

# BUCKS

THE ART + CULTURE + LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

PROFILE



## ISMAEL LEYVA

### Form follows function

By Amanda Gibney Weko

Architect Ismael Leyva has quietly risen to fame humble, optimistic beginnings. He left his home in Mexico in 1976 to make on the architecture capital of the world – New York City. Nearly 30 years later, he has his own thriving practice, commissions around the world, and is fast-becoming one of the most sought-after architects for residential and commercial work. Respected by developers, clients and other architects, Leyva brings to his work a simple elegance that is based on listening to his clients' needs and designing solutions that combine functionality and aesthetics without sacrificing either one. Leyva's designs have included the residences at the Time-Warner Center, The Westminster and The Park Imperial in New York, as well as the Mohegan Sun Hotel and Casino in Connecticut. Current projects included the Millennium Towers in Jersey City, NJ, and 10 Rittenhouse Square, the first new residential project on Philadelphia's famous town center in more than 25 years.

**You came to the U.S. without an American architectural license and speaking very little English, and have evolved into one of the most sought-after architects. What has been the most difficult part of your rise to success?**

Getting credit for my work has been difficult, particularly when I am associated with star architects on big projects. The press doesn't always acknowledge my work or my role in designs.

**So what is it like to partner with those "starchitects" –Frank Gehry, Phillippe Stark, David M. Childs?**

It is definitely an honor to be part of a team with such well-known colleagues. Egos sometimes clash, absolutely; but if we communicate, then at the end of the day good architecture develops.

**Your work has been called sensual and assertive, yet also practical and efficient. How do you strike a balance between form and function?**

I believe that form follows function in architecture. Following this basic approach helps me to work with developers, clients and other team members. When you try to force something that is different, that's when things don't work.

**10 Rittenhouse Square, for which you are teaming with Robert A.M. Stern, is sure to be one of the most spectacular new condo projects in Philadelphia. What differences have you experienced working in Philly's booming condo market versus that of New York City?**

Manhattan is a pressure town. The pace is a little slower in Philadelphia. There's more time to do things – not as much rushing. The approach to the architecture wasn't different. As a matter of fact, the design of 10 Rittenhouse Square is based on two New York Projects – The Chatham, another more traditional building I worked on with Robert A.M. Stern, and the contemporary Time-Warner Center.

**What are the hottest, must-have features requested by your recent residential clients?**

It has been very popular to create amenities within the buildings – basketball or squash courts; media rooms; concierge service; plus the latest technology, trying to give the buyer additional features in the buildings as well as the residences. Very luxurious bathrooms and kitchens with the latest in fixtures and appliances are also popular.

**You've gained recognition for your residential work, but you're also engaged in number of other exciting projects like the Re-development of Penn Station in NY. What's the one dream project or building type you'd like to design?**

My house is one which I am working on now. I would like the opportunity to design a museum. I might be interested in entering product design – maybe furniture or lighting fixtures.

**Architects don't often earn recognition until later in life, once they've built up a portfolio of work. What advice do you have for young professionals eager for fame and fortune?**

Keep focused and be a dreamer, but be realistic. Do your best at whenever you do and you can't go wrong.