

NOBU MATSUHISA

SURFACE

ISSUE 142
OCTOBER 2017

THE TRAVEL ISSUE





STUDIO VISIT Meyer Davis

Will Meyer and Gray Davis discuss their approach to designing entertaining, calming experiences for the world's top hotels and restaurants.

INTERVIEW BY SHIRINE SAAD
PHOTOS BY JULIA FREUND

You founded your firm in 1999, and have since designed spaces for fashion brands like Oscar de la Renta and restaurateurs Daniel Boulud and Jean-Georges Vongerichten, as well as hospitality icons like Four Seasons Hotels, the Ritz-Carlton, and W Hotels. How do you imagine each guest's journey through these spaces?

Will Meyer: We always come up with a design narrative, and we try to be honest so we create something that's essential. An environment can't just look cool or stylish—it has to have a soul and substance, where the materials stand on their own in their simplest form.

But a hospitality project also has to be fun. How do you create the perfect environment for a good time?

Gray Davis: People like a space that reveals itself. We never give the entire space away from the first vista or view, and try to create interiors that you may not discover when you first arrive. It's good to have some foreground, then break the space up, because you're always going to want to know what's beyond.

Meyer and Davis with blueprints for an upcoming project. (OPPOSITE)
An office bookshelf decorated with awards and inspirations.

Meyer: It's also important that there are no dead ends. We always try to think about circulation and that runway effect. Whether you're in the lobby or the lounge or the bar, people want to see and be seen. We offer a flexibility of experiences, a cinematic viewpoint where you imagine scenes: the conversations, the lighting, the background. Nowadays, thanks to Instagram, people are always looking for these moments. From the start, hotel brands are asking where these Instagram moments are going to be. It's a big thing for these clients to get their images out there.

How do you keep a large, multi-space environment from becoming overcomplicated?

Davis: We go back to the narrative and edit ideas to find what *has* to be there. We like to stitch a motif throughout, whether it's an object or graphic element or a material. If you find that thread, that's the essence of the project. Simplicity does not occur when you enter environments that are jarring. >



What are some designs that you both greatly admire?

Davis: The Guggenheim was so ahead of its time when it was built, in the way that you start at the top and move down through the building, with a beautiful skylight anchoring this organic, circular shape.

Meyer: Philip Johnson's Glass House. It's just four glass walls and a circular mass in the middle, set within a beautiful setting. It really defined minimalism in its simplicity and made a statement on how simple life could be. That's a dream we all have. And it's timeless—it's so modern.

In both of those examples, the architecture itself dominates. How do you design an interior that complements an architect's vision?

Meyer: We detail things on a human scale that are part of the architect's vision on a grand scale. Right now, we're working on a few projects with architects who have big design ideas, including a building in Miami with Rem Koolhaas's OMA and one in Sydney with Wilkinson Eyre. We are really good at translating those ideas from the large-scale to a tactile environment that represents the building and the brand, and we've introduced this idea that a large building must have tactile luxury to be complete. In the Sydney project, there's this incredible atrium in the lobby and a ribbon-like stair that we're lining with a black stainless-steel rod and crystal lights. The stair has a dynamic element to it and was part of Chris Wilkinson's idea of a seamless connection between the interior and the shell of the building.

What else is next for the firm?

Davis: We're working on the Six Senses in Turks and Caicos, which is about wellness and sustainability, and creating a private lagoon so every bungalow or villa is on the water. Some villas will sit on a little beach. We're also working on the Rosewood in Little Dix Bay, on a beautiful crescent-shaped cove with midcentury bungalows. We're reimagining them in a contemporary way that nods back to that era. Every project is different, and we think about keywords that guide each one. That's what's interesting about our work—no two projects are the same because they're each their own thing, and that drives the design as the creation of an environment that is unique to that space. Our practice is very edited and tailored. We create controlled chaos.



(THIS SPREAD) Scenes of Gray Davis's office atmosphere.

