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Children: MalamaDoe, Head of the Table, MalamaDoe, Head of the Table.

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Sheila Long: Hello, everybody, and welcome to the Head of the Table podcast. My name is Sheila Long. I will be your host for today's show. Very excited today to have another podcast with another member of our community. First and foremost, I am joined by Melanie Wolf, she will be helping us out today.

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We also have our guest today, she focuses on safety in a different light, she is an architect. I would like to welcome here, Suzie Van Cleave.

Suzie Van Cleave: Hello.

Sheila Long: Hello. Suzie, how are you?

Suzie Van Cleave: I'm doing good, I'm really good. My first podcast.

Sheila Long: First podcast, welcome here. We have known each other for many years now.

Suzie Van Cleave: Couple of years.

Sheila Long: Couple of years, all right. Well, welcome here. Do you want to tell us a little bit about yourself?

Suzie Van Cleave: Yes, I'm an architect and I have my own business. I call it a boutique architecture firm because we kind of specialize in the small projects, the ones that are one of a kind, unique projects, we do commercial projects, we do multi-family, and then we also do residential.

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We do pretty much anything you put our way. I've been practicing at my own firm for a little over ten to twelve years now. I've been an architect for about 25 years.

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Sheila Long: Wow, that is great.

Suzie Van Cleave: Registered as an architect for 25 years.

Sheila Long: Great. You're the owner of the firm?

Suzie Van Cleave: I'm the owner of the firm. I started my business. I kind of got into architecture by way of interior design. I got a degree in interior design a while back, quite a while back. Practiced that for a short time, but realized it just wasn't very interesting to me.

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It was creative but with a small limited palate, I would say. I would describe it like that. Where I wanted to do a little bit more, so I was working with interiors, but I wanted to do a little bit more and deal with the building, the site, the environment, how the building works with the interiors. I realized, I needed to go back to school and get a degree in architecture.

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I went back, got a master's in architecture and have been practicing ever since then. Feel like I have stepped to my profession. A friend told me that the best feeling is that you've gotten to the right profession is if you feel like you've stepped into an old worn shoe and it fits perfectly. That's the way I feel about it, it's a passion of mine also.

Melanie Wolf: That's a lovely way to think of it.

Sheila Long: It is. Yes. Then you would be the person we'd want to be using for architecture because you really love what you're doing.

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Suzie Van Cleave: I am, I'm a little bit too passionate and can go off on a rail on things. I won't do that today.

Sheila Long: That's okay, there's not a lot of architecture here to talk about. Rectangular room. Let's see. You started your own firm a few years ago, it's kind of similar to what we did here, we opened Malamadoe about two years ago,

but it took a while, a lot of growing and growing pains and figuring out what works and what doesn't work. Congratulations for being able to do that.

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Suzie Van Cleave: Thank you. I did, when I first became an architect, a registered architect, I have a little story I want to tell that is stuck in my mind, when my second child was born, my daughter, I had taken the licensing exam for architecture, which is a 12-hour exam. Well, it's actually three days, and one exam is 12 hours long.

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Sheila Long: Wow.

Suzie Van Cleave: I was six months' pregnant.

Sheila Long: Wow.

Suzie Van Cleave: That's when you had to draft your plans for the 12-hour project. You had to sit at a table and physically draft things out. I remember thinking, man I'm six months' pregnant, I can barely reach the drafting table because I could hardly physically get to the drafting table. I was very thankful that I did pass. In fact, the day she was born, I got the letter in the mail that said, I'd passed the entire exam and was so thankful that now I didn't have to worry about it because I had two kids at home. That stuck in my mind. Got that out of the way.

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Sheila Long: That's awesome. That's good, it sounds like you can do that test online now probably.

Suzie Van Cleave: Yes, I think now it's really easy. You have to go in for the drawing part of it still, but most of it is online. Makes it really easy. That's just from the olden days.

Sheila Long: Yes. I'm just thinking about the pregnant woman, how comfortable that would be.

Suzie Van Cleave: Right. I was in a room with mostly men, so it was typical.

Sheila Long: I wonder if they make accommodations? I don't know.

Suzie Van Cleave: Probably nowadays they do.

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Sheila Long: Yes, it's amazing how things are getting better and better for people who need things to be shifted a little bit. Talking about the table there, how do you feel being head of the table, what does that mean to you?

Suzie Van Cleave: Head of the table to me is about being someone who knows... has experience and knows about the field that they're in enough to work in the... well, architecture is a collaborative environment.

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As an architect, you're working with all of these different disciplines. The engineer, the landscape architect. The soils engineer, the mechanical engineer. You're gathering a team together, not just people at your office, but the outside disciplines to make a project come to fruition. That's the contractor then once you start building, it's the owner that you're working with.

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I see it literally as being head of the table, being the facilitator of that group, which is the role of the architect. Then also, head of the table is someone who knows what they're doing and has the experience to step up and be the facilitator for that way, for that group, which could mean working with a client to draw ideas out of them. It could be working with a contractor to suggest different ways you could frame something, or get those ideas working and flowing.

