



## BUSINESS OF HOME FULL SERVICE

JUL 10, 2017  
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*Hospitality design has finally dumped the outdated and overplayed conventions of yore: ugly curtains, boring carpets and tired furnishings. The hottest hotels, restaurants and shops are getting the residential treatment and grabbing all the Insta-attention. But how easy is the leap from homefront to concierge desk?*

Meet the  
Talents



Jeffrey G. Beers  
Jeffrey Beers International



Alexandra  
Champalimaud  
Champalimaud Design



Piet Boon  
Piet Boon Studio



Andrew Kotchen  
and Matt Berman  
Workshop/APD



Ron Swidler  
The Gettys Group



Kristina O'Neal and  
Adam Farmerle  
AvoKO



Greg Bradshaw and  
William Harris  
AvoKO



Nestor Santa-Cruz  
Gensler



Ryan Korban  
Ryan Korban



Carolina Eguiguren  
QUADRUM

The way we dine, how we choose to relax and where we shop reflect contemporary cultural desires. The past decade in experiential consumption has seen a rather striking transformation—and behind it is an elite group of interior designers who specialize in reconceptualizing public spaces into increasingly unique, luxurious and unexpected venues. Hotel and restaurant chains no longer adhere to a monolithic, one-size-fits-all approach to interiors, and instead seek out interior designers who can choreograph the nimble dance of coalescing a sense of brand identity, place and a unique visual experience for clients.

Across the board, designers say residential and commercial are increasingly informing one another. “There’s been a strong desire from travelers and hotel folks who seek out hotels for a more intimate experience—a home away from home—and less of a sterile environment,” says architect **Jeffrey G. Beers**. Conversely, he says, time in high-end hotels influences what guests want to come home to in their own residences. “People are more well- and internationally-traveled and have seen some of the

best properties around the world. They want great living experiences at home that are more hospitality-driven,” says Beers. Interior designer **Alexandra Champalimaud** echoes that thought, “People who travel a lot these days are enchanted and influenced by what they see—the details are done with great rigor and precision and thought.” “You could say,” adds **Matt Berman** of New York-based architecture and design firm **WORKSHOP/APD**, “hospitality is re-creating luxury homes and vice versa. It’s an interesting conversation, and exciting to see how they both speak to one another.”

The retail landscape is no different, with clients eschewing big-box chains and multi-platform department stores in favor of a more intimate, discovery-driven experience that speaks to a desire for the one-of-a-kind. We spoke to some of the top designers in the arena to find out how they have succeeded in an ever-changing landscape, what they see for the future, and how aspiring commercial designers can parlay their residential expertise to fit a new set of commercial expectations.

### Know Thy Client

As Dutch designer **Piet Boon** says, “The ‘client’ of a hospitality project represents multiple persons and stakeholders,” all of whose interests must be taken into account. Just as important are the faceless guests whom the designer does not get to meet. Beers, founder and CEO of interior architecture and design firm **JEFFREY BEERS INTERNATIONAL**, has a client list that includes **ONE&ONLY**, **HILTON HOTELS AND RESORTS**, and **DANIEL BOULUD**. He is highly attuned to the inner machinations of a hospitality project. “It’s very important to understand the reason why a hotel goes in a particular location, and who will operate the hotel, who the brand is—they each have their own particular kind of clients and guests that are attracted to the brand,” he says.



*The Jane restaurant in Antwerp by Piet Boon*

Berman, a co-principal at Workshop/APD, whose clients include **TALDE MIAMI BEACH**, **MASSONI AT THE ARLO HOTEL**, and **BLDG 92 AT THE BROOKLYN NAVY YARD**, notes that getting it right can be like a tightrope walk. “It’s a Catch-22: You need to design something interesting enough to attract, but it can’t be so particular they can’t see themselves in it. It’s a serious balancing act,” he

says. Indeed, every hospitality project ensures that a host of specifications will be there to work with and work around, but this technical, hair-pulling domain is of zero interest to a guest. A hospitality project's success hinges on its ability to dazzle and delight, bearing no evidence that someone else has truly sweat the small stuff. To achieve that, Berman says they try to deliver on the practical end and present an "exceptional level of service and quality" alongside an "invitation to step into another world and connect with the materials and atmosphere of a space." For Berman this means elevating design staples in ways that have not been seen before, and finding creative ways to work within commercial applications that elevate the quotidian. So, how different is the world of commercial design?

