

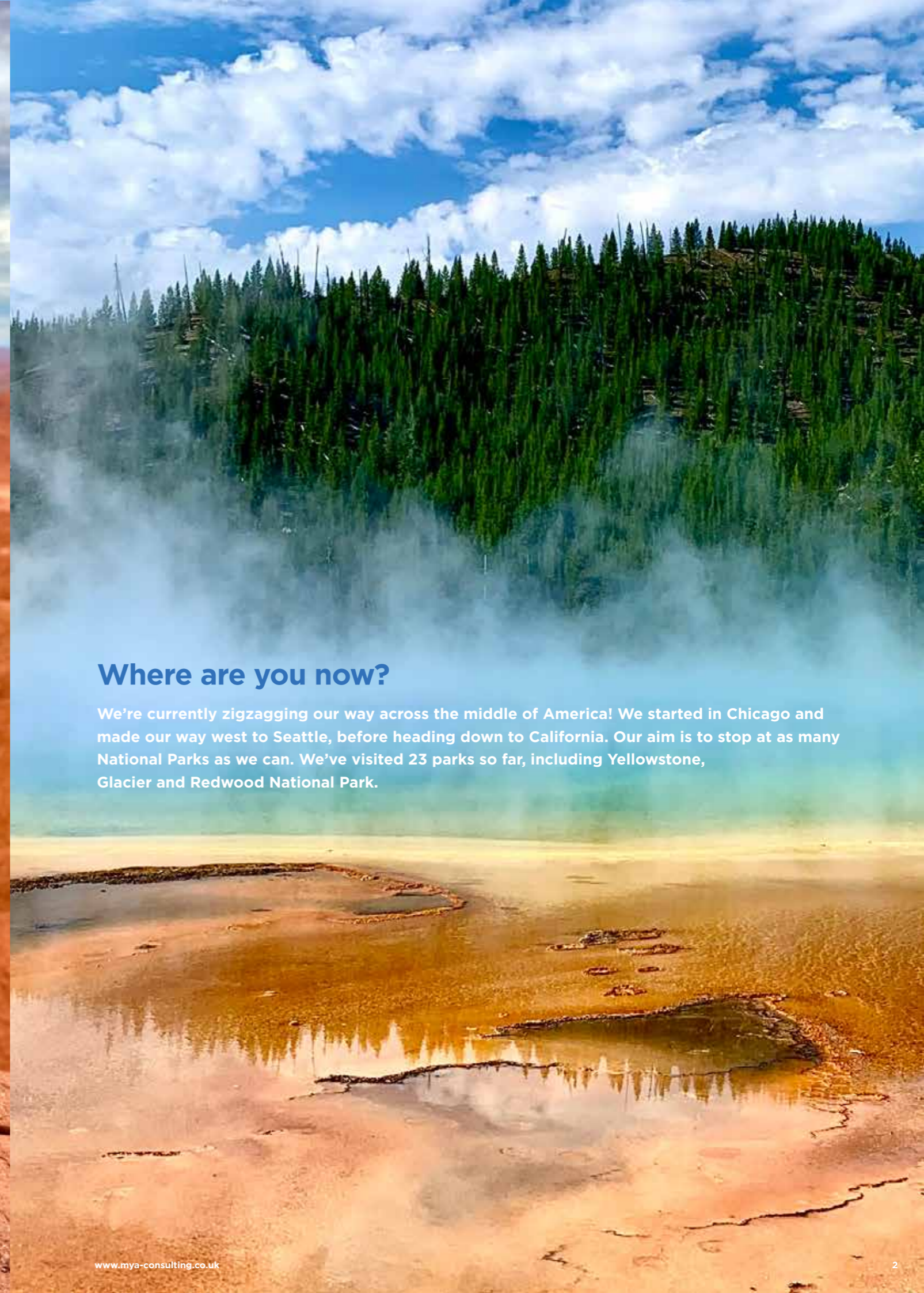
WALKING ON THE WILD SIDE

by Catherine Francis & George Panks
October 2022



At MYA we encourage our staff to push the boundaries. Some go further than most: our senior designer Catherine Francis is in the middle of a sabbatical, travelling the world in search of new experiences and new ideas.

George caught up with her on the road...



Where are you now?

We're currently zigzagging our way across the middle of America! We started in Chicago and made our way west to Seattle, before heading down to California. Our aim is to stop at as many National Parks as we can. We've visited 23 parks so far, including Yellowstone, Glacier and Redwood National Park.

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How are you travelling?

We've hired a car and looking to clock around 20,000 miles by the end of the trip! The car takes us from place to place, and then we get out and walk.

What's your biggest hike?

The biggest hike we've tackled so far is the Four Mile Trail to Glacier Point in Yosemite National Park. It's a 16km trail with 1,000m elevation gain. It was especially tough due to 35 degree heat, and being at a high altitude. But at the top, we were rewarded with panoramic views of Half Dome and Yosemite Valley.

My favourite hike was the Skyline Trail in Mount Rainier National Park. It was just under 9km and we had stunning views of Mount Rainier the whole way around.

Where to next?

We've just finished exploring Utah, which has 5 National Parks in itself: desert land with arches, stone and canyons. Then we'll work our way through the mid states, including Arizona, New Mexico and Texas, before visiting New Orleans and Savannah on the East Coast. After that it's the Blue Ridge Highway, westwards to Smokey Mountain National Park, northwards to Acadia National Park in Maine, then back to Chicago, then home.



Any OMG moments?

