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COVER STORY: Lauren Rottet's Scripted Designs
What's Hot: Twelve Notable Trends for 2012
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LAUREN ROTTET
Founding Principal, President
Rottet Studio



"I sometimes conceive rooms around pieces of art that help drive my narrative, as I did in the public spaces of The Surrey hotel," says Lauren Rottet.



Lauren Rottet, Rottet Studio

Novel Approach

Lauren Rottet, Boutique Design's Designer of the Year, brings projects to life by writing story lines for each one.

BY MARY SCOVIAK



Rottet Studio's current projects include the Rosewood Hotel in Palm Desert, several hotel renovations, the conversion of a bank into a new boutique hotel and a commission for Viking River Cruises.

Lauren Rottet: Up Close

VITAL STATISTICS Houston native; graduate of the University of Texas with highest honors; FAIA; FIIDA; inaugural member of the Women in Design Hall of Fame; lifetime appointee to the U.S. General Services Administration's National Register of Peer Professionals for Design Excellence

WORK HISTORY After a stint with residential specialist Fisher Friedman Associates (San Francisco), Rottet joined Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM), (Chicago and Houston offices), working as an architect before being tapped to launch and head up SOM's newly created interiors practice in Los Angeles. She moved on to form Keating Mann Jernigan Rottet with several colleagues from SOM. In 1994, Daniel, Mann, Johnson & Mendenhall (DMJM) acquired the firm Rottet was working at and created DMJM Rottet. DMJM, a subsidiary of AECOM, went public in May 2007. Rottet separated from AECOM a year later to form the privately held Rottet Studio.

SPECIAL SKILLS Rottet's studies as an art major not only influences her design work but earned her illustration, "Olympia Center, Rendering of Chicago Avenue Elevation," a place in the permanent collection of The Art Institute of Chicago. She curated an exhibition on "Imperative Design" at the Barbara Davis Gallery in Houston in 2008. The show was the first of its kind to feature furniture as fine art in an internationally recognized contemporary art gallery. She also designed a line of casegoods for Halcon, the Abacus Collection, which received a Good Design Award from the Chicago Athenaeum. Her casegoods line for Bernhardt, Shift, earned a Best of NeoCon Gold Award.

INSPIRATIONS Art, architecture, theater, psychology, fashion and landscapes, especially the ocean.

WHAT HER STAFF DOESN'T KNOW

"I'm at my most creative very early in the morning. I sometimes think through an entire project before the sun comes up. I just hope no one calls me that early. I don't like to talk before about 7:30 a.m."

Lauren Rottet has logged 25 years as a serious curve wrecker in project design and process development. She's changed the boundaries of the scope of work from delivering just another pretty space to "improving the human experience through the built environment." She's expanded the studio president's skill set beyond creativity and management to marketing, establishing client relationships with all of the project team members and mastering the art of being social, from social networking to social responsibility.

She also learned to run—as in running on adrenalin, regularly sending her last (first?) emails of the day around 3 a.m. and sketching out ideas in bed before dawn, and running around a construction site in gravity-defying Christian Louboutin heels. And she understands that, even with an envy-inducing portfolio and a page-long list of awards and professional accolades—including being the only woman in history to be elevated to Fellow by both the American Institute of Architects and the International Interior Design Association—you're never too big to fail.

"Nobody is going to hand me work because I'm Lauren Rottet. I have to earn every project," says the founding principal and president of Houston-based

Rottet Studio. "I want the client to know that anyone who hires me gets all of me—that his or her hotel will be created from scratch, not just reinvented from pieces of projects we've done before."

When she says "all," she's not exaggerating. She researches the client, the market and the brand identity of the hotel. Typically, Rottet stays in the neighborhood around the project for several weeks. She walks the area, observing how the population changes from day to night, visits local hotels, eats at the haunts only locals know, familiarizes herself with the sounds and smells that bring character to the environs and homes in on the aspects that make the lifestyle and cultural scene unique.