Residential design requires countless technical and interpersonal skills (diplomacy, for one) and yields something so valuable but often taken for granted: a direct relationship with the end user. Working in the hospitality realm alters the immediacy of that client connection. Designing for a type of guest or a desired demographic is a radically different experience. Champalimaud, whose attentive eye and luxurious sensibilities can be spotted in such illustrious places as **THE PIERRE, THE DORCHESTER** and the **FOUR SEASONS HOTEL JAKARTA**, initially started in residential design. When the opportunity arose to design a hotel, she says, "I absolutely seized it; it was a very conscious decision to go into this line of work. What I like is the rigor and the formality and structure of what it takes to build a hotel."

### **A Strong Foundation**

Champalimaud appreciates the direct yet artful mediation of pulling off a successful project, negotiating the various pushes and pulls. "In a hotel, you have an advantage: It's not about one person, you're not attached to their schedule or their whim. It is an entity which is subject to very considered budgets, a strategic plan, a financial model and a serious decision-making process," she says, which is one of the elements she enjoys most about the arena. It is also, she noted, in the unseen and unsung details where success often lies. "With hotels, we have to create miracles in limited space, which is incredibly challenging. Results are in the details and service-oriented elements that add value to an everyday experience—small things we otherwise don't think about: the way a closet is designed, which is a different thing than what we need at home, for example. It's all about practicality and efficiency, and how well it's going to perform."

Workshop/APD co-principal **Andrew Kotchen** reiterates the importance of longevity. "You have to be nimble enough to take an idea and present [it] in a way that is more durable and lasting than residential but with the same experience." For this, he says, an extra layer of attention to specification is necessary. "Any time you are designing for a commercial space, you are looking at a lot of things: contract-grade fabrics, joinery details and furniture life cycles. Much of the work that goes into contract-grade specification goes into the details that you cannot see and has a lot to do with the

reinforcement of the durability of the final product. The goal is always to maintain the vibe of the space and warmth that exists in the residential world.”



*PUBLIC restaurant in New York by AvroKO*

All the designers we spoke to cited a thorough phase of research evaluation as pivotal to developing a commercial concept before moving forward with the actual design. Chicago-based hotel design firm **THE GETTYS GROUP** takes background research to the next level. With an international portfolio of clients such as **HILTON**, **HYATT** and **MARRIOTT** hotels and resorts, as well as boutique properties, restaurants, casinos and cruise ships, Gettys has entire departments devoted to branding, consulting, procurement and interior design. **Ron Swidler**, the firm’s principal of branding, weighs in: “The hospitality branding process begins by searching for and unearthing the elements of a brand story first. This is informed by what we can learn from studying history, the building, the area, the competition and the guests who we expect to be the future marketing targets,” he says. It is not until the hotel has a “story direction,” that the design process even begins. Swidler says that Gettys “builds a Venn diagram that identifies the areas in which the guest types and needs overlap,” taking into account various times of year, and after the branding phase is finished, the in-house interiors team implements the branding story through design. “Most of the time,” he says, “our clients provide a brief that describes their expectations of process, deliverables and costs. However, as part of our initial phase, we interview our clients to better get to know one another and form the foundation for a great working relationship. Our clients generally come to us, however, without a preconception of the story direction.” This gives Gettys a structure to work within, but a lot of empty space to fill.

### **All Roads Lead Home**

The emphasis on brand stories can seem more aligned with marketing and consumer psychology than color, scale and material. Indeed, the path to commercial design is a varied one, with interests in architecture, art and interiors leading to an often circuitous arrival to this particular segment of the design world. The varied backgrounds of many designers speak to the range of creative outlets and

financial opportunities that commercial design affords. Take Jeffrey Beers, who won a Fulbright  scholarship examining the use of glass in architecture, and studied under **Dale Chihuly** as a student at Rhode Island School of Design. “With an IIE/Fulbright scholarship to Brazil, I spent a year with **Oscar Niemeyer** in Rio and met a lot of Brazilian architects and artists, which influenced me greatly,” he says. Beers also spent eight years at **I.M. Pei’s** office in New York, where he studied a more technical use of glass, particularly curtain wall glass in high-rise design. His technical comprehension of the possibilities of glass use in architecture while at I.M. Pei’s practice led to his involvement in a number of hotel projects in Asia, particularly in Singapore. “It led me to a love for hospitality design,” he says, “and a desire to create public spaces.”

