

By Gemma Ralph Sep 11, 2017

Celia Chu, Celia Chu Design

As the principal and visionary of her eponymous interior design firm, Celia Chu is renowned for her elegant, rich interiors – ever inspired by her passion for the creative arts. Born and raised in Taipei, Celia has built a distinguished portfolio of national and international clients and is a designated designer for some of the world's major hotel brands. Here, she discusses her formative influences, why The Guggenheim Museum inspires her use of artwork, and the exciting projects she has in the pipeline.

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Who was inspirational to you early in your career, and why?

Tony Chi, who completed the Grand Hyatt Taipei ten years ago in my hometown of Taipei, which I was very impressed by. It made me want to pursue my dream to study in New York and widen my eyes as a designer. After graduation, I worked for him for a few years, from an intern to a professional. It was the early and insightful chapter of my journey to date.

How would you describe your design approach?

Each project is undertaken with its own unique approach and appropriate narratives that reflect the sensibility and the spirit of our aesthetic. We capture every idea from culture and background, which make our designs unique and hard to copy.

With different clients come different strategies. Above all, the craftsmanship reflecting the culture and the artistic sense is the one key aspect that I like to show in every projects.

What would you say has been the biggest professional challenge for you so far?

To be honest, PEOPLE! People have always been the most critical part in my career thus far. I wish I could learn the magic to deal with them all. How to communicate with the clients, with the contractors, with my staff, can be the key to making a project successful or not. I am still learning and hoping I can, as I aspire to be, a good communicator, whoever I am talking to.

What is your proudest achievement, as a designer, to date?

I have genuinely enjoyed every project I have completed to date, but if I had to pick one, I would say it would be the 'White Rose Chapel' in Grand Hyatt Fukuoka, Japan. It is the very first time I truly felt that my design could help people and make them happy.

What are the most important creative developments in hospitality design that you have witnessed over the last fifteen years or so, and looking forward, what challenges will designers need to create solutions for?

For the past few years, the trend in high end hospitality has become more and more residence-oriented and localised. I expect to see a lot of design hotels, boutique hotels and luxury hotels responding to the trend towards residential living, and becoming less "hotel-like".

This trend reflects the expectation of people who are all stressed and busy and wanting the feeling of home from home when they are away so they can completely relax.

Please describe your top three interior spaces, from anywhere in the world, and tell us why they resonate with you.

The Pantheon in Rome – its great scale, and the interaction between the space and the natural sunlight moved me deeply when I stood in it for a long time.

The Louvre – I could never see it all. The beautiful details all over the space are breathtaking. I can always be inspired by the combination of the old and the new.

The Guggenheim Museum in New York City – a masterpiece of Frank Lloyd Wright's without a doubt. I loved to spend my leisure time there when I was studying in New York. The way it combines the architecture, the interior and the flow of the exhibition makes it a design classic even to this day. That is one of a reasons that artwork also plays an important role in all of my projects.

Have you got any hospitality projects in the pipeline that you're able to share with us?

We are now working intensely on the Rosewood Hotel, Bangkok. The project has been underway for over four years now and it is expected to open in 2019. It is always exciting to work with them and I am so grateful for their trust and confidence in me and my team.

In the meantime, the renovation of InterContinental Hotel Cairo is in the making, which is my first project in the Middle East, so I look forward to seeing this completed.

Also, I am working on another specialty restaurant of a local brand hotel in Taiwan which is under construction, and expected to be completed in November.

What do you like to do with your downtime?

Recently I've really started to enjoy swimming with my two daughters, one is three years old and the other is one year old. They are my little angels that can swipe my worries and pressures away easily.

I also love to watch movies in my free time. It's a way to develop my inspiration too. I watch any kind of movie because they all tell very different stories to me. To be a successful interior designer is to be like a director, we have to tell a fascinating story which can attract people to want to hear and see our work again and again.

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