



Designing Woman

*Inside the mind
of Houston's
Lauren Rottet.*

Page 2



INSIDE

Lust List:
Design finds for
home entertaining
during the holiday
party season. Page 4



The Buzz:
High-profile
experts
highlight
Theta
Charity
Antiques
Show this
week.
Page 4



The Dish:
1252 Tapas Bar chef conjures Spain with
a new menu of authentic dishes. Page 6

Cover Story

Woman on Top

With a new furniture line and a growing number of high-profile projects, Houston interior architect Lauren Rottet is in demand

By Sarah Rufca

Before she was a design-world darling, Lauren Rottet's early dreams of success were to be driven to work in a limousine.

As it happened, she was just a few years out of college and working as an architect in Chicago when she learned that her landlord worked in the same building that she did and rode in every morning in a limo. Rottet convinced him to let her ride along each day.

"I couldn't afford to eat, but there I was, riding to work in a limo," said Rottet with a laugh.

Thirty years later, Rottet is the president and founding principal of Rottet Studio, one of the most in-demand interior architecture firms in the world, with satellite offices in Los Angeles, New York and Shanghai.

Her résumé includes high-profile projects from corporate headquarters to hotels; she's known for her ability to infuse even the most stark space with soft textures and lines, unexpectedly bold art and a sense of motion and freshness. She has been named designer of the year by Interiors magazine, admitted into the Interior Design hall of fame and is one of only eight people — the only woman — to be named a fellow by both the American Institute of Architects and the International Interior Design Association.

Besides her firm's 105 active and completed projects this year, Rottet also just debuted a buzzed-about 33-piece furniture collection with Decca Home at October's High Point Market, which will hit stores in April.

Four years after she curated a landmark show of art furniture at Houston's Barbara Davis Gallery featuring works by Zaha Hadid, Ross Lovegrove and Arik Levy, the new Rottet Home Collection reflects her embrace of sleek lines and contemporary furniture shapes interspersed with traditional materials, such as rattan



Karen Warren / Houston Chronicle

At her office in downtown Houston, Lauren Rottet sits on an origami-inspired table, part of her new Rottet Home Collection with Decca.

and wood. The Cubist line includes tables with origami-inspired folded edges and crumpled, faceted planes, while the Montauk Gray line is inspired by Rottet's midcentury Long Island abode designed by George Nelson, with acrylic bases contrasting against the solid tabletops and chair shells to give them the illusion of floating. It's not Rottet's first foray into residential product design — the Evaneau

sofa she designed for her own home has been a best-seller for 20 years — but it's her largest collection to date.

It's a far cry from her humble beginnings. Born in Waco, Rottet traces her Texas roots back generations and says she remembers the day a Dr Pepper salesman knocked on her door and asked her mother to try their soda. She moved to Houston at age 7. For college, she enrolled



First lady of design

►Global force: To see more pictures of Lauren Rottet's work, go to chron.com/laurenrottet.

at the University of Texas, focusing on art and pre-med classes before finding her way to architecture.

"In art I drew buildings and I drew the

BEST QUALITY AND VALUE IN TRAVEL

Best Eastern Europe
12 Days / 10 Nights
from **\$2,950*** per person
(includes International Air from Houston)

Book Before 12/20/2013 for
2014 Tours to Europe, Asia & Africa
Save up to **\$600** per couple

RITZ TOURS
*Advertised price includes specific international airfares, taxes and fuel surcharges, and is based on per person double occupancy basis. Refer to www.RitzTours.com for more details.

1.800.900.2446 WWW.RITZTOURS.COM
CST# 1014510-20

紅上木海 **Rosewood Furniture, Inc.**
EXQUISITE FINE WORKS OF ART

3020 Fondren, Houston
713.975.8605
www.rosewoodfurniture.us
Since 1982 • Designers Welcome

STYLE

Senior Editor,
Features:
Melissa Ward
Aguilar
Style Editor:
Jody Schmal
Art Director:
Susan Barber
Style Designer:
Nadya Shakoor
Style
Photographer:
Karen Warren

Production:
Robert Wuensche
Copy Editor:
Erin Graham
Style Writers:
Greg Morago
Sarah Rufca
Joy Sewing
Executive
Director, Local
Advertising:
Gerald Johnson

gerald.johnson@
chron.com
713-362-8162
Account
Manager:
Jason
Wullschleger
jason.
wullschleger@
chron.com
713-362-7395
Comments:
style@chron.com
chron.com/style

ON THE COVER

Photography: Karen Warren / Houston Chronicle
Houston interior architect Lauren Rottet poses near an elevator at downtown's Mellie Esperson building.