Not all commercial designers began their careers under the tutelage of big names in architecture and design. **AVROKO**, which recently won a 2017 James Beard award in the Best Restaurant Design category, got its start in a decidedly bootstrap fashion. The company’s four partners—**Greg Bradshaw, Adam Farmerie, William Harris** and **Kristina O’Neal**—have been shaping the current zeitgeist of restaurant design with projects like **BEAUTY & ESSEX** and **SAXON + PAROLE**, which consistently have a cosseted, elegantly relaxed feel to them. In fact, the firm’s first client was the designer team itself. “Our first ‘job’ as our newly formed company,” says Harris, “was actually our first restaurant, **PUBLIC**, in New York City. We created the concept, raised the capital, built the project and have operated it for 14 years. In essence, we were our first client, and so we suppose the job was pretty easy to get.”

It was a learning curve that informed the DNA of their design. “Our concept story would be the filter through which every aspect of the project would be guided by, from the interiors to graphics to uniforms to food and beverage program to service style,” says O’Neal about the restaurant that put them on the map. “It was very exciting and slightly uncharted territory, which is always exhilarating.” The design was inspired by old municipal buildings of the 20th century—courthouses and post offices from the 1930s and 1940s with their earnest, unfussy demeanor. The founders translated this mood at **PUBLIC**, via the space’s heavy use of walnut, the addition of mechanized pulleys and even the inclusion of a library section featuring an old card catalog. For AvroKO, the grounding concept story has layers that create tension, which they achieved by “referencing specifics of the restaurant’s geographical location, identifying unique muses (which could range from art to literature to industry), and rooting a space in a particular period while juxtaposing a contrasting period reference, which may be a real curveball, but that’s what makes spaces unique and interesting,” says O’Neal.



*Hotel Bel-Air, Presidential Suite in Los Angeles by Alexandra Champalimaud*

**Nestor Santa-Cruz**, a design director at **GENSLER**, approached commercial interior design through the prism of architecture. The Cuban-born, Washington, D.C.–based interior designer, who studied architecture at the **UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS**, was informed by **Fay Jones**, dean of the school and disciple of **Frank Lloyd Wright**. “Fay Jones believed in architecture in a holistic way—like Wright. He believed in designing houses and buildings integrated into landscapes, and designing everything inside the home that fit in that context,” says Santa-Cruz. “I never thought I’d specialize in interiors, but my education in architecture allowed me to explore design in the big picture.”

Santa-Cruz works on a highly varied range of projects, from the 225,000-square-foot law firm of **LATHAM & WATKINS** in Washington, D.C., to a recently designed, private 200-key, five-star resort in South America. Regionally, he has brought an inside-out design approach in the renovation of older buildings to meet current and future workplace needs.



*De Kas Restaurant in Amsterdam by Piet Boon*

“Something we see a lot in Washington, D.C., is that downtown has various ‘trophy buildings’ from the 1980s to 1990s that are losing tenants who are attracted to new, state-of-the-art buildings. Thus, these older buildings are being gutted down to the bare structure, and then completely redesigned to meet the demand for quality commercial real estate,” he says.

## House Specials

In restaurant design, there is a whole separate set of considerations essential to creating a successful space. Among the practical concerns, says AvroKO’s Greg Bradshaw, are “guest journeys, staff flow, music progressions, lighting transitions from day to night, and an enormous amount of logistics, from food deliveries to trash disposal.” On a more philosophically challenging level, he bears in mind that “restaurants can either shift or mirror societies’ current tastes and values, and can become a part of the culture at hand.” Fortunately, changing aesthetic interests requires time to become normative and desired, so “restaurants can (and should) be relevant for quite some time if done with care. Our restaurant PUBLIC has barely changed in 14 years. However, it seems that renovations or concept refreshers tend to happen more frequently, perhaps around eight to 10 years.”



*Princess Cruises by Jeffery G. Beers* ←

While designing Antwerp’s famed two-Michelin-starred **THE JANE**, Piet Boon was presented with a unique set of challenges. Situated in a former 19th-century military hospital chapel, the abandoned building had to meet the conditions of the monument preservation committee. A host of issues followed during the process of updating the unorthodox space without jeopardizing the structure. Boon developed precise logistics around “acoustics, the routing of food, preempting staff, guests and food using the same routing,” he says. Eventually, five elevators, in addition to the existing stairs, were installed to connect the restaurant’s three levels, “ensuring a smooth, invisible flow.” Boon likens the role of a restaurant designer to “conducting a huge orchestra that together forms something beautiful.”

