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denise korn

It's no secret. The hospitality market is more saturated than ever with new brands coming online seemingly each month. So how does a company distinguish itself from the others and capture the right market? Meet Denise Korn. "We work in the space 'between' the owner or visionary behind a project and all of the creative and operational partners that bring it to life," says Korn, founder of her Boston and New York City namesake firm. "It is our job to ensure that the brand does not lose its focus and stays true to itself throughout every choice and touch-point with the guest." And we think she has carved out a crucial niche.

And, as of late, so does an impressive client list—including Blackstone, LXR Luxury Resorts, Sage Hospitality and Restaurant Group, and Ritz-Carlton, letting her work with just as an impressive list of designers including Alexandra Champalimaud, David Collins, and David Ashen. For instance, Korn and her team of 11 designers (including business partner Javier Cortés) developed the brand story for Sage's Catalan-inspired Mercat a la Planxa restaurant in Chicago, taking cues from Barcelona's Mercat de Santa Caterina (hence the name), with its colorful, undulating tiled roof, and Antoni Gaudi's architecture found throughout the city. Signage features a hexagonal shape derived from Gaudi tiles, and vibrant interlocking hexagons re-appear on the curved stair wall and private dining room's backlit lasercut walls. Meanwhile illustrations created from photographs of crowds (and even pigeons) at the market and in parks are silk-screened on mirrors throughout the restaurant, animated on the website, and found in a variety of the marketing materials. "The illustrations are meant to bring to life the street scene in Barcelona," she says.

And for the Liberty Hotel (renovated from a 19th century jail in Boston), Korn created the signage, in-room materials (including witty door privacysigns that read "Solitary"), and an unprecedented ad campaign that features Boston Ballet company members. But her favorite? Working on the launch of the London brand (locations in New York City and West Hollywood have recently opened) with LXR. "They pulled together a powerhouse team of international creative talent around this effort," she says.

Her voracious spirit and passion for the industry is contagious. "Our work in this space is multi-dimensional, multi-faceted, and that's exciting. It is at once high touch and highly strategic," she says, mentioning that she is working on two more restaurants for Sage in Portland, Oregon, and a lifestyle/spa concept that launches this fall. "It's actually all challenging; each project's context and team is different and that's what I love about it." www.korndesign.com



Left, top to bottom: Denise Korn at Café Habana, her favorite Cuban restaurant in New York City; the in-room materials for the Liberty Hotel in Boston. *Above, clockwise from top:* One of the ads for the Liberty Hotel featuring a Boston Ballet company member; a screenshot of Mercat a la Planxa's website; and a mirror featuring silk-screened illustrations of pigeons lines colorful lounge seating at Mercat. (Photo of Korn by Antony Crook; photo of Mercat by Todd Nakashima.)