Repeat after me:
I DESERVE NEW SHOES!

20% Discount on your purchase with this ad thru 11/24/13.

Brucettes
SHOES, INC.

1725 Post Oak (@ San Felipe) • 713-993-0022
1520 W. Bay Area Blvd. (Near Baybrook Mall) • 713-941-1170

Glam Up Your Day...
with a new look from Swoon

SWOON
APPAREL • ACCESSORIES

20% OFF
ONE ITEM
WITH THIS AD

5886 SAN FELIPE, HOUSTON
713-781-7966

art in the city
fine art • accessories • custom framing

3601 W. Alabama (just west of Edloe)
Houston, TX 77027 • 713.552.0900

CHAMA GAUCHA
BRILLIANT STEAKHOUSE
HOUSTON'S MOST ELEGANT & LAVISH BRAZILIAN STEAKHOUSE

5865 WESTHEIMER RD.
713.244.9500

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT US ON FACEBOOK,
YELP OR EMAIL HOUSTON@CHAMAGAUCHA.COM

CHAMA GAUCHA IS OPEN FOR LUNCH, DINNER AND SUNDAY BRUNCH. RESERVATIONS RECOMMENDED.

FLY
LONDON

9637 Hillcroft @ S. Braeswood
713-489-4993
www.ForYourToesAndFeet.com

for your toes & feet

space between buildings," she said. "It was Tim, who later became my husband, who said, 'You need to be an architect.' It was like a light going on in my head. I loved art, I loved math, I loved science, and all I ever painted were buildings."

Her career led Rottet to stints in San Francisco, Chicago and Los Angeles, but it was when she was working in Texas during the 1980s that it took an unexpected turn. After leading the design and construction of two high-rises in Dallas, the local economy cratered. Firms were still moving their offices, but big construction projects were shelved — so when someone in her firm suggested Rottet try her hand at interiors, she was game.

"High-rises are so impersonal. My first interiors project was the Trammell Crow offices in Dallas. When we designed that building, no one questioned any decisions, because you're the architect. When I did the office for those same people, it was, 'How big is my desk drawer? How's it going to function? Where am I going to put my papers? Where's my secretary going to sit?' Just every question imaginable," said Rottet. "That's because it's personal. It's their space, and I found that interesting. We were affecting people's lives."

Since then, Rottet has built her reputation adding life to other corporate offices, among them the BMC Software headquarters in Houston, San Francisco's Artis Capital Management and the United Artists Agency in Los Angeles. However, after starting her own firm in 2008, she found herself itching to design a hotel. It wasn't an easy sell.

"We were so known for doing offices that no one would take a chance on us," said Rottet.

She got a lucky break when one of the owners of the Surrey Hotel, on New York's posh Upper East Side, saw an office space that Rottet had designed for a company in Paris, which was subsequently featured in a magazine (as is most of Rottet's work nowadays).

"He said, 'That's the feeling I want for The Surrey,'" said Rottet. "That's what got us in the door."

Of course, that break was just the beginning. Rottet stayed at the hotel for a week and a half to get a sense of the building and the neighborhood, waking up at 3 a.m. to poke around the hotel when people wouldn't wonder what she was doing. Accustomed to working on sleek, minimalist office spaces, she made her team re-create the hotel's 12-foot walls at full scale inside her office so she could get the right proportion for the traditional mouldings.