"What differentiates Lauren is her complete immersion in the setting," says David Davis, Rottet Studio's managing principal and, like most of her core staff, a long-time collaborator. "When she works with an owner, her participation in the process is all-encompassing. She doesn't arrive at any project with preconceived notions about what will work. More than anything, her effectiveness is based on her ability to listen."

Rottet takes information and inspiration—both her own and that of her staff—and writes a plot for each commis-

sion. Then she develops scenes in which her characters live out the story line. For Denihan Hospitality Group's ultra-luxury Surrey hotel in New York, she mixed the mood of E.B. White's "This Is New York" with strategic contemporary touches to make the beaux arts building fresh, but not self-consciously hip. "I could see Coco Chanel strutting into the lobby of her pied-a-terre in New York, tossing her mink coat over a chair and strolling into the bar for a drink," says Rottet.

For Denihan's upscale James Royal Palm in Miami Beach, it was a different story. "After eating in some Cuban cafes and talking with local artists, I started thinking about Jean-Michel Basquiat (the late graffiti/neo-expressionist artist) meeting Virginia Woolf at the James and staying up long into the night talking about art and poetry."

That one-of-a-kind way of working resonates with clients like Brad Wilson,

who was coo at Denihan when Rottet was tapped for both projects (but since has moved on to become president and coo of Ace Hotel). "I was searching for a designer who could do a traditional space with a modern personality," he says. "As I described the challenge, Lauren just smiled and said, 'Have you seen my house in Los Feliz [Calif.]?' There it was, just what I was looking for—and from a woman I think of as a pure modernist. She has an incredible taste and an eye that enables her to execute a beautifully minimalist lobby as easily as a detailed deco space."

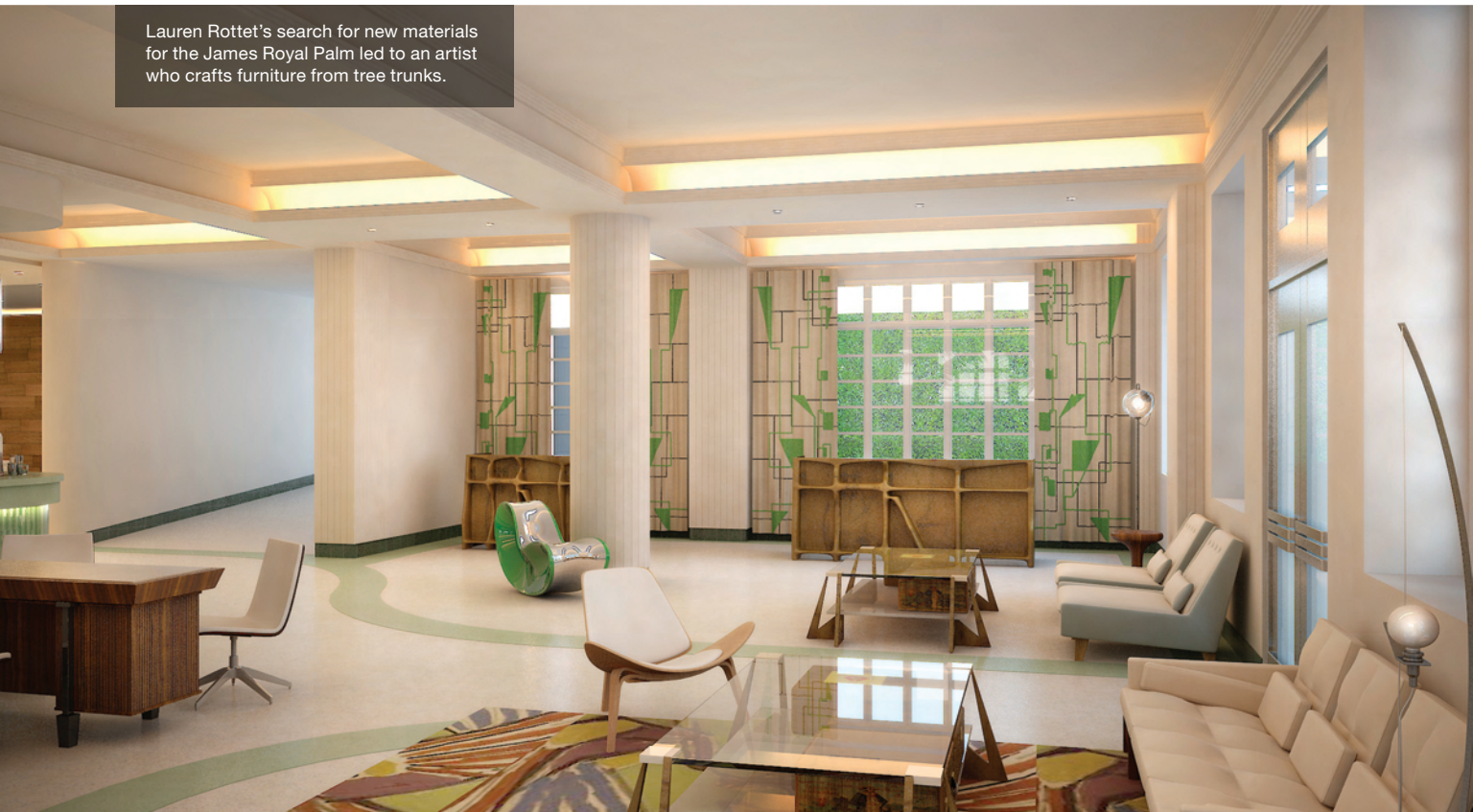
Rottet's art training (she had a dual major in art and pre-med before switching to architecture in her sophomore year at the University of Texas) as well as her architectural expertise give her that range. "I like to manipulate space through light, color and shape. I don't think of interiors as static; I want them to be kinetic," she says.

