

## BREAKING THE GLASS TARMAC: MEET 4 WOMEN ON A MISSION TO TRANSFORM AUSTIN-BERGSTROM INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

***In an industry typically dominated by men, these architects and managers are guiding the \$350 million ABIA expansion that will allow it to handle more flights and passengers***

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An uncommon dynamic is in play during the \$350 million terminal expansion at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport.

Four women are overseeing the work, something very unusual in the world of big construction — an industry long the bailiwick of men. The assemblage of this band of sisters is noteworthy, especially for what is one of the largest projects in the state.

Three of the women are employees of architecture titan Gensler and the fourth is from Austin-based Sunland Group. Collectively they are overseeing the massive project on the east side of the existing ABIA terminal with a deft touch.

“This is so big. So complex. We’re just bombarded continually with questions,” said Vineta Clegg, a technical designer with Gensler. “It’s a lot of spinning plates. We have to be flexible and in constant communication with everyone involved.”

Clegg is cloistered in a small construction trailer — one of a growing armada of trailers occupied by general contractor Hensel Phelps Construction Co. and its subcontractors — by colleagues Pavitra Dholakia, the project architect, and Sophia Cartlidge, the project coordinator, along with **Meg Grayson, the senior architect from Sunland Group, which was brought in for its aviation expertise.**

The foursome, based onsite for a little more than six months, have matured into a well-oiled machine — yet they remain wowed by the magnitude of their commission.

“The scale of it, seeing it, is just “oh my God,”” said Dholakia. “It’s so exciting wearing so many different hats and learning to be OK and flexible with whatever is going on.”

Though it wasn’t an intentional plan, Project Management Supervisor Janice White of ABIA’s Aviation Division said the team of astute female professionals is affirming.

“The project can be an example as a visible role model for women in architecture working successfully, taking action, making decisions delivering an important project for the city of Austin and ABIA,” White said.

### Sprawling construction site

Two tower cranes dominate the site, along with a boom crane and a sea of apparatus. Construction is in full swing. When completed in 2019, the expansion will include nine new gates with additional concessions, baggage systems, office space and overall amenity upgrades. Apron improvements — about 1.3 million square feet of new tarmac surrounding the terminal expansion — will provide greater maneuverability for aircraft and additional aircraft overnight parking.

The improvements will support four million additional passengers each year for an annual total of 15 million passengers — an increase of 27 percent from current capacity.

Gensler and Hensel Phelps were awarded the contracts for design and construction in October 2015. As the largest civic project in the city of Austin at the moment, the assignment represents big wins for the architect and general contractor.

“As designers of the original terminal (that was) completed in 1999, Gensler has a long history of working with Austin-Bergstrom International Airport,” said Todd Runkle, managing director of the firm’s Austin office. “The team working on site are the boots — or heels — on the ground keeping the whole thing running smoothly day to day.”

The all-female team is also noteworthy for its ethnic diversity. Clegg is from Ireland. Dholakia is from India. Cartlidge is an African American from Mississippi, and Grayson hails from Waco, about 100 miles northeast of Austin.

Clegg, who has worked on projects in Europe, Australia and the Middle East, landed in Austin via her husband's work for Dell Inc.

Dholakia, with extensive high-rise design expertise, also touched down in Austin because her husband works for Dell.

**Grayson** brings a wide range of talents from her work at several Austin architectural firms.

Cartlidge is, in a sense, the glue that holds them all together.

As the project coordinator, she's onsite first in the morning and the last one to leave. A former marketing specialist, Cartlidge is an operational and management whiz kid who pays fierce attention to the details.

Sometimes that sixth sense is very practical and accommodating.

When Cartlidge moved from Gensler's sleek offices at the W Hotel in downtown Austin to the humdrum trailer at ABIA, she noticed two non-descript bathrooms.

One of them cried out for a feminine touch. She designated one for women, with design touches and sweet fragrances, and one for men. The men, she said, are a bit jealous.

"It was the first thing I needed to do," Cartlidge said.

The team's camaraderie and contagious upbeat, can-do chemistry is palpable.

"There's a real click between us," Clegg said.

Gensler's Runkle said the dynamic is serving the ambitious project well.

"This is an extremely talented group of women who know how to design and build complex projects," Runkle said.

ABIA project supervisor Janice White couldn't agree more.



From left, Sophia Cartlidge, Pavitra Dholakia, Vineta Clegg and **Meg Grayson** in their cozy workspace out at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport, where the four are overseeing a massive \$350 million expansion project

"As a female architect myself and owner's project manager it's been enjoyable to work with the Gensler team. The level of communication and response on issues is professional and a benefit to ABIA and delivery of this important project," she said.

### **Airport expansion fast facts**

- ✓ Design contract with Gensler: \$36 million
- ✓ Construction contract with Hensel Phelps: \$289 million
- ✓ Terminal expansion: Nine new gates, about 175,000 square feet
- ✓ Tarmac/apron expansion: 1.3 million square feet
- ✓ Increased operational activity: 30 percent
- ✓ Increased passenger support: 27 percent
- ✓ Total capacity on completion: 15 million passengers annually

*Source: Austin-Bergstrom International Airport*

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