

INSPIREDESIGN®

innovative vision for today's hotel

“CLOSE TO MY **HEART** IS ITALY,
WHERE MY **PARENTS**
AND **FAMILY** ARE FROM.”

—ANNA MARIA MANNARINO

IN HIS OWN WORDS

Alex Woogmaster, studio founder/creative director,
Woogmaster Studio

I dissolve through drawing. In an instant, the world melts away and I become a conduit between history and the imagined unknown, translating notions and forgotten experiences into chance movements of pencil on paper.

Drawing is how I've always come to understand travel, design, the genius of others. It is how I discover new ideas, find solutions and dream deeply.

Growing up, our family's Sabbath observance afforded me contemplative time in Boston's leafy suburbs to pour each Saturday over monograph tomes of floor plans by masters like Horace Trumbauer and McKim, Mead & White. I dreamed of what the spaces felt like in reality, how one moved through them and, inadvertently, learned the value of sequence, of volume and the spatial dances granted to those privileged to pass through them. The drawings filled me with sublime, aspirational wonder, and recalling that sense of discovery still fills my chest with Scotch-like warmth. Floor plans became so natural to me that I sketched them in school notebooks (often designing homes for friends) and only at the close of one middle school year did a teacher suggest that I study architecture. Architecture was and remains in many ways a game for me, a meditative puzzle, so the notion that it could be a formal profession hadn't ever crossed my mind.

As a self-taught classicist at Corbusian Cornell University (by then Koolhaas was eclipsing Corb), I struggled to imbue architectural designs with human scale—the elements of relative intricacy that inspire comfort—against professors who sought cool, objective abstraction. Those studies brought me

to Rome, thankfully, where my world exploded. I drank in Michelangelo, Moderno, Bernini, Borromini, and every accidental architectural intervention in between. I learned texture and layering, craft-driven invention, and Italian. I returned after graduating to guide Jewish visitors (and occasionally diplomats) through the Vatican palaces and collections. I saw Rome through countless sets of eyes and studied the physical effects of pointedly designed spaces on those who encountered them. I also learned about who I love.

My architectural thesis explored how buildings can be used for manipulation (towards altruistic ends or selfish ones) and sent me to Paris, in a way, and from there, to Las Vegas. There, I was rejected for an architectural position, but luck brought me under the mentorship of Roger Thomas, a true pioneer, and a central inventor of opulent integrated resorts. Roger introduced me to the world of modern luxury and the noble art of decoration and, together, we studied the finest examples of each as we developed schemes for properties. And so I became an interior designer.

Now, following years as creative director at Wynn Design and three more years as an independent studio founder, I look back at a relatively linear path. I have always been driven passionately by a love of classical design, even if it doesn't manifest literally in our work. The design language we apply can adapt to need, but the foundational interplay of grand scale and intimate purpose has always struck a deep chord in my being. I believe that spatial relationships are at the core of what elevates us, what inspires us, what helps us find comfort. The experience of passing through carefully crafted volumes reminds us of our aspirations, guides us to stand tall, compels us to savor each moment. When truly great, these compositions whisper with promise at what we can yet become.

My team and I begin each of our projects examining scale, sequence, balance—the sacred procession of a person in space—whether we're working on a hotel, a café, a villa, or a yacht. Stylistically, each project

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differs greatly, but that sense of movement and shelter, the interplay of the palatial and the personal, informs our every decision.

We are taught there is nothing new under the sun, and I think it's misguided to ever expect designers to create something that is actually new. I don't believe that any of us truly create in the deepest sense of the word, either. We form and craft, collect and curate, utilizing meaningful materials and learning from the discoveries of others. When done right, these efforts result in spaces that feel transformative even if they're not fundamentally new. I think that's the secret: harnessing known elements but formatting them in ways that allow for discovery, making spaces surprisingly fresh but comfortably familiar.