



mover shaker brand ambition

Between business interests and creative concerns, Denise Korn builds the bridge

Denise Korn is not easy to pigeonhole. She studied photography and design at Cornell University and the Parsons School of Design. Her first real job was in the graphics department of the *New York Times*. It was the dawn of computerized typesetting, and she fell under the spell of modernizing art director Steven Heller. "I always knew I wanted to come to Manhattan as soon as it was legal," the Boston native says. She soon discovered the world of Lower East Side nightlife at the tail end of the Andy Warhol era. "I started to collect ideas," she says, "and develop a perspective."

Today, Korn Design's perspective goes beyond graphics, in the traditional sense, to include the mood and narrative for shops, restaurants, and hotels. "That's never only about the graphics," Korn explains. "It's everything that touches customers."

While establishing branding and a Web presence for the London brand of hotels, run by the Blackstone Group's LXR Luxury Resorts & Hotels, Korn worked alongside David Collins Studio to create a New York property. "Everybody was expecting beef-eaters at the door," she says with a smile. Instead, David Collins supplied the luxurious, textured interiors, while Korn drew on her photography background to art-direct the images of rooms that LXR uses online to sell the London NYC to potential guests, highlighting such undeniably British signatures as herringbone parquet and embossed leather-covered desks and footlockers. When the London West Hollywood opened a year and a half later, she contributed similar images of rambling roses in the garden.

In Boston, Korn helped recast a 19th-century jail as the Liberty Hotel. Drawing on the concept of freedom, she created an advertising campaign starring local ballet dancers leaping into the air. Playful touches on the hotel premises include do-not-disturb door-hang cards printed with the word *solitary* and adorned with shiny key blanks ➤



Clockwise from top left: Brother Jimmy's BBQ sauce bottles featuring the restaurant chain's identity. The Anya Hindmarch tote, Havaianas flip-flops, and Waterworks towel provided to guests at the London West Hollywood hotel. Promotional postcards for Mercat a la Planxa. Its main dining room by D-Ash Design. David Collins Studio's penthouse suite at the London NYC. Collateral materials for the Liberty Hotel, Boston.

mover shaker

formed from one of the building's originals. A ball-and-chain hangs from signage for the hotel restaurant Clink. She even helped select the hotel's interior designer, Alexandra Champalimaud.

Having become familiar with Champalimaud's cultured personal style, Korn found herself speaking frankly with her new colleague about the barely-there branding of Alexandra Champalimaud & Associates. "Honey, this has to be changed," Korn declared. Soon enough, the firm was rechristened simply Champalimaud, with its Web presence streamlined and upgraded accordingly. As Korn points out, a lot of her work is accomplished thanks to the rapport she builds with principals. "We always work with the person at the top, because that's how big ideas originate."

She goes on to recall her conversation with a restaurateur thinking of opening yet another tapas joint in Chicago. "I came back to him and said we're doing Catalan and Barcelona," Korn explains. The result was Mercat a la Planxa, a festive collaboration with David Ashen of D-Ash Design. Making a colorful statement in the dining room facing Millennium Park, honeycomb dividers recall the hexagonal tiles on the undulating roof of the Mercat de Santa Caterina, a historical Barcelona market renovated by Enric Miralles-Benedetta Tagliabue/EMBT—paying a debt to Antoni Gaudí.

Off the clock, Korn continues to develop her charity, Youth Design, in conjunction with AIGA chapters in three cities. The program will soon arrange its 45th seven-week paid internship for an underprivileged high-school student. Korn dreams, too, of products designed for teens, by teens. "When the kids get juiced up, it feeds me," she says. This sort of multifaceted identity project—her labor of love—probably best defines her chosen role as advocate, conduit, and facilitator. Maybe a better title would be master planner.

—Craig Kellogg

