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ON HIS SPELLBINDING NEW ROLE

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EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

THE INTERIORS OF L.A.-BASED DESIGNER THOMAS SCHOOS ARE A DELIGHTFUL FEAST FOR THE SENSES.

By Laura Eckstein | Portrait by Frank Ishman

Dressed in an impeccably tailored Seize sur Vingt suit and donning his signature Oliver Peoples glasses, interior designer Thomas Schoos, principal of Schoos Design, is an immediately recognized figure in his beloved neighborhood of West Hollywood, where he's lived for nearly 20 years. But beyond his polished exterior, you can't help but notice a visible sparkle behind the frames, one that speaks to the countless ideas percolating beneath the surface. "If you want to be new, you cannot use only old things, but fuse the old and new together to make something different," explains Schoos from the patio at Herringbone, the new restaurant he designed at the Mondrian Hotel. "You have to push the wagon and stick your neck out because otherwise you're stagnant. And that's not me."

There are a few overriding themes that, combined with his own singular sense of artistry, pervade Schoos' work. Be it the celebrity homes of Jessica Simpson and Will Smith, hotels such as the Huntley in Santa Monica or restaurants such as Tao (Las Vegas and uptown in Manhattan) and Morimoto (Mexico City, Napa and Waikiki) Schoos' projects feature a connection to nature, references to his own travels, and a keen play on textures.

Schoos started his career in his home country, Germany, as a stonemason, which provided a deep understanding of three-dimensional space and the mechanics of construction. That's part of what gives him confidence to design spaces that most would avoid. "Even if a contractor claims it cannot be done," he explains, "if I know it can happen, I push ahead." That attitude and Schoos' talent as an artist shine through in all of his projects, many of which contain his paintings and sculptures. Another driving force is the resistance he sometimes encounters when presenting a new idea to a client. "Sometimes out of head-butting comes sparks, which create friction, and from friction comes energy," he explains. "I'm not here to sell a beige box. Life is about seeing color."



BRIGHT IDEAS

From top: Thomas Schoos strikes a pose at his recently designed restaurant, chef Brian Malarkey's Herringbone at the Mondrian Hotel; gold fish bones make a dramatic statement over the bar at the hotspot; Duplex on Third, another Schoos-infused space, is filled with eclectic furniture and accessories (including a buffalo bust).



Schoos' latest project, Herringbone, a restaurant from chef Brian Malarkey (he also worked on Malarkey's La Jolla location), posed a particularly daunting challenge: reworking a space by design icon Philippe Starck, a man he's admired since his teenage years. Besides buying his first significant collector's piece—one of Starck's sculptures created by French glass manufacturer Daum—as a teenager, Schoos relates to his predecessor's role as both an artist and a businessman. With so many accomplishments under his belt, Starck, like Schoos, could easily take a major step back, but continues to actively participate in all of his work. "Philippe knows how to draw, and even today he does hand sketches and has a philosophy behind everything he does," Schoos explains. "He did many amazing projects and moved the design industry to where it is today. In many ways I'll be the next one who does that," he adds.

The challenge of reimagining the space to create Herringbone was one Schoos handled swimmingly. Like all of his work, inspiration from the natural world played a big role, but in an unpretentiously chic way. Unfinished, matte oak floors and furniture, and white Calacatta marble lend a fresh, beachy feel, while decorative touches like enormous clamshells dipped in silver and white rope chandeliers (carefully draped by Schoos) add to the overall effect without seeming forced. Gold finishes and glints of blue glass are seen throughout the dining room and patio, and recall "that bit of sparkle over the ocean and the glistening

over the waves," Schoos says. He adds, "I think this reflects L.A. It's sexy and chic, but natural and warm at the same time."

In the next few months, Schoos Design is working on several local restaurants: Beach Nation, a beach-in-the-city coffee shop concept he hopes will be the first of many; a beer garden at the Farmers Market at The Grove and Red-O in Santa Monica. Further afield, expect to see the designer's dream project realized: Sawanpuri Estates, a luxury resort set on a pristine stretch of beach on Koh Samui island in Thailand. Although he's never done something of this magnitude, the challenge is one he enthusiastically welcomes. "Evolution means going forward," he says. "If you stay put on the same thing, you stop living. You have to surprise people and fulfill their senses. It's a very important thing." We can't wait to see what he'll create next. ▣



STYLISH SPACES From top: The glamorous and earthy Huntley Hotel in Santa Monica; for Morimoto Waikiki, Schoos turned to Hawaii's lush natural habitat for design inspiration; the modernist design of the Camino Real Hotel in Mexico inspired the glass-heavy Morimoto Mexico City.

PASSION PROJECT

An Artist at Heart

With multiple design projects going on at once, Schoos finds solace and peace delving into his artwork. Although it often ends up in the homes and restaurants he designs, when painting, the end result or location doesn't often come to mind. "My art is my deepest inner conversation," he says. "Sometimes my partner walks in, and I have no idea that he's there or said something to me."



"I'm just in the moment." Like his eye-popping interiors, Schoos' paintings make a statement: They are often larger than life and done in a bold, almost tribal style. One painting he recently finished, representing the merging of a shark and a fishing boat (above), will be part of a global traveling exhibit to raise awareness of the killing of the animal for shark fin soup. "It's a small step to make sure millions of sharks a year don't disappear," he explains. Up next? The largest painting he's ever done, at an impressive 50 feet wide.