

Profile

Landscape Designer Christopher Counts Is Combatting Climate Change

Counts shares all about his new Miami-based role at Perkins and Will

By Jaime Joyce

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Christopher Counts at work.

“What’s that *Seinfeld* episode that says if you’re in [New York](#) for a certain while you’re supposed to buy a pair of white shoes and just move to [Miami](#) and get it over with?” landscape designer Christopher Counts asks as we speak by phone recently. He’s joking, of course. After more than a decade in New York City, where he founded the boutique firm Counts Studio, Counts has moved to [Miami to become design principal](#) in the landscape architecture practice of global architecture and design firm [Perkins and Will](#).

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A winner of the prestigious Rome Prize in landscape architecture, Counts, 44, has worked on projects such as Teardrop Park and Brooklyn Bridge Park, in New York; Lower Don Lands and Corktown Common, in Toronto; and the Green Roof at the American Society of Landscape Architects headquarters in Washington, D.C.

The move to Miami gives Counts an up close and personal opportunity to tackle one of the 21st century’s greatest challenges. “Miami is ground zero for [climate change](#),” he says. The city sits just six-and-a-half feet above sea level. By 2060, the sea level rise in the region is [expected to increase by 14 to 26 inches](#), according to the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact. Already, [rising seas have resulted in higher storm surges and increased flooding](#).

“Being in Miami and engaging in these climate change issues and having the opportunity, the tools, and the support, and the resources of a firm like Perkins and Will is beyond exciting,” Counts says. In addition to working on Miami-based projects, he’ll be engaged in efforts further afield. Currently, Counts is working on a public garden in Boston and a master plan for what he describes as a “significant public space” in [Dallas](#).

Born and raised in Greenville, South Carolina, Counts comes to Miami with his wife, landscape designer Maria Counts, and their two sons, Hammett and Harry, ages two and one. As a new father, he’s keenly aware of the urgency of the climate crisis and of his adopted city’s commitment to set the course for a resilient, [sustainable](#) future.

In November 2017, Miami residents approved the \$400 million [Miami Forever Bond](#) which allocates nearly half its budget for infrastructure projects aimed at sea-level rise mitigation and flood prevention. The city’s mayor, Francis X. Suarez, is the only U.S. mayor on the [Global Commission on Adaptation](#), founded in 2018 to combat the effects of climate change.

Perkins and Will began work on a major new climate change initiative this summer. Counts refers to it as the Miami Project. “I think we’ve got some really interesting ideas on

the table,” he says. For now, he’s keeping the details under wraps. What’s his approach to resilient design? “I’m a fan of lower-tech solutions,” Counts says. His preference is for “plans that work with and harness natural systems.”

“There is a logic and an intelligence, an embedded intelligence, in natural systems,” Counts says. “That, I think, is where we should be looking [for solutions].”

“Nature’s like a partnership,” he adds. “You really have to work with the circumstances.”

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