

LEADERSHIP & TALENT

This Bostonian Design Director Helps Hotels Find Their Brand Identity

Denise Korn founded Korn Design 25 years ago

By Katie Richards | March 5, 2018



Korn Design's founder creates relatable spaces and places for her hospitality and real estate clients through unconventional means.

Antony Crook

While many people move between jobs over the course of a career, Denise Korn has worked at the company she founded for 25 years. In 1992, Korn established Korn Design, specializing in real estate, hospitality and culture, and from the very start, she worked with high-profile clients from the Ritz-Carlton Palm Beach to the Liberty Hotel.

Although Korn has held the same job for a quarter century, her story is far from ordinary. At 18, she moved to New York State from Boston to attend Cornell University and study photography. She then went on to study photography at Parsons School of Design, where she also discovered her true calling: design communication.

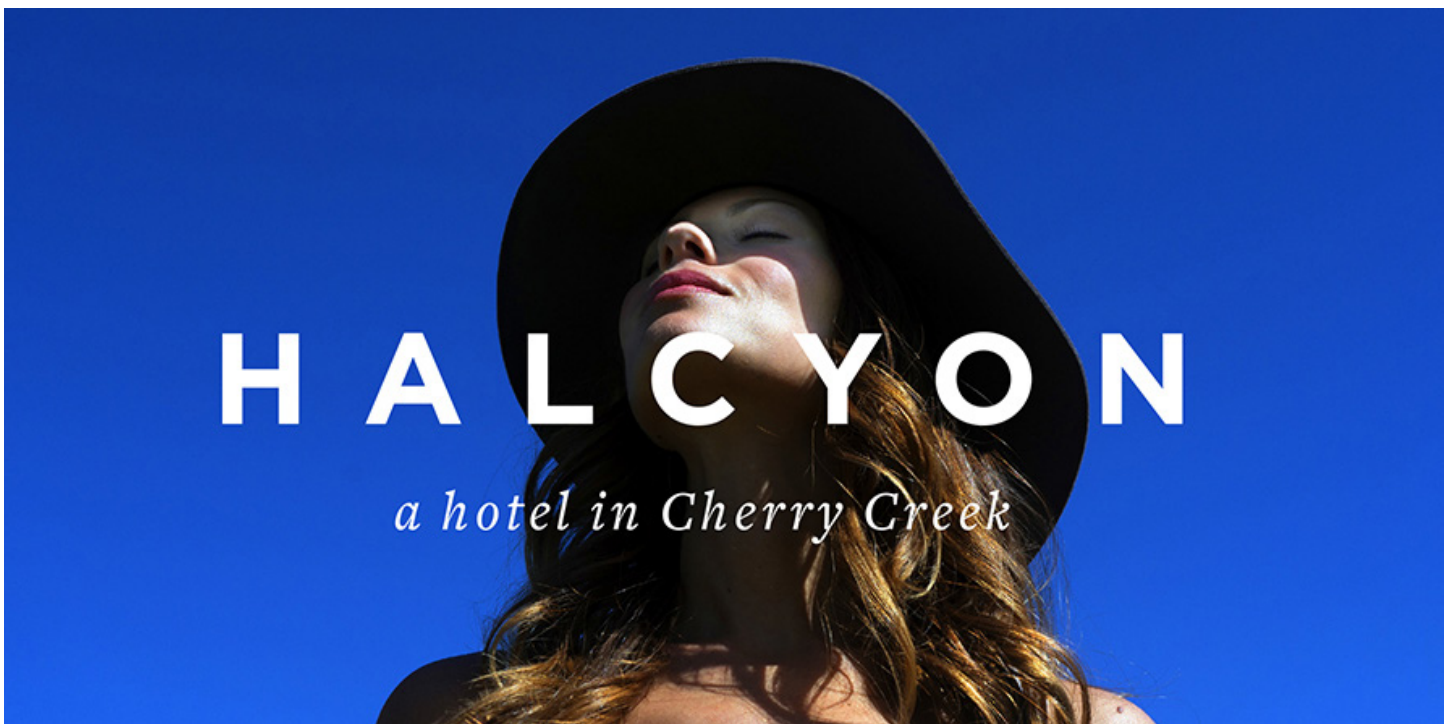
"I fell in love with this link between visual storytelling and what was going on in the world," Korn said.

After college, Korn discovered that New York design firms only wanted graduates from the Rhode Island School of Design or Carnegie Mellon University. So she focused her energy on freelancing and getting to know design icons like Milton Glaser, Ken Carbone and Leslie Smolan. She also managed to score a gig in editorial design at The New York Times. When she and her husband moved back to Boston in 1991, Korn found that most of the places she wanted to work at wouldn't provide her with a big enough team or enough money, so she decided to start her own firm.

Korn Design aims to generate a comfortable and visually beautiful experience for patrons but often executes this goal in unconventional, unexpected ways, combining Korn's design-oriented background with clients' unique needs. For example, at the Halcyon hotel in Cherry Creek, Colo., the firm created a gear garage that lets visitors rent anything from handmade skis to mountain bikes.

"The most gratifying part of our work is injecting these places with [beauty and] a unique point of view ... with experiences that make people feel great," Korn said.

Most recently, Korn Design worked with Brookfield Property Partners on a 23-acre property in Napa Valley with its own vineyard and two hotels (Vintage House and Hotel Villagio) called The Estate Yountville. Korn's firm created an entire brand and visual identity for the Vintage House, along with ads for the hotel and a new website.



Casper Lundemann



VINTAGE HOUSE



Manuel Santilices

Curriculum Vitae

2003-present

Founder, Youth Design

1992-present

Principal, design/strategy director, Korn Design

1990-1991

Senior designer of corporate annual reports for Fortune 500 companies, Corporate Graphics

1987-1989

Graphic designer and information graphic artist, The New York Times

Job Profile

Korn is a design and strategy director at Korn Design, a company that specializes in creating spaces that people can connect with in the hospitality and real estate industries. In her role, Korn helps clients inject strategy into the design of their hotels as well as the brand messaging and marketing.

How She Got the Gig

When she moved to Boston from New York in 1991, Korn was getting a lot of job offers she wasn't that interested in with little staff or money, so she decided to forge her own path in the design industry.

Pro Tip

"Keep everything at a very high quality. It's very tempting to just churn shit out because you can make more of a profit, but the work that we do requires a combination of very honed skills to problem solve. You have to be really smart thinkers and be strong in both the visual and the verbal dimension," Korn said.



This story first appeared in the March 5, 2018, issue of Adweek magazine.

Katie Richards

@ktjrichards

Katie Richards is a staff writer for Adweek.