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**LAS VEGAS SUN**

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# Six questions for: Mike Del Gatto



Sam Morris

Architect Mike Del Gatto, winner of Young Architect of the Year from the American Institute of Architects, has worked on the Andre Agassi Academy, above.

By ***Joe Brown***

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Architect Mike Del Gatto moved to Las Vegas at age 4 and saw his city grow up around him. Del Gatto, 34, graduated from Valley High and got bachelor's and master's degrees at UNLV. He's a partner and principal architect in the Vegas-based firm Carpenter Sellers Associates. He recently was honored by the American Institute of Architects as the Young Architect of the Year for the six-state Western Mountain Region.

**Congratulations on the award. What does it mean to you?**

It's an individual honor, but I didn't take it that way. Obviously, to get a architecture project done, lots of people have to be involved. So it's certainly a tribute to our staff and to Rick Sellers and Steve Carpenter, my mentors and partners.

**What is your mission as an architect?**

I'm passionate about projects that make a difference in the community. I've been working on the Andre Agassi

College Preparatory Academy in West Las Vegas for about seven years. The reality is that it's not the architecture that's making the impact, it's what the (Andre Agassi Charitable) Foundation is doing there.

#### **How can building design help the Agassi Academy?**

The foundation's mission is to change the community through education, and they wanted to make an appropriate statement with the buildings. They wanted you to believe, when you step onto that campus, that change can happen.

#### **Has Las Vegas changed architecturally in your lifetime?**

Tremendously. There's more appreciation for design now. That's because a lot of restaurants were built on the Strip, and high design started to become important to their success. That spread out from the Strip.

#### **Is there a recognizable Vegas aesthetic off the Strip?**

The general public is starting to demand better design that's more responsive to the environment. There's also more of an appreciation for the desert. Newer communities are requiring that houses not look like Tuscan villas, favoring instead a desert palette and materials and proper solar orientation.

#### **How did growing up here affect your career?**

It was a dream to be able to sneak onto construction sites and watch buildings go up and to see communities grow so quickly. And I learned to appreciate the climate and see that the desert is a beautiful place. It's not like anything goes here. You have to definitely be responsible in your design.

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