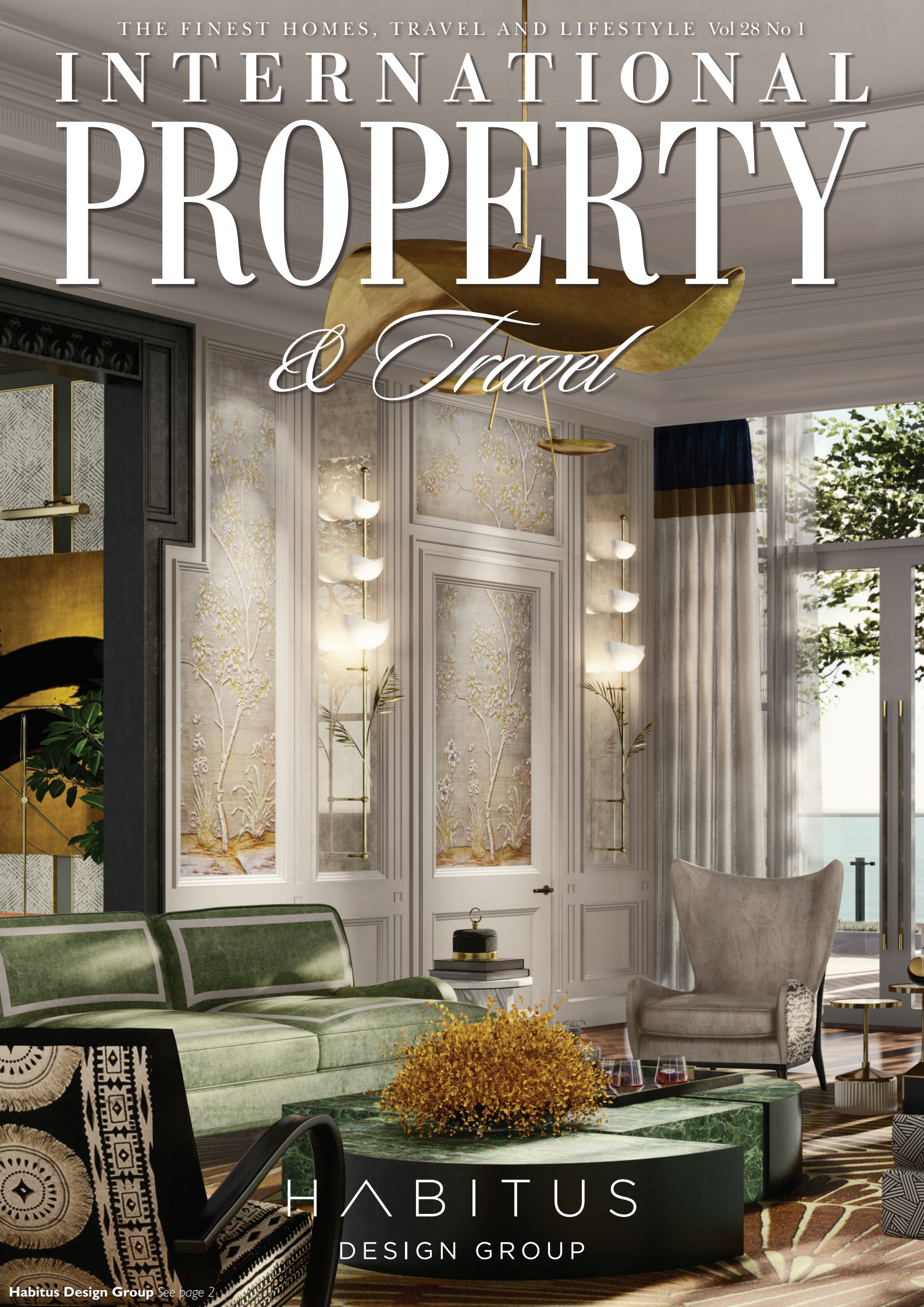
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Habitus Design Group *See page 2*

The Business of Design

We speak with Samantha Drummond whose extraordinary career has taken her across the world, working with UHNWIs, global design firms, luxury brands and internationally revered artists.



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"I SUPPOSE I'VE NEVER shrunk from swimming in my own direction," muses Samantha Drummond who, under lock down, is working from her current home in Denmark. "I don't see barriers where others might and perhaps because I did not travel the conventional route into design leadership, I'm as equally driven to deliver very large projects as the smallest detail, the commercially successful as much as the aesthetically beautiful."

