

IE INTERVIEW

NEXTGEN:
Pioneering
Architecture for
New Ways to
Live and Work

Speaker:
Kelsea Crawford, Co-Founder
and CEO Cutwork Studio

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KELSEA CRAWFORD

EXPERIMENTS IN ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN FOR A BOLD NEW WORLD

The IE NextGen Program continues to transform the way we see architecture and design. Set on the international stage, the forum brings together young built environment and real estate professionals to share innovative projects, spark new ideas and gain insights into trends in the market.

In this edition, titled “Pioneering Architecture for New Ways to Live and Work,” IE University hosted Kelsea Crawford, an award-winning entrepreneur on the frontlines of exciting architectural innovations. Kelsea is the CEO and co-founder of Cutwork Studio, a visionary team of architects, designers and engineers determined to redefine how space is used and shared in the modern world.

KICKING TRADITION TO THE CURB TO INNOVATE ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

Kelsea’s professional journey has defied all convention. She has followed a non-traditional path from the start, challenging established ideas of what architecture and design are about along the way.

Her story started in 2014 when she first moved from her small town in the south of the United States to Paris in search of inspiration and new opportunities. But what was meant to be an eight-month assignment turned into a much longer adventure when she met her future co-founder in a series of unexpected events.

She calls these serendipitous occurrences “sliding door moments.” Defined by their unparalleled capacity for transformation, they can change the entire course of one’s life—and that’s exactly what happened for Kelsea. In her case, her sliding door moment led to her co-founding an architectural studio, despite previously not being an architect or designer by trade. But right out of the gate, that studio won a place among Europe’s top 30 cleantech startups with their first project. Later, they were also selected to join Station F, the biggest startup incubator in the world.

To call it a ‘project’ is perhaps understating their achievement. Kelsea and her team invented a new patented laser-cutting technique that allows metallic tubes to be bent by hand. As a result, they began designing flatpack furniture that end users could easily assemble on-site, opening the way for Cutwork Studio to start shipping their pieces to customers worldwide. This innovation not only makes it easier for industrial designers to turn ideas into reality, it’s also transforming how things are done in the sector forever.

Now the head of a truly global company, Kelsea is eager to share her design philosophy with a broader audience. At the heart of her work is the idea that relationships transform us, and that relationship transformation is key to the future of architecture and design. According to her, the cities we live in were built for a world that no longer exists today. If the challenge of the last century was densifying the city vertically, then 21st-century professionals must tackle reimagining spaces and making them more fit for their evolving usage.

Kelsea believes that, because of this, architects and designers must shift their mindsets, conceptualizing new designs and building new types of spaces that support the emerging communities and lifestyles of the modern-day world. One of the places this need manifests most clearly is in the family.

Through their groundbreaking research, “After the Family,” Kelsea and her team can track how the traditional family unit is evolving. Now, the classic structure isn’t just a small minority, it’s inherently unsuited to life in today’s cities. Which new relationship typologies are unfolding, and what new kinds of experiential bonds are being formed? What implications will this have for architecture, and how will it transform how we design and build for the new family unit?

These questions promise to shape the next few years at Cutwork Studio. By providing real, data-driven answers for the design and architecture world, Kelsea hopes to inspire fellow professionals to see beyond traditional and embrace innovative, multidisciplinary solutions for a more functional and sustainable world.