

Lucas: Welcome to Bridge the Gap Podcast, the senior living podcast with Lucas and Sara today. How exciting is this? I've got two powerful alpha girls on this show today, and we're going to interview our very good friend, Melissa Banco at Banco Design out of Atlanta, Georgia. Welcome back to the show!

Melissa: Thank you. Thank you for having me. I guess I didn't screw up the first couple of times, right? Cause you guys want to talk again, so I appreciate that.

Lucas: Totally, there's a lot going on at Banco. We keep seeing all the moves that you guys are doing. You guys are awesome innovators. And so, you know, in the world of senior living design, it has changed. And I don't mean it's changed in the last 10 years. I mean, it changes daily right now coming out of the pandemic. There's just so much that has happened from the supply chain to what's available. Then just all of the projects that are starting to come back online, there's so many different challenges with people's budgets, material. Lumber is sky high, we can't get lights, we can't get formed, we can't get FF&E. And so let's just have a discussion around those things and how you guys have been able to innovate and come up with solutions to help the people that you're serving and senior living. So with that said, Melissa, tell us, just give us a pulse on the street about what's happening.

Melissa: Yeah. So you're totally right. I mean, it's an ever-changing vertical for sure. I mean, we got thrown a lot of, we were jumping through hoops last year to get projects completed. We were trying to be as strategic as we could to help projects that had started. And there were a couple of different things that we're doing here that I think are different, maybe from what other groups have done. We made big moves in 2020; instead of sort of sitting at home and saying, okay, this is where we are. We said, what can we do to come out of this thing as strong as we can. And let's make big moves now. So, we actually took on other team members and other offices, we bought a studio in Minnesota. So it was widening the footprint of where we were, that was a big move for us. We want to be the local girl every single time. So we will continue to grow that footprint. But with products specifically, yeah, it was crazy. The shortages of foam and lumber were through the roof and we couldn't get a hold of steel. And so we were, and we are being thrown all these curve balls. We always have not been okay with not finding what we want. So we were building a lot of our own furniture and we decided in 2020 to take a look at some of our best partners and have some really candid conversations with them about how we could strengthen that relationship and take the time to do that. You know, not being best friends with everybody, but really leaning into your core village. And so we had a discussion with the Fairfield Chair, actually, they've always been a great partner of ours. And we said, listen, we're not finding what we want in the market. We're not seeing what we want, not only aesthetically, but in the right price point and in the right durability. How do you guys feel about coming together and building a collection specifically for senior living? That's not only sexy, but also super durable and they were all about it. So it was again, just sort of leaning into that concept that we're better together. I think the world sort of forgot about a little bit in 2020. It seemed like we were working against each other in a lot of ways. So it's like, let's get together and see what we can do as a powerhouse. And you put innovative thinkers in the same room that really work together and big stuff happens.

So we're ecstatic about this furniture collection that's going to roll out later this year because it's something that the market hasn't seen in senior living, not readily available anyway. So we were building it for our own projects. Now we're going to be building so that it's available to lots of other specifiers and end users. We couldn't be more excited about it. Thank you pandemic for a little bit of the time to do that.

Sara: Yeah. Well, gosh, Melissa, that is so exciting. So you obviously did not have many days off during the pandemic in 2020. You rolled right into creating this new line of furniture. Can you kind of take us a step back? Let's take a look back kind of this process from 2020 with all of the challenges that even we mentioned in our pre recording call, but the challenges that operators, architects, general contractors, all of those people that are coming to you with these like huge question marks, what did some of those conversations look like that now you have this solution for not only the interior design, but also the furniture line. What were those conversations like? Kind of take us from challenge to solution and, and tell us what that was like.