The biggest hike we've tackled so far is the Four Mile Trail to Glacier Point in Yosemite. We've seen and done so many amazing things already, and all the National Parks are incredible. There was something magical about being among the Redwood Trees and we just had to take a swim in Crater Lake, even though it was freezing! My absolute favourite moment was hiking in Sequoia National Park and seeing some black bears on the trail. It was so special to see these amazing animals in the wild.

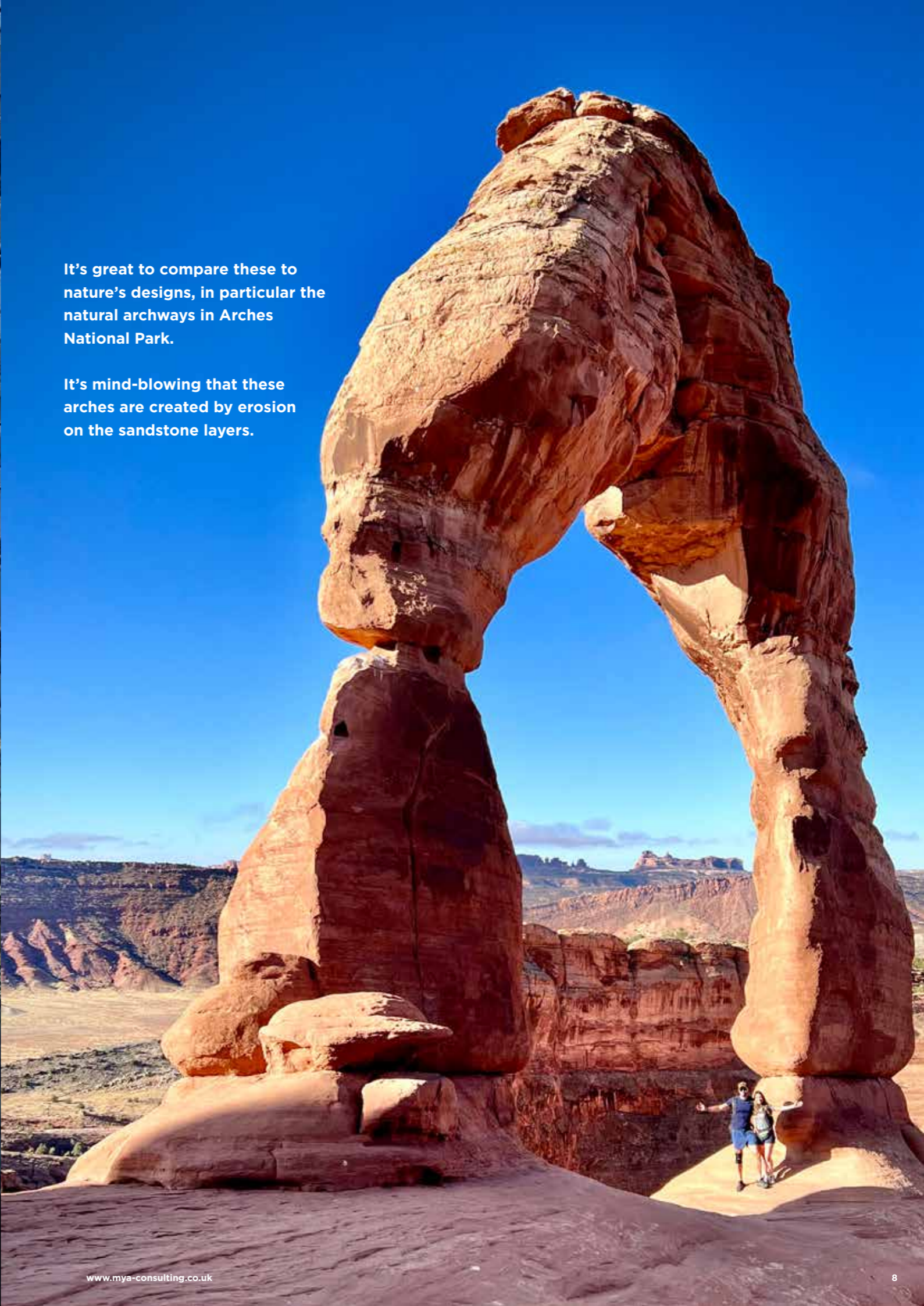
What is the best design that you've seen on the road?

I was delighted with all the skyscraper architecture in Chicago. After studying my architect heroes Frank Lloyd Wright and Mies van der Rohe at university, it was brilliant to see some of these buildings on the architecture riverboat tour.



It's great to compare these to nature's designs, in particular the natural archways in Arches National Park.

It's mind-blowing that these arches are created by erosion on the sandstone layers.



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Has the trip given you some ideas?

As a designer, I'm always inspired by our natural surroundings; America has such an abundance of different landscapes. From the yellow, blue and orange of the Yellowstone Geysers to the red, orange and brown hoodoos in Bryce Canyon, I can't wait to capture these inspiring places in future designs.

Do you think you'll bring some of this back?

Travelling in another country gives you a much wider perspective of the world: you see so many things that are different from home. I hope, after these experiences, that I'll bring a broader, deeper vision back to MYA.



AUTHOR BIO

Catherine Francis is senior designer at MYA Consulting Ltd. Catherine is responsible for the process of design and innovation, and works closely with her clients to capture the 'wow' factor. With exacting standards and an exceptional eye for detail, Catherine brings design leadership and innovation to any project team.

Catherine earned a degree in Interior Design from Kingston University, and then gained experience working in an architecture practice before joining MYA Consulting. She rejoins the team in November, before setting off on her European stretch with her husband Toby in the new year.



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