, it felt like someone had pulled the thread. Education is meant to open doors. But sometimes, history bolts them shut.



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Interview With Sonia Magdziarz

Zaha Hadid Architects stands as one of the leaders in global architecture, and working there is truly inspiring for young architects. Before and after joining this renowned brand, what challenges or uncertainties did you face, and how did you address them? Do you have any advice for those aspiring to follow a similar path?

Zaha Hadid wasn't just an architect; she was a force of nature. For those lucky enough to work alongside her, she wasn't just a mentor—she was a masterclass in pushing boundaries. While I never had the privilege of working with Zaha directly, I've heard countless stories from her former students and colleagues about what the office was like during her time. It had the energy of a university studio—an experimental playground for those who had studied under her, where ideas ran wild and limits barely existed.

Today, Zaha Hadid Architects is a different kind of machine—sleek, structured, and undeniably commercial. The firm is divided into clusters, not unlike university units, each with its own specialism and design philosophy. For anyone considering joining, my best advice is to reach out to senior employees who can offer an inside perspective on the different career paths available. Because if there's one thing I've learned, it's that where you land initially isn't always where you're meant to be.

I know this first-hand. I started in a cluster that didn't quite align with my ambitions, and in a moment of clarity (or madness), I made the decision to leave. But life has a way of leading you back to where you're supposed to be. When I returned, it was to a completely different cluster—one led by an inspiring female leader who gave me the freedom to explore and innovate. That trust led to several competition wins for the firm, proving that sometimes, the best work happens when you give people the space to think beyond the expected.



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Interview With Sonia Magdziarz

What elements do you believe have been instrumental in your journey to joining Zaha Hadid Architects?

My thesis project, *How to Carve a Giant*, was more than just an academic exercise—it was a statement. The project explored the idea that architecture isn't just a backdrop to city life; it is an urban actor, shaping the way people experience, record and archive knowledge. A sculptural, large-scale urban intervention designed to blur the line between the landscape, architectural spectacle, and meaningful public space – a philosophy that, unsurprisingly, resonated deeply with the ethos of the company.

Beyond concept, I had the technical skills to back it up. My strength lay in visualisation and polygonal modelling —both invaluable in a firm like Zaha Hadid Architects. With much of the firm's success built on international competitions, the ability to craft compelling visual narratives wasn't just an advantage—it was essential. Because in a world where first impressions are everything, architecture isn't just about what you build; it's about how you make people see it.



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Interview With Sonia Magdziarz

As a senior architect, what does your role entail? What key skills are essential for this position?

As a designer, my world revolves around the competition stage—the fast-paced, high-stakes arena where ideas are born, tested, and refined. Along with my team, we begin by immersing ourselves in the brief, dissecting every requirement, constraint, and hidden opportunity. From there, the real work begins.

We generate multiple design options, developing them in parallel in a dynamic, almost Darwinian process where only the strongest concepts survive. Week by week, through iteration and refinement, we push each idea to its absolute limits until one emerges as the most original, the most impactful—the one worth fighting for.

But great design doesn't happen in isolation. Beyond the creative process, I also orchestrate the seamless exchange of information between key players—rendering companies, engineers, acoustic and lighting consultants—ensuring that every detail aligns into a cohesive vision. And while competitions are about bold ideas, they're also about precision. So I guide junior team members through the complexities of the process, helping them navigate the delicate balance between creative ambition and technical rigour.

Because in the world of architecture, the best ideas don't just stand out—they stand the test of scrutiny.



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Interview With Sonia Magdziarz

Is there a particular project you've worked on that holds a special place for you? What makes it unique or meaningful?

The project was an Archaeological Museum—though, like so many ambitious ideas, it never saw the light of day. Its design revolved around an ancient tree discovered on-site, with the building itself carved from local stone.

This wasn't just a museum; it was a story in built form. A reflection of my own design philosophy—where architecture isn't just about shelter, but about storytelling. Form and materiality become narrative tools, revealing the passage of time, like an artefact unearthed through excavation.

I've always been drawn to the cultural, poetic, and phenomenological aspects of architecture—the idea that material choices and construction methods aren't just technical necessities, but the soul of the design itself.

My approach often contrasts with the more system-based, performance-driven methodologies that dominate today. And while I fully appreciate the need for efficiency and functionality, I also believe architecture should do more than perform—it should evoke. It should engage with memory, atmosphere, and the sensory experience of space, creating environments that resonate on a deeper, more human level.



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Interview With Sonia Magdziarz

In your opinion, how important is a strong digital presence (e.g., websites, social media) for architects today? How has it impacted your career or practice?

Sharing work on social media has transformed the way architects engage with the world. It's a stage for ideas, a space for feedback, and a window into the ever-shifting landscape of design trends.

For me, it has been particularly valuable in advancing my animation practice—connecting me with like-minded creatives and opening doors to unexpected collaborations. In an industry where visibility can make all the difference, social media has the power to expand professional networks and attract partners who share a similar design philosophy.

