

SPECIAL REPORT

ENGINEERING

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Jasmine in bloom

30-year-old engineer hasn't wasted any time in landing lucrative projects

By PAULA MOORE

Staff Reporter

Life has always moved faster for local engineer Jasmine Azima than most people.

As a young girl growing up in Iran, she developed an affinity for tinkering with engines and a love of race cars. She sped through college at the University of Texas at Austin with barely enough time to maintain a 3.86 grade point average, make the National Dean's List and graduate early. Jasmine Engineering Inc., founded by Azima at the tender age of 25, is only 4 years old, but Azima has had so much work, she feels as if the company is 10 or 15 years old.

In its brief existence, Jasmine Engineering has completed more than 300 engineering projects — in new and renovated office buildings, schools, nursing homes, hospitals and government structures — amounting to 190 million square feet and worth \$575 million. Last year, the company worked on \$160 million worth of projects. Revenue figures for 1988 have not been compiled yet, said Azima.

While Azima's firm does work in mechanics, plumbing, lighting design, energy management and fire protection, her own favorite engineering realm is heating and air-conditioning design. She likes nothing more than the challenge of taking a 200,000-square-foot space and balancing its heating and cooling needs — taking the trouble to make sure the rooms are equally toasty or chilled.

"Heating and air-conditioning design fascinates me," she said. "It's always changing."

Jasmine Engineering currently has 64 clients — among them architectural firms, the city of San Antonio, Southwestern Bell and school districts — and has worked in 30 states.



PHOTO BY TRICIA BUCHHORN

Jasmine Azima is one of a few women in engineering. But because of her no-nonsense professionalism, male colleagues have no trouble taking her seriously.

It has contributed its expertise to projects as diverse as a Bookstop Inc. bookstore in Dallas, a Builder's Square building-supply store in St. Paul, Minn., a retirement center in Albuquerque, N.M., and the Trammell Crow Co. building in Commerce, Calif.

Locally, Azima and crew have completed engineering jobs for the new \$7.5 million San Antonio Police Department Academy, the San Antonio River Authority headquarters building in the King William Historic District and the 40,000-square-foot Texas Commerce Bank building, among others.

The company has enough work already booked to keep it busy for the next four or five years, said Azima.

Located at 309 Third St., across the street from the *San Antonio Express-News* newspaper building, Jasmine Engineering's offices house 11 employees including six mechanical and plumbing

engineers, two electrical engineers and two technicians who do both design work and drafting. Several of Azima's associate engineers have more than 10 years experience in their fields, and one, Tamila Altoiz, a specialist in heating and ventilation, was trained at Lomohosov's Institute in Odessa, Russia. This year, Azima plans to hire another three engineers.

Her fourth location in as many years — business has ballooned that fast — Azima's Third Street office reflects her perfectionist, yet warm, personality. The place is a polished blend of high-tech modern and remnants of the original old building. It mixes black-leather and chrome, Italian chairs and color-coordinated walls with a mosaic tile floor and exposed heating ducts purring contentedly on a winter afternoon. The dark-haired, dark-eyed Azima herself is a study in contrast, attired in crisp, well-

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"I have been able to survive in business because I emphasize quality work, and I baby-sit my clients."

Azima's work persona is rooted in the Middle East

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tailored suits and round-lensed eyeglasses similar to the late Beatle John Lennon.

Described as intelligent, a stickler for detail, attentive to clients' needs and determined by industry peers and employees, Azima admits to being passionate about her work.

She has made her life harder and her work hours longer because she is a perfectionist and equates perfectionism with quality, she said. She makes sure projects meet deadlines and budgets. Because she has a vision in her own mind of exactly how she wants something done, she has difficulty delegating chores to others. She even does her own paperwork.

"I have been able to survive in business because I emphasize quality work, and I baby-sit my clients," she stated. "We're a service-oriented firm — I have a phone in my car so I can return my calls within two hours."

"She's well-educated and experienced . . . She's tough, as she needs to be."

Even though quality is her byword, she's also in a hurry to complete jobs.

"I always want to get to the end of a project to see what it looks like," stated Azima. "It's like when you read a book. You always want to know how it turns out."

Although Bunny Raba, senior chairman of the board of Raba-Kistner Consultants Inc., a local engineering firm, doesn't know Azima well, she knows her work.

"She's a hands-on person," said Raba. "She doesn't sit back and delegate. To see that a project gets done right, she gets in the middle of it."

Formerly chief executive officer of EN Inc., an Austin engineering firm, Azima isn't new to management, but she is new to the strains and problems unique to ownership.

When she ran EN Inc., she had other managers to turn to for help, but now she's the only one who's responsible — and liable — for her and her employees' work.

She finds it challenging to be the top boss. She's one of the youngest people in her firm, and yet it's she who instructs a colleague with 20 or 30 years of experience how to do what she wants done.

But despite the rough spots she has encountered changing management gears, she seems to keep her company on an even keel.

"She balances things well," said Coy Ballard, Jasmine Engineering's associate in charge of administrative management and business development. "She's inspiring and keeps everybody going. And one of the secrets of this company's success is that Jasmine is careful about blending people with a wide range of experience with talented, younger people who don't have much experience."

Azima also faces the task of being one of the few women in a man's domain. But because of her no-nonsense professionalism, male colleagues such as local architect Pat Chumney, principal at Chumney and Associates, have no trouble taking her seriously.

"She's a very good engineer, and she's certainly the most attractive engineer in San Antonio," said Chumney. "She's

well-educated and experienced . . . She's tough, as she needs to be."

Police Capt. Alex Torres collaborated with Azima on the local police academy for a year, and remembers he was very impressed by her technical expertise and intelligence.

"Women in engineering are few and far between, and she's overcompensated for that by being super-smart and easy to get along with."

The roots of Azima's work persona can be found in her birthplace, the geographically barren but culturally rich Middle East.

Born Yasaman Azima in Istanbul, Turkey, in 1958, Azima emigrated to Teheran, Iran, at the age of six months. There her father became an English professor at the University of Teheran, and her mother worked as a registered nurse. In 1979, while Yasaman was at the University of Texas at Austin on full scholarship, the elder Azimas and their 12-year-old son fled Iran for England, amid the turmoil of the ouster of the Shah of Iran. Azima's parents continue to reside in London.

Even though she's Turkish by birth, Azima considers herself Persian, or Iranian, by disposition. And while she can't see herself returning to her homeland — "In some ways I'm embarrassed for Iran," she said — she clings to some of its ethnic traditions.

"I love the hospitality and affection of the Iranian culture," stated Azima. "I've lost a lot of my culture, but I'm still very sensitive and emotional, and I believe in true friends. Friendship is more important than anything in life."

She likes San Antonio because of its hospitality and the affectionate, sincere nature of its people. Although Azima has had offers to open offices in Los Angeles and Boston, she prefers to remain here.

In addition to working long hours at her company, Azima also spends 30 hours a week on pet civic projects. She sits on a committee of the Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce's Leadership San Antonio program, the advisory board of Trinity University's engineering department and the board of directors of the Women's Employment Network. She's also involved with the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, and as co-chairman of Young Leaders for Lila Cockrell is committed to seeing the former mayor re-elected.

Busy as she is, Azima manages to pause and reflect on her life. She's very aware of what she wants and where she is going. Right now her company and her volunteer efforts are her life — she's moving too fast for there to be much else.

Crossword answer

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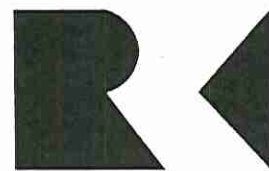
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