"So I use receding and protruding planes, mirrors, reflective surfaces and lighting to achieve that." She also designs "art furniture" and frequently hires local artists/artisans to create custom FF&E to ensure that each project has a consistent and individual identity.

A pioneer among left brain/right brain designers, Rottet has proven equally effective on the business side of design. "There's still a problem in that some designers have let themselves be undervalued by reducing their fees and by behaving in an unapproachable manner. It's time the industry figures out how to show clients that, with good design, their projects can be more efficient, less expensive, healthier, prettier and, in the long run, a much better investment. We're trying to do that by looking at statistics on the rate of staff turnover, employee satisfaction, brand loyalty, etc., before and after our renovation work."

Courtesy of Rottet Studio (James Royal Palm); Fred Licht (Beverly Hills Hotel)

Lauren Rottet's search for new materials for the James Royal Palm led to an artist who crafts furniture from tree trunks.





Lauren Rottet positioned the mirrors in this Presidential Bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel so they constantly change what the viewer sees.

She's also looking at employee satisfaction strategies in her Houston, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Shanghai offices. "We train people backwards," she says. Each new hire is assigned a mentor and learns cost analysis first, then construction drawings, design and, finally, programming.

"We want everyone to see the results of what they draw," she says. "We are slow to hire. In a small firm, every person we bring on board can

have meaningful input. We try to be a true studio. The fact that I have amazing partners in [principal] Richard Riveire and David Davis and a great team makes this so much fun."

Her other mission centers on giving back. Although Rottet enjoys knowing that clients "are realizing that design matters," she wants to send that message to the population at large in the future.

"When I retire—if I ever do—I want to sponsor an organization called something

like, 'Every Child Should Know About Design.' It would teach elementary and high school students about the different fields of design and how design can shape and affect our cities and our everyday lives," she says. "One thing we talk about continuously is that it's important to really think through every aspect of the built environment we're creating because it's going to be around for a long time." **BD**

For more from Rottet, go to boutiquedesign.com