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HOSPITALITY EXPERIENCE & DESIGN



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25 Years Of **LW Design**

Upon celebrating a milestone anniversary, the founder and CEO of **LW Design** discusses the past, present and future of hospitality design.

KEY HOTEL PROJECTS

The Dubai Edition (2022)

Bab Al Shams, Dubai (2023)

SIRO One Za'abeel, Dubai (2024)

Grosvenor House, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Dubai

A quarter of a century after LW Design's inception in Dubai, the studio's founder and CEO Jesper Godsk reveals more about the journey so far.

ON THE INITIAL VISION

When we started LW Design back in 1999, Lars Waldenström, Morten Hansen and I saw a clear gap in Dubai's interior design market. At the time, the landscape was dominated by a sense of over-the-top opulence. While this suited certain tastes, we believed there was room for something different – something that reflected the simplicity, functionality and understated elegance of minimalist Scandinavian design. Our vision was to introduce this philosophy to the region, and in doing so, offer a fresh perspective that emphasised clean lines, natural materials and timeless aesthetics. That vision was pivotal to establishing LW Design as a firm that could deliver high-end projects that resonated with authenticity and purpose.

ON ITS EVOLUTION

Our approach has evolved over the years, driven by both our expansion and the changing needs of our clients. What started as a team of three in a small office has grown into a global firm with over 125 team members and offices in Hong Kong, São Paulo and Aarhus. With this growth, our design philosophy has had to adapt to different markets and cultures, but our core DNA remains unchanged – collaboration, honesty and an unwavering commitment to quality.

One major evolution has been the transition to the next generation of leadership within the company. Over the last eight years, it's been incredibly rewarding to see individuals like Rachel Kidd, Pooja Shah-Mulani and Andrew Harms take on key roles. They bring their unique perspectives and talents to the table, but are also committed to preserving the essence of LW's design approach. This evolution ensures we remain true to our roots, whilst staying relevant and forward-thinking.

ON MILESTONE HOTEL PROJECTS

After successfully completing over 500 projects globally, it's nearly impossible to choose a single one that I am most proud of. However, if I had to highlight two that particularly stand out, they would be Buddha Bar Dubai and The Dubai Edition; both projects transformed our perspective on our capabilities and altered our understanding of what we can achieve. This transformation was pivotal, shifting our mindset and inspiring us to push boundaries in design.

Buddha Bar Dubai was a groundbreaking endeavour, where the owner envisioned a magical oriental experience that drew inspiration from his explorations of the East, including a journey through Tibet. This marked our first large-scale F&B project, which exemplifies our philosophy that design transcends aesthetics; it is about creating a holistic experience for guests. Every element, from intricate décor to curated furnishings, immerses visitors in a captivating atmosphere.

On the other hand, The Dubai Edition represents a bold statement in understated luxury. This project seamlessly integrates both architecture and interior design by LW, while introducing a new dimension of elegance to the city. By embracing the principle of 'less is more', we created spaces that meet the high expectations associated with the Edition brand.



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Recent projects for the studio include (top to bottom) The Dubai Edition; SIRO One Za'abeel, Dubai; Bab Al Shams, Dubai

ON CHANGES IN HOSPITALITY DESIGN

The hospitality design landscape has evolved significantly since we first started. One of the biggest changes I've noticed is the shift in focus from purely aesthetic luxury to creating spaces that feel personal and authentic. Today's travellers are looking for more than just beautiful interiors – they want to connect with the space and the story behind it. There's been a real move towards designing spaces that offer a sense of place, where guests can feel immersed in the local culture and environment, and this is something we always strive to achieve in our projects.

Functionality and operational excellence have also become a bigger priority in hospitality design. It's no longer enough for a space to look good – it has to work seamlessly from an operational perspective. Whether it's a hotel or an F&B venue, owners and operators expect designs that enhance the guest experience while optimising flow and efficiency. We've adapted to these demands by ensuring that our designs are not only visually striking but also practical and tailored to the specific needs of the client.

ON NEW OPENINGS

We have several exciting hotel projects in the pipeline, each designed to offer distinctive and memorable experiences for our guests across the globe. For example, following the launch of our first fitness and recovery hotel SIRO One Za'abeel, we are designing wellness-focused Verdala Hotel in Malta. We're also working on Waldorf Astoria Kuala Lumpur, W Hotel Riyadh and Four Seasons Neom. In addition to these flagship developments, we have a diverse portfolio of both boutique and large-scale hotels, as well as F&B outlets, planned for a variety of locations around the world including Croatia, Kenya, Turkey, Canada, Macau, Philippines and Saudi Arabia.

Over the last few years, we have also made a concerted effort

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Forthcoming projects include the interiors for Waldorf Astoria Kuala Lumpur

to diversify our portfolio by exploring new market segments. As part of this strategy, we are expanding into the resort and lodge sectors, tapping into the growing demand for nature-based and experiential travel.

ON THE NEXT 25 YEARS

While I'm immensely proud of everything we've achieved so far, I believe we have now reached our 'perfect model' on a global scale. What my partners and I see over the next 25 years isn't necessarily an expansion in size, but rather a deepening in strength – strength in our presence, our identity and the impact of our work. Our goal is global recognition, not measured by the number of projects or offices, but by the uniqueness and diversity of our portfolio and the way our work resonates across regions and sectors in new, meaningful ways.

In today's market, we believe that the size of a project doesn't define its value. Instead, what matters most is aligning the right project with the right team, and executing it in a way that's authentic to our creative vision. That, in my opinion, is the true marker of success. This approach often pushes us out of our comfort zone, but that's where the magic happens. It's in these moments that small ideas turn into bold ambitions, and our passion for creativity is unexpectedly reignited. These challenges help us to continue growing – not in number, but in depth, relevance and creative excellence. We want to be known for pushing boundaries, embracing new challenges and delivering work that leaves a lasting impression.

ON HOSPITALITY IN 2100

It's difficult to predict with certainty how hospitality will evolve, but by examining the past, we can uncover valuable insights as to what the future might hold. Over the past 75 years, the industry has been transformed by technology, increased global travel and changing customer expectations. However, rather than focusing solely on technological advancements like AI, automation or virtual experiences, it's important to highlight a critical constant: the human connection and people-centric approach.

At the core of hospitality is the desire for escapism – an innate human need to break free from everyday life. Traditionally, hotels and resorts have provided this in the form of unique services, luxury and comfort – a getaway that feels like a 'home away from home', yet is enhanced by offerings beyond what is available in daily life. No matter how far into the future we look, this fundamental human desire is likely to persist, though it may evolve in extraordinary ways.

Today, there are still parts of the world that remain unexplored or inaccessible to the average traveller, but in the future, much of the earth may be fully explored, commodified and accessible. As a result, future guests may seek experiences that push the boundaries of what is physically and mentally possible, such as space tourism, undersea hotels or deep underground retreats. In this sense, escapism in the future might be more immersive and multi-dimensional, involving not only new physical destinations but also mental and emotional experiences facilitated by advances in neuroscience or virtual reality, allowing individuals to craft deeply personalised retreats that cater to their psychological needs, as well as their physical desires. The challenge for future hospitality providers will be how to balance the advancement of technology with the enduring demand for authentic, human-centric service.