But while an online presence can spark conversations, it's no substitute for real-world connections—especially if your ambition is to establish your own practice. At the end of the day, clients don't just commission projects; they invest in relationships. Trust and rapport aren't built through perfectly curated posts but through genuine interactions, an understanding of their needs, and the ability to translate their vision into something both meaningful and enduring.

Because in architecture—like in life—likes and follows might get you noticed, but trust is what truly builds something that lasts.



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Interview With Sonia Magdziarz

Architecture is constantly evolving. What emerging trends or technologies do you think will shape the future of the profession, and how are you staying ahead of them?

Sustainability is, without question, the defining conversation in architecture today. Collaborating with engineers to optimise a building's environmental performance is essential, and as designers, we have a responsibility to embed sustainability into our work.

But for me, architecture should never feel constrained by a purely technical or sustainable agenda. A building shouldn't just perform sustainably—it should exist meaningfully.

At its core, architecture is a cultural and material practice, a discipline as much about poetry as it is about precision. I'm drawn to architects who treat it almost as an art form—those who craft space, materiality, and atmosphere with an almost sculptural sensibility.

Think Anne Holtrop, Smiljan Radić, Junya Ishigami —designers who understand that architecture isn't about chasing trends but about creating something with depth, presence, and permanence.

Because architecture is, by nature, a slow discipline. It doesn't move at the speed of fashion, nor should it. I believe in staying true to what inspires you—developing a personal approach that remains relevant, resonant, and meaningful over time.



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Interview With Sonia Magdziarz

In your opinion, what are the most effective elements for the success and growth of emerging architecture practices seeking to establish their identity, and what key traits or mindsets should young architects cultivate to thrive in the field?

For emerging architecture practices, the biggest challenge isn't always about design—it's about survival. Finding clients and establishing a steady cash flow is the real test. While talent is never in short supply, running a practice requires an entirely different set of skills. The trick is balancing projects that bring in the revenue to keep the lights on with those that satisfy your creative ambition and architectural vision.

Let's be honest: starting an architecture practice is incredibly tough, especially when you don't come from a privileged background. The system is broken, with young architects often forced into a race to the bottom, undercutting one another just to get a foot in the door. It's a tough, competitive landscape where survival sometimes feels like an achievement in itself.

This creates an environment that's not only challenging for new practices—it's downright hostile. But somehow, against the odds, it's those who persist, who find ways to balance the practical with the poetic, that manage to carve out space for themselves.



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Interview With Sonia Magdziarz

If you could look back to ten years ago, what advice would you give to your younger self at the start of your professional path?

While I wouldn't change my degree—after all, it's equipped me with a diverse set of high-level skills—I do sometimes wish I had explored other creative paths earlier in life. Architecture is undeniably fascinating, and the opportunity to design public buildings with the freedom to innovate is, without a doubt, one of the most rewarding roles to aspire to. But the reality of the profession can be, at times, disheartening. It's often a world marked by a toxic culture, long hours, and compensation that feels almost out of sync with the effort required.

There are a few things I wish I had known earlier. First, the path to becoming a fully qualified architect seems unnecessarily long. The mandatory master's degree often feels like an exercise in redundancy, leaving many fresh graduates with little more than theoretical knowledge and few practical skills to apply. Second, after six years of study, the starting salary is often so low that it doesn't cover basic living expenses, particularly in a city like London.

It's an unsustainable situation, with many young architects relying on financial support from their parents—hardly a foundation for independent adulthood. The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) should do more to advocate for these young professionals. The Bartlett's new Architecture MSci (ARB Part 2 & 1) programme, which condenses the study time to just four years, seems like a step in the right direction. If I were to start over, that would certainly be my choice.

My advice to my younger self would be to gain as much experience as possible by working in a variety of practices during my 20s. The COVID pandemic disrupted my ability to switch between firms, but I believe that moving around is essential for discovering which areas of design truly speak to you.

And finally, I'm glad I didn't restrict myself to one career path. By working across multiple fields, I've been able to express my ideas on different scales and through various media. Working as a Senior Designer at Zaha Hadid Architects is just one chapter of my story.

I've also spent years in academia and I have been collaborating with fashion designers on animation projects in my spare time. Because at the end of the day, the beauty of a creative career lies not in following a straight line, but in charting your own path—one that navigates passion, adversity and a healthy dose of reinvention.

As we have unveiled this conversation, anticipate forthcoming dialogues within Architects of Tomorrow—a Zora-curated series featuring luminaries from esteemed institutions such as Zaha Hadid Architects, Foster + Partners, Bjarke Ingels Group, UNStudio, and other icons reshaping the design landscape.

Join us at Zora in celebrating the art of architecture and the inspirations that quietly pave the way for tomorrow. To follow the ongoing narrative, we invite you to stay connected.

