

Villa, Thailand

DIFFERENT *by Design*

With projects ranging from Marina Bay Sands in Singapore, to a summer house on the Danish coast, Samantha Drummond reflects on her appetite for new challenges and daring to be different. By L-J Andrew

What attracted you to the world of design?

I needed to solve a problem. I was very young and working in a bar in Melbourne that had fallen on hard times. Instinctively, I believed in what my now 30-year career has since shown me time and again – the power of design as a problem solver. I managed to persuade the owner to entrust me with a makeover. It succeeded in transforming the bar's fortunes and I discovered what I really wanted to do. So, my life in the world of design began in an unorthodox way. You could say that's how it's been ever since.

Tell us about some of your career highlights

After a while, Melbourne felt small. My restless spirit was urging me onto new experiences. So I moved to Asia to work on huge-scale residential and commercial developments in China and, several years later, Las Vegas Sands came to town. This really turned the page for me. I was one of their first appointments in Asia and, as design director, my immediate task was to bring the business model together with the creative ambition for Sands Cotai Strip. Then came Marina Bay Sands where I was one of five key decision makers. My scope was to oversee and manage all design aspects of the project build and my role encompassed the identification and engagement of the most talented teams of designers, world-acclaimed artists, leading chefs and luxury retail brands, providing the design direction to ensure the client's expectations were surpassed and budgets were met. These were crazy days, the pace never let up and I learnt so much. Another highlight some years





Apartment Dining Room

later, was when I established my own design company in Asia, Habitus Design Group. I have such a skilled and dedicated team there and now that I am spending more of my time in Europe, I am finding that it can be very useful to have a team in a totally different time zone who can deliver drawings for me to wake up to in the morning.

What has your experience taught you?

Nothing is impossible and everything is achievable. I have also learnt how to work directly with UHNWIs and business entrepreneurs to provide them with the level of thinking and service they deserve. It starts, of course, with listening to them and then, as the designer, you really have to interrogate each project. Doing something simply because it has been done that way before is not good enough. Over the past year, I have worked on projects as diverse as a luxury menswear store, a concept master plan for transforming a country estate into a luxury hospitality destination, a new integrated resort, high-end residences and villas and a mixed-use development combining opulent office accommodation with a landmark restaurant in an historic warehouse.

My experience has taught me that it's not what you design, it's how you design it; the golden thread is authenticity, creating in some way a game-changing outcome. It was music to my ears recently when the menswear store in Odense, created behind what was once considered the ugliest façade in the city, was described as: "Bringing a piece of Milan to little Odense".

How would you describe your role today?

It's as varied as my projects. For my larger scale resort projects, my design advisory role is very important where I work from the broad canvas to the tiniest details in order to harmonise the effort of project managers, architects, designers and other team members and make sure that everyone is aligned with the client's vision. It's a little different



if the project is a family home or a private investment when I can end up flying to Paris to purchase bed linens, for example, or going to site at 6.00 am on opening day to dress the windows.

What are you currently working on?

We are designing a new restaurant for a Michelin Star chef in Copenhagen and more widely in Denmark, we are working on a new-build country estate with coastal views as well as creating a summer house in Skagen on the coast. We also have a very exciting project in the UK that must remain confidential for now.

Meanwhile in the Philippines, Solaire Quezon City has been keeping me busy in recent months, where I have been collaborating with Aedas Singapore on the architecture and leading my Habitus team on the interior design. When it opens in 2024, it will be the first-of-a-kind, five-star integrated resort in North Manila with numerous restaurants, a sky bar and rooftop terrace, high-end retail, gaming and 800 guestrooms and suites. We will also shortly be starting on the master planning of a new tropical resort in Asia.