Melisa: Yeah. So in 2020, a lot of things went on hold. We weren't able to get in communities and complete renovations that were teed up, cap money went to PPE and additional care these buildings have really been lived in, right. I mean, have you ever looked at your house at the end of the weekend? And you're like, we lived here this weekend, like we tore it up and that's how these communities and these buildings have been over 2020. They lived and they used these buildings top-down. So, what we did was we, you're bringing in these different consultants, you're bringing in architecture, you're bringing in ownership, you're bringing in operations and we were able to and we are having conversations of how we can come out of this stronger. So what do these renovations look like? How can we refresh these communities that have again seen a lot of love in the last year and maybe even the year before the year, before the year before, but they were, you know, we were thinking maybe we would do some of those things in 2020. So it's that concept of better together, you bring in specialists that know each of those trades, you lean in, you work together as a team and you get the projects done. It's the same with a new build. A lot of those conversations are being pinned or reevaluated just with the cost of material and development in general, Banco foresees a really big boom in renovation. And so we are here to help with that, right. GCs like Bridge the Gap and all of these great architects that let's lean in together and work together to get this work done that had been pinned in 2020.

So we're not the girl that's good at all the things, but we surely do bring a skill set. And the skill sets that we don't have, we're going to reach out and find really great partners to fill that and build really amazing teams. So we are vertically integrated here at Banco with design and procurement. And we've got you covered from start to finish with concept and programming and design and construction documents, and we will procure all the things and install all of those things. But we need really great GCs. We need really great architects and we need really great groups who are going to educate us on what they really need and let us knock it out. So that's sort of where we are here coming out of 2020. We're well into 21, but things are starting to move and shake, and we're just really excited to see how senior living as a vertical, as an industry is going to come out stronger than ever.

Lucas: So that's the power of relationships, right? I mean, the world is built on these strong relationships and it's never been a more important time to develop these strong relationships, to get things done, to solve these problems. So, you know, I got this question last week from somebody and they said, you know, what are the design trends right now in senior living? And I thought, oh my gosh, things are just starting back up; like, it's very budget driven. You know, like you said, back to your point, they've spent a

lot of money on PPE and care and all of these things. And so, Melissa, can you think of just a couple of things for people that right now they're like, we gotta raise occupancy, right? This building needs to be done from top to bottom, but we don't have the budget to redo the whole building right now. What are some quick projects that they could deploy right now with some CapEx money to say, we need to make this pop so that we can get people in and move them in.

Melissa: Sure. So, we call those lipstick projects where you've got, you got your face together, you just need a little lipstick. I think that residents and that is always how Banco strategizes and where our first thoughts go is how can we design for our residents resident based design? And it's amazing what a little flooring changes out, what a little paint, what a little upgrade to lighting and a little bit of FFNE will do to really just fresh in a space and make it feel new, make it feel fresh. So we are getting a lot of calls about that. We are slated to complete a lot of those lipstick projects here coming up. So it's finding a group to help you spread that dollar as far as it can go. We sort of use the analogy here, if you've got a little bit of peanut butter, it doesn't take 10 pieces of bread and try to make five sandwiches. Let's make a couple of really great sandwiches. Don't try to spread that peanut butter too far. And so it's just strategizing where our areas are, maybe that our residents are really congregating and where they like to meet and to gather. How can we improve those areas? And then it's just a continued conversation. And if you get a really great group that is helping you on the front end with a little bit of that refresh, we are going to be there with you along the way as you need those upgrades, you know, down the road. So again, a little flooring update and listen floors have been beat up and we had carts going all over communities. You know, it used to be maybe that, you know, snacks were delivered or one meal or something like that. We had three meals a day that were being carted up and down corridors, right?

You've got knicks and scratches and all sorts of programs that these buildings originally were not designed to do. You've got FNB areas that have just been used over and over and over again. So again, just a little bit of a refresh to get those buildings back to snazzy. There's an easy way to do that and there's an economical way to do that too. You don't want to give up on durability, you still need a commercial product. Banco has always designed very resamercially, meaning we want that residential and that sort of luxury scale, but we want it to also last. So we kind of have to fulfill both of those. So there's a way to do that, there's specs out there that can help with those light refreshes, for sure.

Lucas: What do you think about outdoor spaces?

Melissa: Outdoor spaces are big, they always have been, but more than ever, those are areas that people are, I think for a minute, gonna feel more comfortable in. So it's making sure that there's comfortable furniture in those spaces. You've got overhang, so you've got some shade, you've got fans to circulate air. So it's upgrading those exterior areas too. It's also sort of improving some of that streetscape and what that entry looks like. So that those buildings continue to stay inviting. We had lots of visitors outside of our communities in 2020. So what can we do to sort of upgrade and change the look and refresh those exterior areas? So that's a great point. That is definitely something that is on ownership and operations mind to also keep up with those exterior spaces and keep them looking fantastic too.