Sam's career began in her native Australia when she turned her hand to the redesign of a cocktail bar and discovered an instinct for using design to draw in new customers. Soon Asia was beckoning and she made her move, catapulting herself into commercial and residential developments on a grand scale. Sam was still there when Las Vegas Sands came to the region; she became one of their first appointments and the world of hospitality development opened-up to her. Initially, she led the design effort for the Cotai Strip in Macau, including a new Four Seasons Hotel for which she created the overall design concept, collaborated with an international hotel design firm to develop the schemes and introduced a luxury retail mall, the first in the city. Then came the iconic Marina Bay Sands in Singapore.

Sam oversaw and managed all design-related aspects of this $5.66 bn project in a role that extended to the introduction of celebrity chefs, famous artists and luxury fashion house brands, as well as the identification and engagement of the most appropriate and talented teams of designers. "In my design advisory work, I think of myself as orchestrating teams of specialists and ensuring successful collaboration between them," explains Sam. "I was working with some of the best consultants and greatest artists in the world and it was my job to provide the design direction, ensuring that the client's expectations were surpassed, that there was the right balance of creativity and commercial sensibility and that everything guests would encounter in their environment was of the highest quality."





Since then, Sam has continued to work on large-scale resorts. In 2012, she delivered the first two phases of Solaire Resort & Casino, Manila, currently the Philippines' only five-star integrated resort and one in which luxury retail brands, such as Prada, Bvlgari and Louis Vuitton, have established significant flagship stores, convinced by Sam of the business case for doing so.

She has also established her own hospitality design firm, Habitus Design Group, which has studios in Singapore and Hong Kong. "Acting as client advisor on Marina Bay Sands and the Solaire Resort and managing a whole panoply of design issues was an incredible experience that taught me a tremendous amount. However, the day came when I wanted to be much more hands-on again, so I founded my own design company," she explains.

Currently, the practice is nearing completion on an additional VIP Club for Solaire Resort & Casino, comprising 4,000 square metres of wining and dining destinations together with a luxury gaming space. There will also be four stunning new villas. "Although each villa is unique, they are loosely united in a narrative of the "Silk Road" where the East's exotic design vernacular is combined with a refined European style. I love this blending of East and West; when handled sensitively the two complement one another both in terms of the aesthetic and their different working cultures."

Habitus is also looking forward to beginning work on what will be an exceptional tropical resort in Asia, located on a pristine beach frontage. "We are very excited about this – the opportunity to weave landscape and buildings into a seamless experience that respects and celebrates the environment," says Sam.

However, not all projects have been huge new developments. Opportunities to repurpose and reinvent single spaces are also relished by the firm – for example, the conversion of part of an underground car park into a discreetly luxurious restaurant and transforming a pool deck into a sophisticated venue for events.













However, now such new and enticing Asian projects are not Sam's only objective. Several years back, she and her Danish partner decided to make their home in Denmark so that their young son would grow up with the freedom and open spaces offered by this Nordic country. Initially, this meant long trips away from home for Sam but now she is looking to shape a new phase in her career, bringing her experience from years of working in Asia to Europe and, while continuing at the helm of her South East Asia studios, opening another hub in a European city.

"So, I am doing it again! Swimming against the tide when so many European designers are looking to Asia for their next projects. But to me it makes sense. I have worked successfully as an expat woman in the male dominated world of integrated resort development and I have had a seat at the top table with extremely wealthy, well-travelled and rightfully demanding clients. I dare to believe there is space on the Continent for all I have learnt and I would love to bring my experience to luxury hospitality projects that are of a European scale and sensibility."

As if to vouch for Sam's point of view, she was approached by one of the larger Danish property developers within a few months of lock down and is now helping to create new concepts for his hospitality projects. Meanwhile, she continues to lead her Asian projects remotely and is intensely involved in the minutiae of their roll out; in the last three weeks alone, she has checked some 3,000 drawings.

"Effectively, it's my name over the door; clients come to me because I have a reputation for not letting them down. I think we know how to work with people who want the very best and since integrated resorts are essentially multiple projects within one huge development, our approach holds good for luxury hotels and resorts of all scales." IP