

Hospitality Interiors

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By Gemma Lochhead Aug 12, 2019

Q&A: Baranowitz + Kronenberg

Since founding their Tel Aviv studio in 1999, Alon Baranowitz and Irene Kronenberg have brought their intuitive and story-driven design approach to scores of residential and commercial properties internationally. Here, they discuss their unique philosophy in more detail, reveal the fascinating narrative behind their design for the Sir Victor Hotel in Barcelona and unveil some exciting new and upcoming projects.

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What do you feel is the single most important thing that people should know about you, or your work?

We are a passionate team who find the extraordinary in the ordinary and the ordinary in the extraordinary. We believe that design is a vital tool to bring people together to exchange and explore new ideas which have the potential to change our lives and urban surroundings, making them worth living.

We are in a constant dialogue with the present, the future and the past to build stages for cosmopolitan lifestyles and modern shifting selves. We realise that this may sound like a cliché, but we are truly storytellers.

What has been your proudest moment or most memorable project as designers, thus far?

The W Hotel Amsterdam stands out as a real game changer in our portfolio. This project forever changed Spui Straat; it invigorated the entire neighbourhood, the local community and cemented its presence in the collective memory of Amsterdam.

Giving a second life to buildings by the appropriation of new programs that work in synergy with the original essence of place, results in an inspiring moment that validates the power of design.

You've mentioned that narratives and storytelling are fundamental to your design approach. Could you tell us more about your work with Sir Hotels, and how you've worked to bring the various personalities of their properties to life?

There is no formula ... everything we do is made to measure, hand-stitched and a one off. We look to the future, we study the past, and then we reinterpret it.

"We create mini-worlds in which people are cast in compelling narratives"

Context is key. We create mini-worlds in which people are cast in compelling narratives. Our designs celebrate the essence of our time and the human desire for originality and authenticity.

The Sir Hotels brand shares our mind-set. Each hotel is developed around an indigenous fictional character whose biggest virtue is that he/she is the king of hospitality. In the recently opened Sir Victor Hotel, Barcelona, we interpreted the beautiful story of the Catalan female writer – Caterina Albert i Paradís – who used the pseudonym Victor Català in order to publish her works at the turn of the 20th century.

In 1898, at just 29, she became the first woman to be awarded with the esteemed Jocs Florals d'Olot literary prize. Following this, scandal erupted when the judges realised that they had awarded the prize to a woman. Caterina could no longer publish her work under her own name, so she changed it to Victor. 'Victor' went on to break barriers in the literary world throughout her long career, and our design pays tribute to her determination and refusal to adhere to the status quo. Sir Victor is the first female Sir of the brand.

This narrative became an important theme within our design scheme – we explored how to express femininity through a masculine expression. We covered the entire ground floor with sensual curtains which initially appear to be soft drapes, yet on closer inspection they spark dissonance as they are in fact made of hot rolled steel.

Several ceilings and the welcome desk area are covered with copper dots which resonate with the beads of a beautiful necklace. These beads too tell a feminine story with a masculine touch, adding to the gender duality.

Which areas of the world are you excited about in terms of their hospitality scene at the moment?

China is an exciting place for self-made and upcoming hoteliers, especially off-the beaten track. The country's fusion of indigenous and international influences brings about compelling ways of expression and experience which would be fascinating to explore in design terms.

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Could you talk about some of your upcoming projects?

The W Ibiza is opening this summer, the W Prague will open in 2021; both are two totally different galaxies which is making our lives really exciting at the moment.

Sir Victor Barcelona opened last June and marks the company's first steps in this amazing Catalan city. Other lifestyle projects include our store design for Ame's laboratory diamonds jewellery space in Soho NYC which is currently underway. It's set to be a key destination within the cast iron district of the city.

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We're also reviving a historic hotel in Tel Aviv, which is actually the city's first hotel that opened in 1913. It's always a great honour to restore historic buildings – it calls for invention and conversation with the building which is always a process that we find fascinating and insightful.

More than ever, we're seeing blurred distinctions between home, work and leisure environments. How do you see hospitality design evolving to service this fluid lifestyle offering?

Blurring boundaries or living in apps is the brainchild of the information revolution. The hotel industry is reacting on many levels for; marketing, service, operation and experience.

Yet hospitality could go further than perfecting their relationship with their target audience. It should evolve beyond hospitality if it wishes to thrive.

Hospitality should look beyond its guests towards the local communities and become an eco-system where guests and communities create a synergy which stems from the meeting of completely different mind-sets. Its value should push beyond logic.

What do you feel will be the other key challenges or opportunities facing the hospitality industry in the coming years?

Finding the right balance between technology and experience is key. I think that simplicity, clarity and honesty are paramount as is raw human connection. If we continue to cherish these essentials whilst developing and following progress, we are going to be okay.

What are your framing ambitions for the firm going forwards?

At the end of the day it is all about people. If we put people at the centre of anything we do, we will always have a good starting point. We are often described as an anthropology-driven design office which is true; we never judge.

Instead we observe, listen and are then able to process all of the information together which we gather in a very holistic way and extract a forward thinking interpretation. This is where we shine and we hope to shine for many years to come.

What would be your dream hospitality project?

Any project has the potential to become a dream if one fights hard enough. We are living our dream projects every day.

What are your passions outside of the design world?

Music, reading and being off the grid as much as our dreams allow.

www.baranowitzkronenberg.com (<http://www.baranowitzkronenberg.com>)

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