Sara: I love it. There's lots of new priorities, I think in today's world, in a senior living community and even on the exterior that perhaps we didn't even really think about before, and now that's such an important piece of just the entrance to your community. So take us back inside of a senior living, either new development or renovation that you might be working on. Are you seeing, or what is your forecast or what are you seeing the trends on with spaces that have, I think previously been very popular, like an activities room or a huge dining and culinary space. Are those rooms still looking the same? Are you seeing something that's perhaps looking a little bit different now?

Melissa: You know, we get that question all the time. And I think it's because no one has all the answers, candidly, you know, what are we doing now coming out of this crazy year and that's still the talk track. Bancos answer has been, it hasn't changed. We've always wanted spaces to be scaled appropriately, not oversized, not cramming as many people in a space as we can when it comes to the dining room or something like that. Big spaces for our senior residents can be very overwhelming, they can also be very loud, so we've always tried to break them down and design them to be intimate and appropriate. Now that's not to say that they can't be flexible and they can open up if you do or need them to. But there haven't been dramatic changes with the way that we've designed even through 2020. So I think it's just continuing on with good design and good specifications. That's just been our strategy pre 2020 and post,

Lucas: Well, you know, talking about these relationships and getting back together, we're also super excited to be spending time with the Banco team in Nashville in August. We're going to be having the VIP Ignite Experience event and you guys are a big part of supporting us in those efforts and coming alongside us to say, look, we do we want to build trust. We want to ignite change. You know, what interested you guys to be a part of that as we look out just even a couple of weeks that we're going to be having it?

Yeah. So, we adore you all in everything that you stand for and this vertical didn't have a voice for a really long time and it's time that we do as a whole. We want other verticals to look to senior living as a leader. There's all this talk track about, oh, senior living communities now, or, you know, they're designed to look like hospitality projects. So they're designed to look like multifamily projects. We want those verticals to look at senior living and go, wow, why didn't we think of that? And it's being on the forefront of change. It's being bold, it's making big moves. We support the groups who are helping the vertical do that, and you all are certainly doing that and we want to be a big part of it. So, I think again, better together as leaders, those of us that are leading change and projects in this space.

I think if we all are on the same page about what that is, that we can do big things and we can make a really big impact on a demographic that absolutely deserves it. So that's why we're interested in it. We could not be more thrilled to get back together in person and strategize and catch up with each other and talk about how we can support each other in these upcoming years. And really, again, just make big moves together.

Sara: I love it. Well, we are so excited about the VIP Ignite Experience. Also excited to see you guys and your team in Nashville. Obviously we're celebrating big time on the furniture line. It's always great to catch up with you, Melissa. And it's been super interesting, lots of new things happening in this world of design and we're always excited to hear from you.

Melissa: Well, Hey, I appreciate you guys giving me the opportunity to chat a little bit with you today. Definitely stay tuned if you're not following Banco Design from all the social media platforms, please do. We've got some really great stuff that we are rolling out and constantly posting. Stay tuned for more information on this, what we think is an amazing collection, that's going to roll out here with Fairfield Chair this fall. We're going to be at a couple of shows here coming up in the fall. So there'll be information about how you can attend and see some of these samples here sooner than later. We're just really excited, we're excited to bring a different look to the market readily available. We've been very thoughtful about price point and durability. So we're excited to share that with the world and if you need help with any renovations or new builds coming up please also let us know. We do know a couple of really great GC's in that renovation space. So, hit us up, we'd love to work together as a team to help your community,

Lucas: Melissa Banco of Banco design out of Atlanta, Georgia. A great friend. Thank you for a great conversation today. We will connect with her and her team in the show notes. You can also go to BTGvoice.com and access this show, and many others and all of our social media links, as well as the VIP Ignite Experience. If you want more information, check out that invitation there, and thanks to everybody for listening to another great episode of Bridge the Gap.