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It's somebody who's a facilitator that makes it easier for others. It means being a leader and stepping up to the plate when someone has to. Then it means accepting your faults when something does go wrong, because things do go wrong in a built environment. You have to deal with those issues.

Sheila Long: It sounds like you really understand what it is to be a leader and also, you like having integrity to step up to say when you have something that you learned from.

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Suzie Van Cleave: Yes, as an architect, you're always learning.

Sheila Long: Really?

Suzie Van Cleave: Always learning, there is always new material, new technologies, the one thing I've learned over my experience, over the years of practicing is that people are generally... have certain personalities and you have to learn

how to deal with all of those personalities. How to bring some certain personalities out and how to tap others down.

Sheila Long: Really?

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Suzie Van Cleave: To get those to be collaborative and to get those people to work together.

Sheila Long: I would have never thought of that in architecture. I would just think people are more working, more introverted and...

Suzie Van Cleave: You get a little bit of everything.

Sheila Long: A little bit of everything. Then you have the client, who you're trying to satisfy.

Suzie Van Cleave: Yes, that can get emotional sometimes. Especially when you're working with residential projects, it can get emotional and the budget can get emotional. Meeting with a husband and a wife can get emotional sometimes.

Melanie Wolf: I can already imagine.

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Suzie Van Cleave: There's some drama there sometimes. You have to keep a cool mindset when they're hashing it out there over the table. It's fun.

Sheila Long: You're a little bit of a marriage counsellor too.

Suzie Van Cleave: Yes, there is part of that, yes.

Sheila Long: Seems like you'd be like a nice calm voice in the storm.

Suzie Van Cleave: I try to be in my work environment, yes.

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Sheila Long: Yes, because there's a lot to manage, right? The scope of how long it's going to take, how much money, and then... the timeline, making sure.

Suzie Van Cleave: Timeline is very important to a lot of people and people get passionate about that. Sometimes you had to move out of their house, or move out of their office, and nobody likes to do that because it disrupts their schedule, so you kind of have to manage that.

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Sheila Long: Then you want quality too, because you want it to work.

Suzie Van Cleave: Definitely.

Sheila Long: Because in the end, that's what they'll remember.

Suzie Van Cleave: That's exactly true. That's one of my passions as a matter of fact.

Sheila Long: Cool, okay, let's hear about it.

Suzie Van Cleave: Is that you don't necessarily need tons of space in architecture, in building, you don't need a huge house necessarily when you work through the program and you understand how you use your house, sometimes it can be scaled down quite a bit and save money and put it more into the quality of things, or the quality of a space.

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Instead of just having square footage because you want a big house, or because you want an extra room, where it might not necessarily be the best solution to an issue that you're having to a problem. That's where I bring in my interior design hat and work from the inside to setup a program and decide on the scope of the project. Maybe at the end, we don't even need to expand or add on to space.

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That's sometimes how it works, but part of my passion in architecture is to push the quality over the quantity. Make it an intentional space.

Sheila Long: Neat.

Suzie Van Cleave: That's what I like to call it.

Sheila Long: It's so great that you have that design background, too.

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Suzie Van Cleave: I do. I feel like I'm a little bit unique in that respect.

Melanie Wolf: That sounds very European. Do you have international experience?

Suzie Van Cleave: I did live overseas. I've always... in the beginning of my career, I actually followed my husband around, because I just jumped on bandwagon. As architects, when you start out in the field, you don't make a lot of money. My husband was the breadwinner. Followed him to different cities around the U.S., then moved overseas to China and lived there for a while and lived in Japan for a while. It seems like each time we went to a different location; we were meeting people that had the same basic needs across every culture.

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Sheila Long: Wow.

Suzie Van Cleave: They just dealt with their issues to their problems differently. It was really interesting, especially in Japan, where people have very little space. They deal with space in a whole different concept. Their houses are minimal in design and minimal in detailing, minimal in size. Going to Japan really influenced my design aesthetic. It's the one that kind of set me on that idea of quantity of space is not that important, it's more quality of space, because that is their mantra there. I've always been influenced by the Japanese aesthetic.

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Sheila Long: Neat.

Suzie Van Cleave: Then moving back to the U.S. is when I started my business. I think to me, all of those different cultures and people that I met, each one of them has influenced me in some way and brought a different way of seeing things.

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Sheila Long: Okay, that kind of leads us to the next part. Who are your big influencers?

Suzie Van Cleave: Gosh, it seems like each little segment of life, or each little move basically, my whole life is based on, since I've been married, has been based on where we've lived as a family. Each move, it seemed like there was something different that influenced me. One of them, like living overseas, was that built environment that was there.

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Moving back to the U.S. then was a little bit of a culture shock. It took me about a year to get used to that.

Sheila Long: How long had you been gone?

Suzie Van Cleave: Six years total.

Sheila Long: Wow.

Suzie Van Cleave: It was good. Our kids got a really broad perspective of living. They were young when we were there. When they came back, it was just a new environment. Our daughter was asking kids in her first-grade class, well, what country are you from?

