

# In the Big Leagues

Three forces on three continents push the boundaries of hospitality, shaping the industry as they go.

WORDS *Matthew Hurst*



## Afroditi Krassa

*Designer, London*

'We spend so much time looking for the right ingredients to bring an idea to life,' says London-based designer Afroditi Krassa, whose hospitality clients include Itsu, Sketch and Heston Blumenthal. Her approach to the design of interiors has seen her practice venture well beyond the physical environment, extending into brand consultancy and product design, all in an attempt to achieve the desired outcome.

Krassa's presentation for the London Design Festival – her first foray into commercial product design – was the AKollection. Her Pentagon pendants and Pleat mirror panels are handmade by artisans 'that were up for the challenge', she says. While designed primarily for the contract and hospitality markets, the collection is also available to the general public. 'The AKollection also gave us a new challenge – and a new space in which to express a specific point of view.'

afroditi.com

The Pleat mirror panel is part of Afroditi Krassa's AKollection.



Mexican hospitality firm Grupo Habita's latest project is Hotel Escondido in Puerto Escondido, Mexico.



## Carlos Couturier

*Hotelier, Mexico City*

The impact that Carlos Couturier, cofounder of Grupo Habita, has had on the global hotel scene is tangible. Fifteen years after opening of Hotel Habita in Mexico City, his ideas on developing and operating small hotels have become some of the industry's more familiar mantras. Together with business partner Moisés Micha, Couturier now operates 13 properties in Mexico and one venue, Hôtel Americano, in New York City. An early believer in the power of hotels to reinvent neighbourhoods and generate popular destinations, Couturier broke new ground with Grupo Habita, soon turning every new location into a place worth visiting – from the financial district of Mexico City to an uninhabited patch of cactus-filled coastline in Puerto Escondido.

Although Habita is synonymous with the term 'design hotel', Couturier says that 'design hotels are a thing of the past. Anyone can build a nicely designed hotel, but very few can create a hotel that's got a soul, and not just a pretty face.'

Habita has two projects under way, a property in Guadalajara scheduled for early 2015, followed by one in Chicago, the firm's highly anticipated second entry into the US market. What does Couturier envision for the future? 'What makes a great hotel is the people who stay in it,' he says. 'The hotel of tomorrow is all about the guest.'

grupohabita.mx



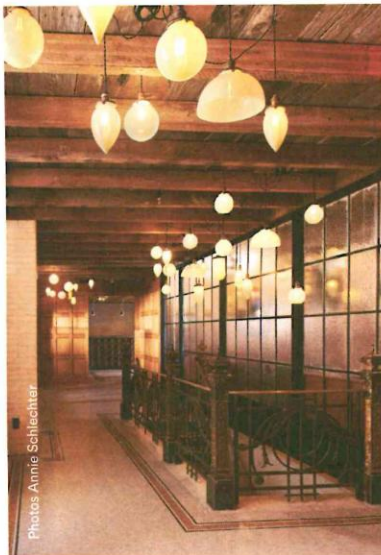


**Sean MacPherson**  
*Hotelier, New York City*

California entrepreneur Sean MacPherson cemented his place into New York's saturated hotel market as the designer and operator of the celebrated Bowery Hotel, a popular East Village hang-out. MacPherson's venues – not only hotels, but the bars, lobbies and restaurants that accompany them – have had a forcible influence on New York social life, boosting his reputation as an outstanding 21<sup>st</sup>-century hotelier. Credited with making hotel restaurants cool again, he often pulls just as many locals inside as the number of out-of-town guests who stay for dinner – and who inevitably enjoy mixing with the neighbourhood crowd.

Macpherson has been exceptionally busy of late. In 2013 he opened the 107-room Marlton Hotel, whose restaurant and bar quickly became a bustling summertime hotspot. His next venture, the Ludlow, opened in July this year on the Lower East Side. At 187 rooms, it's twice the size of the Bowery Hotel and just a few blocks away – an unsustainable situation for most operators and one perhaps feasible only in the Big Apple.

MacPherson, who still designs each hotel that he operates, says he simply makes spaces that he'd like to hang out in. 'I try to make all my properties feel as if they belong to the neighbourhood,' he says, 'and the Ludlow aims to belong to the Lower East Side.'



Photos: Annie Schleichler

The Ludlow has 187 rooms and is just a few blocks from the California entrepreneur's still-in-demand Bowery Hotel.



Lobby Bar, a feature of the Ludlow Hotel in New York City, highlights Sean MacPherson's largest project to date.

*'Anyone can build a nicely designed hotel, but very few can create a hotel that's got soul, and not just a pretty face'*

CARLOS COUTURIER



— TRENDING —

Magnify  
 the Mood

The days of bartenders simply pouring drinks and restaurants modestly plating up food are gone. People want more than just basic services: they want an experience. Maurice Mentjens' use of mirrored ceilings, clear glass and foliage-covered walls at Skunk and Relax, a Dutch *coffeeshop* in Sittard, adds to guests' high by giving them the illusion of wandering through a field of grass. At Circus in London, a cabaret restaurant and cocktail bar by Tom Dixon, both interior *and* staff heighten an experience in which tables function as stages and waiters double as performers. — EM

At Dutch *coffeeshop* Skunk and Relax, Maurice Mentjens gives visitors the illusion of wandering through a field of grass.

Photo: Peter Kessels