

ellie

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SOJOURN

Interiors + Inspiration

AN INTERVIEW WITH

**SCHOOS
DESIGN**

EAT / STAY / SHOP

**CARMEL-BY-THE-SEA &
MONTEREY BAY**



Photography Matthew Hutchinson



Photography Frank Ishman

SCHOOS DESIGN

Los Angeles, CA

THOMAS SCHOOS "World In Mind"

Sharing his immense talent of painting with his lucky clients, Thomas Schoos creates interiors that are full of unique, one-of-a-kind artwork, custom lighting, fixtures and furnishings. He and his LA-based team further utilize layers and texture that speak to the personality of the space, the owner, the patrons, and their firm, giving every project it's own delightful culture and story.

Your projects appear to be an amazing canvas that comes to life through art. Where do you begin when approaching that blank canvas?

It's all about your gut intuition. You have to learn to trust that. When I go into a space for the first time, I get a certain feeling and I immediately start imagining. It's not just random, though. After years of creating restaurants, homes and hotels, I know that I have a pretty good sense of what works and what will fit. Also, I listen to the space, make friends with it and find out what it needs. I like my designs to evoke the surroundings,

pointing out what is so great about this particular space, what makes it special, and using that as an inspirational starting point. For instance, we were asked to create Puesto, a restaurant in a San Diego facility that was once used as a jail and police station. The old structure was just full of texture and personality. The other restaurants that went into the development did everything they could to clean it up, hide the age and make it look like every other restaurant. I said "no." The distress is what makes this place unique. So I clear-coated it and let it show – the chipped paint, old light switches that don't work, glue spots on the ceiling,



Project: Searsucker Photography Hopper Stone

even a partial staircase hanging from the ceiling that goes nowhere. And it works! The rustic vibe takes you back to old Mexico, which is perfect for a Mexican street food restaurant. You just can't pay for texture like that.

What is your all time favorite painting that you've created?

Last winter I was asked to paint something on the theme of sharks for a traveling exhibit that raises awareness about saving sharks from over-fishing and abuse. I painted a large painting 16 feet long that superimposes a shark over an image of a fishing boat, suggesting that these two things must learn to coexist. That came out really well, and I loved the subject, so this year I've been devoting a lot of time to a series of really large paintings of endangered animals. So far, I've done an ostrich and a rhinoceros; a walrus and a vulture are about half-finished. I love pointing out the beauty and personality of these creatures while creating some irony. For instance, the ostrich wears a necklace with a Chanel logo as a reminder that they were hunted nearly to extinction for their use in fashion. In the rhino painting, I used gold leaf on the rhino's horn and added gold letters reading "weight in gold" as a reference to its horn being prized by poachers. But I also love giving this huge beast a warm, gentle personality that contrasts with its imposing presence. I think right now it's my favorite.







How influential is travel and the cultural aspect to your projects?

Extremely important. So important that our company motto is “World in Mind.” I love bringing together cultures from all over the world, as well as nature, into every design. It’s the inspiration I get from traveling that makes this possible. Luckily, I get to travel quite a bit for work. For instance, I’m going to China again in a couple of days.

Does your background in painting scenery for fashion shows translate to your current work?

Sure. That was the first time I had to practice merging art with commerce, where you have to be creative, but in a way that serves a commercial purpose. There’s a real art to working with clients so that they see and understand your inspiration and get behind it. That’s why we work so hard on the presentation process and communicating the concept to the client. Of course, once you’ve got a body of work, it’s a little easier to gain their trust and have the freedom to try something new.

Besides original artwork, what are your favorite pieces within a project to custom design?

Well, in most of our projects, I try to design everything, including furniture, fixtures, lighting, and art pieces. To me, that’s what separates a designer from a decorator – that ability to design every aspect of a project so that it is all part of a total concept. But I think lighting is my favorite because it offers so many ways to be creative and distinctive. A lot

of conventional lighting is unimaginative and cliché. In the restaurants I’ve done for Brian Malarkey, I made the lighting a signature piece. All of the restaurants include fixtures with loops of rope and dozens of vintage Edison light bulbs hanging down. In some cases, I combined the rope with cultural artifacts that fit the space. For instance, in the seafood restaurants, I use old inverted row boats and the skeletons of sea creatures. In the American restaurants, the ropes evoke cowboy lassos.

What do you consider the most challenging moment on a project?

I think it comes right at the beginning when you have to sell the client on your concept and get them to see what you imagine for them. For me, I always have a huge amount of confidence and enthusiasm for the idea or I wouldn’t even waste my time. But getting the client to share your enthusiasm is the real trick. Again, that’s why we do everything to give them a taste of our vision and “wow” them with a big idea. We also give them the confidence of knowing how well our methods have worked in the past.

What are the most difficult items to source for a hospitality project?

Lighting, because first, as I mentioned, it is not easy to find truly imaginative, tasteful designs that fit the space but also make a statement. Then, when you add in all the restrictions like voltage, weight and overall design, it becomes almost impossible. That’s the main reason I end up designing fixtures myself. We work closely with a couple of terrific



Project - Puesto, San Diego Photography Matthew Hutchison





ON THE COVER











Project - Herringbone, LaJolla Photography Matthew Hutchison









BEACH
NATION

manufacturers who do quality work and understand what I'm looking for.

When working on color, texture, scale, and materials, how do you combine these so eloquently without making it look over-designed? Your effects are absolutely breathtaking!

Well first off, thank you! All I can say is that the design skill comes in part from having an artist's eye. You see the overall shapes of things and how to create balance and direct attention. The same concepts work, whether in 2D or 3D. Spaces tell a story, have a beginning, middle and end, and move toward a climax. If everything is a climax, nothing stands out. It's also a matter of being in communication with a space and working within its world instead of trying to impose something random from outside. Every project I work on is different, with its own personality. Morimoto Waikiki is restrained and very "Zen" while Puesto and Figue are extroverted and playful. Even the two versions of Herringbone are unique because their locations demanded it. Herringbone La Jolla is in a rustic warehouse near the sea, while Herringbone LA is on the Sunset Strip, so it had to be more refined with Hollywood bling. Design is a relationship between my personality and the venue's personality to find the perfect fit. You can't force it.

If you had a dream fashion icon that you could collaborate with, who would that be?

Well, the design icon I really respect is Philippe Starck because he does it all, from interiors to products to architecture.

ON THE COVER



Project - Beach Nation



Project - Beach Nation

When I was young I bought one of Starck's earliest designs, which was a Daum vase. I always dreamed of doing design like that. Then, I was so excited last year when I got the chance to design Herringbone LA, which is in a space formerly occupied by Asia de Cuba, a Philippe Starck-designed restaurant! It was such an honor. So that's my design icon. If I had to choose someone from the fashion world, it would be Tom Ford because he is also a truly multi-dimensional artist.

Of your interesting celebrity clientele, who was the most entertaining to work with?

I loved working with Courtney Cox because she's very open and creative but also emotional in a good way. She was very involved and we got along great personally.

What young new designer reminds you of yourself?

I've been impressed by these two designers out of London, Alexander Evangelou and James Waterworth who won the Hospitality Design Award this year for their restaurant The Musket Room in Manhattan. They have a great grasp of texture and I always appreciate designers who know how to bring natural and cultural artifacts into their designs. ■