The result was a study in sophisti-



Rottet Studio photos

Lauren Rottet said the James Hotel in Miami Beach was inspired by an imagined meeting between Jean-Michel Basquiat and Virginia Woolf.

cated luxury that married the glamour of the 1920s with occasional touches of modern artistic irreverence that became an immediate sensation. The design earned Rottet Studio a rare two Gold Key Awards for Excellence in Hospitality Design, won "Best in Show" at the International Interior Design Association Awards and

received two nominations in the Interior Design Best of Year Awards. The Surrey's Bar Pleiades was dubbed the "best instant classic since the Chanel suit" by Time Out New York.

Since then, Rottet Studio has designed a slew of hip hotels across the country, including the St. Regis



Left: The lobby at the Surrey Hotel in New York's Upper East Side, designed by Rottet Studio. Right: The Cubist swivel chair from the new Rottet Home Collection by Decca Home.

in Aspen, the presidential bungalows at the famed Beverly Hills Hotel and the James Royal Palm in Miami Beach, which won another Gold Key Award last week for the best luxury guest room. Closer to home, Rottet's hospitality projects have included Philippe Restaurant near the Houston Galleria and Lone Star Court, a new retro-roadside-style lodging option at the Domain in Austin that opens in December. She's also currently designing rooms on the Viking River Cruises ships.

"In hotels, it's all about the guest experience. The second they get out of the car and meet that doorman, they're in a whole different world. You put them in a movie and you don't let them out," said Rottet. "I write a little story in my head. For the James (in Miami), my story was that Jean-Michel Basquiat and Virginia Woolf were walking down the beach and they saw each other and started talking, he being an artist and she being a poet and a writer, and they went back to the James and had cocktails and went back to their separate rooms. It was all about the two of them and the art and the bohemian and the creation and two souls meeting at a hotel and what a hotel could do to make creativity spark."

And yet despite her global tastemaker status, Rottet is committed to living and working in her hometown.

"Being as involved in the design world as I am, when you tell someone you live in Houston, up until about a year ago, the response was always, 'Oh, my gosh, seriously? Why?'" said Rottet. "Now people say, 'Really? Wow, I've never been to Houston, and I really want to go.' It's been a huge swing. I think it's a much more interesting and dynamic city than it was a few years ago."

The days of catching a ride in someone else's limo might be long gone — these days she prefers piling her two dogs

into her white Mercedes and driving herself — but one thing is clear: In work and in life, Lauren Rottet is clearly in the driver's seat.

sarah.rufca@chron.com



Decca Home

MATSUDA

日本 / MADE IN JAPAN

HOUSTON'S MOST EXCLUSIVE COLLECTION OF DESIGNER FRAMES

RICE VILLAGE
2542 AMHERST
HOUSTON, TX 77005
832-831-7253



RIVER OAKS
1806 B. WESTHEIMER
HOUSTON, TX 77098
713-523-1279

www.EyeGalleryHouston.com

Going Out of Business Permit #13-1784-00002

PAUL CARTER JEWELS

Uptown Park

LOOSE DIAMOND & ENGAGEMENT RING LIQUIDATION!

Over \$5 Million of Loose Diamonds will be SACRIFICED AT or BELOW PUBLISHED WHOLESALE PRICES!

ONCE IN A LIFETIME EVENT!

BUY LIKE A DIAMOND BROKER!

All Remaining Jewelry up to 60% off!

PLUS: Take up to an ADDITIONAL 15% off ALL SALE PRICES!

3 CARATS as low as \$16,500	<u>ENGAGEMENT RINGS</u>
2 CARATS as low as \$6,300	<u>WEDDING BANDS</u>
1 CARAT as low as \$2,500	<u>ETERNITY RINGS</u>

AT OR BELOW WHOLESALE:

29 cts TW DIAMOND NECKLACE	\$545,000
14.79 cts TW STUD EARRINGS	\$455,000
7.59 cts MODERN BRILLIANT CUT	\$159,000
5.13 cts RADIANT CUT	\$99,000

GOING OUT OF BUSINESS

PAUL CARTER JEWELS
Uptown Park

1141-02 Uptown Park Blvd. • Houston, TX 77056
713-627-7495
PAULCARTERJEWELS.COM

Open Monday thru Friday 10 - 6 • Saturday 10 - 5
*Not valid with other offers or prior purchases * Inventory subject to prior sale