



## Rachel Preston Prinz

is a passionate advocate of historic preservation. She strives to applying lessons learned in preservation and archaeology to modern bio-regional design. Her work has included forensic architecture, archaeological architecture, the preservation and adaptive reuse of historic structures, re/design for handicapped accessibility, as well as the design of bio-climatic residences & commercial structures for non-profits.



## ARCHINIA

Her firm, **Archinia**, is an architectural cooperative, employing the services of an array of professionals normally not considered part of "traditional architecture." Archinia's inclusive approach allows her to develop pioneering interdisciplinary research in: "re-visiting historic precedents to get past style and into the design's substance; the development and design of eco-communities; and preserving context in historic structures, trails, roads, and monuments."

Tell us about yourself.

**Q:** What's your background as it relates to sustainable architecture?

**A:** I got into sustainable design through an unusual route: when working on my Master's thesis in Architectural Design, I was offered the opportunity to study in Italy - to get up close and personal with the subject of my thesis - the late sixteenth century Andrea Palladio, and in particular his Villa Emo at Fanzolo. After spending nearly a month studying the site, I realized that Palladio had introduced some incredible bio-regional design aspects to his buildings, making them not only well-designed as far as their response to their time and place - that being the Mannerist period of playful reinterpretations of Renaissance idealism and a deep respect for all things ordained by the heavens (his villas use mythical imagery to connect to the particular powers of certain gods and goddesses) - but the houses were also appropriate as a response to their specific physical environment. The houses were naturally heated, cooled and lit, water naturally went where it needed to be, and was swept away from where it didn't. The landscape and the architecture were inexorably intertwined, working together. I realized that what might appear as merely "structure" had a place. It stuck with me, and I began to search for that "sense of place" in everything else I would study or design.

**Q:** What is Archinia?

**A:** Archinia is half "architecture" and half "Nia". I am technically a Nia white-belt instructor, though I don't teach. Nia is part dance, part yoga, and part martial arts. Nia is a mindfulness-based dance practice, where your only aim is to finding your own edges, so you can take your body places you weren't even sure it could go. Architecture and dance are intimates - moving through space requires a specific kind of attention - and I want to awaken that awareness in my design work.

**Q** Are there any sites in particular that you feel should be more well-known?

**A:** The most magical New Mexico archaeological sites to me are the petroglyphs at Mesa Prieta, everything at Chaco, Taos Pueblo, and the cave complexes at Tsankawai and Bandalier. The New Mexico carved cave complexes are a special thrill... not only are the sites positioned strategically for access to water and therefore some degree of health, agriculture and protection, they are also oriented to the sun to take advantage of solar heat in the winter. Facing a cave opening south or southwest invites the late day sun in to warm your "bedchamber" before you tuck in to your blanket. It's ingenious and SO simple.

**Q** How did New Mexico Archaeology inspire your work?

**A:** I've always had a passion for archaeology but for years I actually believed that you had to have a degree to participate in it. So I never pursued it. When I got to New Mexico three years ago, I was taking time to "reboot" my design paradigm. So, I started volunteering on various archaeological projects. Before I realized it, some of the archaeologists I was working with recognized that it was handy to have an architect around. Especially one trained in vernacular design. I could automatically see patterns where others had to look, and often missed. I came to love archaeo-astronomy and studying how astronomy influenced design. Then, when at Chaco Canyon one weekend, I realized that all these sites I was studying had some things in common. They were built with materials found within a very small radius from the site. The sites were oriented towards the sun for maximum solar gain. They were hand-built by the people of that place, and their culture was reflected in the details. Before long, I realized other places in New Mexico confirmed these observations, responding to their environments and cultures in different ways in a variety of historic periods, but answering the same problems. I realized that archaeology told us how to build correctly for our place - and it worked when the power or gas went out - which was relevant as many thousands of us in New Mexico suffered through staying up all night tending a fireplace, if we were lucky enough to have one, for 5 days with no gas for heat in the coldest part of winter.

**Want to hear more?**

**Watch her TED<sup>x</sup> talk on BermudaQuest!**



**Q** What projects is Archinia working on currently and what projects have been successful in the past?

**A:** We have the incredible good fortune of having a diverse workload that incorporates our interdisciplinary approach. We are working on archaeological projects including developing National Register nominations of National Historic Trails; historic preservation projects including developing ways of preserving context and landscape in historic sites, including current projects the Sanctuario de Chimayo and the Santa Fe National Cemetery; and we are helping in the design and implementation of vernacular homes and eco-communities right here at home as well as in far-away places including Arizona, Costa Rica, Canada and Russia.

**Q** How can the public help promote a sustainable future?

**A:** Wow, that's a tough question! It is so easy to get greenwashed in design. I think that the biggest thing people can do to promote sustainability is to commit to it: Participate in your community's planning process. Buy local food. Encourage community gardens. Don't poison your own water supply (aquifers) with non-organic pesticides and fertilizers. Work within 10 miles of your home. Don't drive if you can walk or ride a bike - and look around when you do to absorb what makes your own place great, so you can help protect it. Be a good neighbor. Share. Help other people you may not agree with all the time to achieve their dreams, and if you can, encourage them to do it in a more sustainable way. We can all make a difference if we just try.