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That's what she knew when she was in pre-school over in Japan. The other kids didn't really identify with what she was asking. They didn't really understand where she was coming from. She made it. We all had some adjustment to do after the year, but it definitely influenced me. One person that I know influenced me considerably was back in architecture school, it was an architecture by the name of Max Levy, who is an architecture practicing in Dallas, Texas right now.

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He was the one that open my eyes to how I can form, or how I could consolidate my interiors experience with architecture. Just open my mind to the fact that I have that unique ability and can see things in a whole different picture and harnessed it for me, which I didn't, I don't think I even realized until later on. He was also my mentor after I graduated. You have to have a mentor for a period of time until you become registered and he was my mentor for that.

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Sheila Long: Okay. Neat. There's just so much here. Just the fact that you were gone for six years. You came back and you had this awesome mentor who really helped figure out your competitive advantage and what you're so good at, right?

Suzie Van Cleave: Yes.

Sheila Long: He was your primary role model; do you have anyone else?

Suzie Van Cleave: He was that one in that particular time. I don't think I have any other specific role models. It seems like each segment; I just took from different people.

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I just haven't been... it's not been one individual. It's been more in general. To me, some of my... I wouldn't call them role models, but what I've taken my influence from were the communities we lived in and how people live in them. That was the built environment of each community we lived in, whether it was Japan, China, in Arizona, which is even a whole different lifestyle.

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Each community is what has influenced me in terms of my design aesthetic.

Sheila Long: Neat.

Suzie Van Cleave: Then coming to the mid-west is a whole different thing all together. It taught me that for people, they need the same basic things. That's a place for their families to feel safe, a warm environment, and a community that supports them.

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Sheila Long: Awesome.

Suzie Van Cleave: That's across all cultures, I feel like.

Sheila Long: Yes, a supportive community is really important and just being safe and just really have a place for your family where you can go home after a day.

Suzie Van Cleave: Right, it doesn't have to be big, it doesn't have to be anything great. It could be low-budget, big-budget, but it's just a space where you feel comfortable.

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Sheila Long: Okay. Well, this is great, just hearing your story and the background, right Melanie?

Melanie Wolf: Yes, do you have a business card? I'm ready to get a little Zen in my house.

Sheila Long: There you go.

Suzie Van Cleave: All right, good.

Sheila Long: How about any great accomplishments? Did we touch on that?

Suzie Van Cleave: To me, an accomplishment is anything I've made a difference in the world. Anytime I build a building, I'm hoping it's accomplished my goals of influencing, in my perspective, the built environment influences the regular person in how they work, how they interact with other people, their community...

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...even not just a house or a school, not just an office building, or a medical facility, or a school, but even down to the house. It could be how it opens up to people, how you can walk up to it, or if you have to drive up to it, if it turns its face on a community.

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You have to look for the door to get in, if it's not very opening. I feel like anytime I've done something that has gotten a community together or

influenced a community or brought a community to a different level, that that is an accomplishment.

Sheila Long: You're making the world a better place one building at a time.

Suzie Van Cleave: That's my goal, that is my goal.

Sheila Long: That is really inspiring.

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Suzie Van Cleave: Some of my current passions now are to do that in Milwaukee and to make some of the neighborhoods that have lost that connective tissue in them and have torn down buildings, or they get lost. Do some in-field to bring back that connective tissue because that's that needs to be done.

Sheila Long: Way to go. Yes. How can we help you? Anything?

Suzie Van Cleave: Gosh. I'll think of some ways.

Sheila Long: That would be wonderful, just to be able to really revitalize those neighborhoods, especially since you have such an eye for design.

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Suzie Van Cleave: That's my goal. You don't have to spend a lot of money, but with a little bit of design, you could make those elements of community and support work without spending a lot of money.

Sheila Long: Great. Well, thank you so much for being on the show. This has been really educational. We've learned a ton and it's so great just to be able to talk to you and have our audience get to know you better.

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Suzie Van Cleave: It was a lot of fun.

Sheila Long: A lot of fun. Great. How can people reach you? Do you have any social media?

Suzie Van Cleave: I have a website. [Vancleavearchitecture.com](http://Vancleavearchitecture.com). Or you could email me at: [Suzie@vancleavearchitecture.com](mailto:Suzie@vancleavearchitecture.com).

Sheila Long: That's with a z.

Suzie Van Cleave: Suzie with a Z, S-U-Z-I-E. Yes.

Sheila Long: Okay, all right. Thanks to our audience also for tuning in and thanks for Melanie, just for being here. All right, she always adds a lot of insight that I might miss.

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At MalamaDoe, we really want women to be heads of their own table, so that's why we're doing this, that's why we named it this because we want to see more women flourish in business, more women leading companies, more women on boards. We can only do that if we help people one person at a time. Thanks everyone for being a part of this.

Suzie Van Cleave: Thank you.

Sheila Long: Tune in for our next podcast. Thank you. Thanks for everybody to listening to the Head of the Table podcast. Please, feel free to look for us wherever you find your podcasts, let your friends know, as well. Thanks, everyone.

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