## Retail Detail

The retail landscape is yet another arena with different client priorities and shifting customer desires. **Ryan Korban**, the go-to interior designer for the fashion world, has distilled couture and ready-to-wear brands into experiential shopping destinations for the likes of **ALEXANDER WANG**, **ALTUZARRA** and **BALENCIAGA**. “Your client is the product—ready-to-wear, handbags, jewelry, product categories; they are the client. It is making the collection look so good [that] someone wants to walk out taking a piece of it home with them,” he says. Korban was a pioneer in changing the paradigm of high-end stores. “The goal for my first project, in 2007 [Edon Manor, an accessories boutique], was to blur the gap between commercial and residential design.” It proved to be a bellwether for luxury shopping across the spectrum, from big names to small, boutique ateliers. “Convincing people through good design can really help a business add tremendous value to a company,” he says. One example, “I was working with a global brand who wanted to introduce ties to their line, which had never been a popular category for them, so I designed a gorgeous fixture to sell ties on, and, all of a sudden, the ties take off.”



*Aquazzura boutique in New York by Ryan Korban*

Korban stresses the need to always prioritize the brand ahead of the designer creating the space. “Whether or not it’s good for my own business, I always put the client’s brand first. None of my retail projects look alike.” A successful retail environment is also predicated on the designer looking to the brand’s future. “I have to ask them how they’re preparing, what new product categories they hope to produce, and build a design based on that—you must have not only the input of the designer, but you have to take into account the merchandising teams and salespeople,” he says.

## Hire Power

So, what does it take to land the job? **Carolina Eguiguren**, design director of **QUADRUM**, an integrated, multinational development, investment management and advisory group behind the **ARLO SOHO** hotel, **ARLO NOMAD** hotel, and **NAUTILUS HOTEL**, reveals how she hires. “While



some projects call for someone tried-and-true, I am always searching for young and new design firms—we do go for people without too much experience but who have very novel ideals and just need some guidance,” she says. Her advice to aspiring commercial designers is to be visible, reach out and stay active. “Go to events—go to the hospitality conventions like the **HD EXPO** in Las Vegas. Start small, even if it’s residential. Be picky about your portfolio—if you start doing things too contract-looking, boutique hotel developers won’t want to hire you.” She also echoes what many commercial designers say of the industry today: “It’s very helpful to have a portfolio with residential projects. Whether it’s a small boutique property or a large-scale chain, hotels and restaurants are increasingly embracing a more independent and eclectic feel.”



*The Four Seasons Jakarta by Alexandra Champalimaud*

This is a trend that is well exemplified by the **ACE HOTEL** chain, designed by **ROMAN AND WILLIAMS**, which has embraced the hipster, slow-movement ethos that has infiltrated all aspects of conscious consumption. “Hotel developers used to do these very stiff looking things—boring and basic—now these boutique places make it more like a home, so a lot of these big firms look tired and dated,” Eguiguren says. It is important to her to hire designers who know how to layer and bring in unexpected objects and pieces to turn the property into something slightly off-kilter. “We like to mix in some antique and vintage finds for soul and character—they make the overall feel of the hotel more interesting and also Instagram better, it’s good to mix it in. A contract furniture maker can’t make a good vintage chair—the proportions, scale, materials are so unique to each era, plus it would be a fortune to prototype and produce every item to achieve what a true vintage piece already is.”

““The goal is always to maintain the vibe of the space and warmth that exists in the residential world.”

While dexterity in residential design is undoubtedly an asset for an aspiring commercial designer, so too is a willingness to ask questions, a mastery of the business and a vision for the future. “Consult with knowledgeable peers before signing up for anything—there are many hidden challenges in this line of work. Stay true to your aesthetic,” says Workshop/APD’s **Andrew Kotchen**. Above all, understand the numbers and margins in a job. “Stepping into these waters without managing the business side can be disastrous. Know what’s going in your contract.”



*Arlo Soho hotel room by Quadrum*

While raw talent and MBA-worthy instincts will take a designer far, hospitality gigs require additional superpowers—namely, a certain boldness about the future. Nestor Santa-Cruz advises not to underestimate the future of technology in commercial interiors. Be ahead of the curve, and be prepared. The time is now for collaboration and for a diversity of expertise. “I recently heard that in the future, over 50 percent of today’s students will work in jobs that do not yet exist—that is interesting data. The designer of the future has to have holistic ideas, a well-rounded education and a broader design-thinking approach.”