

# BOUTIQUE design

HOSPITALITY REINVENTED

SEPTEMBER | 2018

## URBANE PLANNERS

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# BOUTIQUE DESIGN contents

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Ace Hotel Group made its mark by shaking up the expected version of what a hotel could look like and how it could feel. As it approaches its 20th birthday, the company readies itself to launch two new flags, Sister City and Maison de la Luz, that bring the same iconoclastic thinking to a broader sector reach. What they share? A common purpose: offering guests a retreat from the hectic pace of life in the post-post-grunge era.

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Lark Hotels' leadership team juggles a stack of hats across every aspect of the business, from design to development, management and ownership. Find out how that's enabling them to grow at high velocity and rewrite the stylebook for boutique properties.

## SECOND SITE | 32

What happens when two restaurants are renovated into one fiery food spot? Find out in the behind-the-scenes story of Kōjin, DesignAgency's latest collaboration with Momofuku. Sample some groundbreaking strategies for heating up new-concept design.

## CITY CENTRISTS | 38

The Grand Poet Hotel Riga by Semarah and the EVEN Hotel/Staybridge Suites Seattle South Lake Union are poster children for a new approach to urban (re)development. Convert five awkwardly-connected buildings into a design-led business hotel in a stuffy neighborhood? Sure. Take a chance on a wellness brand/extended stay combo? Of course.

## LOCAL LEXICON | 44

Hotel Freigeist Göttingen freely mixes Jean-Paul Basquiat-inspired art, sleek Nordic furnishings and Asian accents to craft a landing pad for creatives in this historic center of learning.

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Play (and work and eat) nice, now. Shared spaces aren't just a thing in offices. Hoteliers Hilton and The Student Hotel offer next-gen lessons in creating venues for business and leisure interaction.

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Photo: Oscar Mattson





## DESIGN DISRUPTORS PART II: ONE STOP SHOP

Both Lark Hotels and its founder and ceo Robert Blood flourish as multi-hyphenates. For the full list of capabilities and functions built into this growing powerhouse, read on.

BY ORIANA LERNER

**MANY HOTEL GIANTS** keep key pillars of their business, including design, development, ownership, management and F&B concepting under their own roofs. Just not on the same desks. But, for Robert Blood, founder and ceo of Lark Hotels and as of 2017, principal of design firm Butcher & Blood, being a hotel owner, manager, developer and now designer is all in a day's work. And, that's exactly how he and Butcher & Blood cofounder/director of operations, Megan Butcher want it. "We both thrive when we're creating," says Blood.



**1** With its minimalist color scheme and emphasis on texture, AWOL claps back at the dainty florals and cutesy vintage-isms of its Provincetown, Massachusetts location.

JOE FERRARO (BLOOD); REED MCKENDREE (AWOL)





**2** Eli's Tavern at The Coonamessett Inn, Falmouth, Massachusetts unites the land and sea cultures of the area via nautically inspired art.

**3** It's a hat trick in a Coonamessett guest-room. Wearable art?

Getting into the designer role was perfectly natural for the duo. "We have always been involved in the conceptualization and narrative of each hotel's story in every way except the actual interior design piece," notes Blood. "While we've been on the sidelines of the design, we wanted to jump in and complete the cycle. With the three hotels that we designed this year — AWOL in Provincetown, The Coonamessett in Falmouth, and a redesign at Blue Door Group [which Lark acquired in 2014] in Mendocino, California — we really had the opportunity to start from scratch and shape the story in every way!"

They tell that story in a hands-on way. The team's initial vision board stems from an immersive visit to the locale (including, as for many hotel designers, integrating locals' insights, research and zeroing in on what makes the town unique). Blood and Butcher prefer a time-intensive approach; while it might only take a few weeks to develop a design concept, toward the end of the process, it's a couple of months of travel to and from the hotel.

With three openings or major renovations so far this year and three more in the pipeline, there are also more practical reasons to DIY, at least some of the time (Lark will continue to work with outside design





4 Why bother with shelves when you can mount books on the wall? The Coonamessett room's dark gray walls offer a clever contrast with the warm cream of the pages.

firms, such as Rachel Reider Interiors, their former in-house design lead and others), Blood's open about the challenges of his preferred way of working. "Budget and designer bandwidth were factors we had to consider, and, frankly, since we haven't even found one trash can or wine glass that works across 22 hotels, efficiency of scale is not happening on the purchasing side." While Blood finds the chance to use every piece of FF&E to flesh out the design narrative too tempting to pass up, he's not afraid to delegate OS&E procurement to control costs.

Lark's development plans also take into account that for all of Blood's passion and knowledge, he and his team can't do their best if they're overextended. "We have a growth strategy in place that focuses on regional 'hub' expansion. In other words, we're keen on developing a group of properties in one region like the Southeast, and roll out a handful of properties there. This allows us to have on-the-ground resources to support those properties," he says, noting if the perfect deal comes along, Lark can still be nimble enough to pursue it.

What makes the ideal hotel, according to this independent thinker? "We're creating spaces for people to live and feel comfortable in, not just creating moments to be photographed for design publications." In the end, though, that 360-degree approach often does make even those static images pop. ●