

BOUTIQUE design

HOSPITALITY REINVENTED



GIANT AMBITIONS

JEFF NING
DALIAN WANDA GROUP



1 MAPOS LLC made the most of a tight footprint in New York's Hotel Shocard with a Murphy bed that doubles as an architectural focal point.

SPACE EXPLORERS

An innovative trio of design firms defy convention with tech, nature and improv skills that shake up the creative process for projects large and small.

BY ORIANA LERNER

STUNNING SHAPES? Check. Too-cool-for-school lighting? Check. How'd-they-do-that cleverness? Check.

So much for the sizzle reel. What makes Built Inc., LAVA and MAPOS LLC true innovators is just as much about the behind-the-scenes process as the final product.

For Built Inc. principal John Sofio, that means a personalized strategy for finding clients who "get" why his design-and-build approach works—he'll bill hourly to make his services more accessible, but he'll return deposits from clients who won't give him the autonomy he wants. LAVA (Laboratory for Visionary Architecture) director Chris Bosse turns digital inspiration on its head by using computerized techniques to echo natural forms. MAPOS co-founder Caleb Mulvena ditches vision boards for psychographics.

Here's how these firms are shattering expectations.

SUPER COMPUTERS

Techno is totally Bosse's jam. The director of LAVA's Sydney office channels pure creativity into real-world spaces with some analytical help. "We use the computer as a partner in the design process in order to test ideas and create a feedback loop where options and alternatives are thrown at us," Bosse says. Then, he and his team curate those ideas with a Darwinian eye.

This evolutionary twist on a design charrette isn't the only part of LAVA's style that's organic. In fact, replicating, manipulating and reshaping natural forms is one of Bosse's favorite ways to utilize digital design tools. "Computation allows us, as architects, to simulate natural conditions such as plant growth and the evolution of species," he says. "It's not just superficial mimicry but a way of understanding the principles behind nature."

Don't ask him how he puts that to work in a *typical* LAVA project. There is no such thing. The Berlin-, Stuttgart- and Sydney-based firm's (Tobias Wallisser and Alexander Rieck serve as directors of the German offices) work ranges from "digital origami" in the form of sculptures and emergency shelters, to a mobile library, to planned resorts, to the 9-year-old company's first restaurant, KYO-TO, in Sydney.

As different as the commissions are, Bosse takes a broad approach to sustainable design across sectors. For example, instead of focusing only on using natural materials in a raw state, he also likes to work with textures like engineered bamboo, carbon fiber and composites to play with a wider range of effects while still keeping design efficient and cost-effective.

Bosse's goal for LAVA in 2020? "Over the moon," he says. With a sporty youth hostel in the works in Bayreuth, Germany, a just-completed terrace renovation in Sydney and the Martian Embassy (part of a non-profit creative center for young writers in Sydney) under its belt, that might just be realistic. Blast off!

OLEG MARCH

WHO'S THERE?

Even after 20 years of running his own design/build firm and completing hundreds of projects—including several with enough star power to light up Wonderwall—Built Inc.'s Sofio still has imaginary friends. And, they're the ones—along with his real-life team at his Los Angeles-based firm, of course—that he listens to when it's time to turn a snappy one-liner concept from a client into a space that's as unforgettable for its vibe as for its looks.

"I always ask myself who the person is who 'owns' the venue," says Sofio. "That's what guides my design process. Who they are dictates what goes in the space. Would they be drawn to a 1972 political poster or more out-there (and potentially controversial) pieces like stuffed gazelles?"

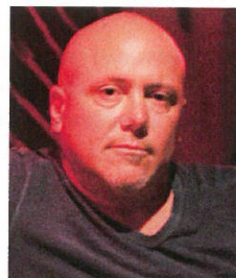
He's a fan of bypassing the vision board for a good book to get inside the spirit of a place or an era. Given that inside-out approach to inspiration, it's no surprise that Sofio's take on the practical aspects of his work is equally unconventional. Instead of taking the final style as the main building block, he looks at projects like an architect, starting with crafting the perfect traffic flow.

At the Ivory on Sunset restaurant at The Mondrian in Los Angeles, the client mandate was "Old Hollywood on the Sunset Strip." Not so easy to deliver in a long, narrow low space that had already been home to two other restaurants. Flipping the entry from one end of the lobby to a patio fixed the circulation problem without knocking out walls.

It also highlights the self-described builder's love of problem-solving. Sofio was bent on crafting four columns for an upcoming bar that evoke Frank Lloyd Wright's Johnson Wax building. But he couldn't use poured concrete in an extant space and drywall was out (dancing is too tough on the material). Moreover, his



CHRIS BOSSE
LAVA



JOHN SOFIO
BUILT INC.

2 The weightless look of LAVA's vision for Hainan Ocean Flower Resort in China (due to open in 2020) blends organic shapes and living greenery.

3 Painted figures and geometric seating play with dimension in LAVA's design for Sydney eatery KYO-TO.



CALEB MULVENA
MAPOS LLC



PETER BENNETT (BOSSE), ELIZABETH DANIELS (SOFIO); COURTESY OF LAVA (2); MALCOLM BROWN (MULVENA); ANDREW WORSAM PHOTOGRAPHY (3)



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go-to resin casting company wasn't comfortable doing structural work. So, a team of five people constructed them out of metal studs used elsewhere in the building. They opted for a wood veneer, which required adding the same finish to the wall behind—and doing the whole area for less than \$30,000.

When it comes to business-building, Sofio will let his work speak for itself, but not without holding the microphone. "If a client doesn't trust me completely, it's not worth it," he says. "I'm always questioning myself. I can't have the client doing so as well."

That said, for the right project, he'll take a step back in the name of relationship-building, as in his work with sbe. "Basically, I'm there as a glorified general contractor on projects like Greystone Tavern [for which Rockwell Group is the interior designer]," he says. "My goal is to be detail-oriented and proactive enough that we get to be the designers going forward."

REALITY STARS

Think on your feet: That's the mantra for Mulvena, co-founder of New York-based MAPOS LLC. "The idea of a 'vision' has always been a cart-before-the-horse approach in our opinion," he says. "We rely on the process to get us there."

That starts with pulling a chorus of voices together, not just for initial charrettes, but throughout the process. The company's ethos stresses an open-source approach to idea generation and execution (hence the name, "map" referring to creating a guide and "os" to open source). And that's not just for the firm's design team, but also for the leaders on the client side.

"We require that all project stake-holders participate in our creative meetings: employees, clients and consultants," says Mulvena. "Years of

4 Light breaking through wooden slats edges up streamlined design in Built Inc.'s work on Hedley's.

5 Built Inc.'s Ivory on Sunset restaurant at The Mondrian in Los Angeles layers vertical elements, like the striped upholstery and paneling, to add airiness to the patio.



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experience have taught us that creative meetings with middle management rather than top-level decision-makers results in enormous inefficiencies that are in no one's best interest."

Mulvena and co-founder Colin Brice take an academic approach—think complex research distinguishing what shopping-centric locals need from Times Square vs. the aspirations of global travelers seeing the Big Apple for the first or second time—to applying that information to a physical space. "When designers are being appropriately responsive to client needs, and staying informed on the end user's changing aspirations, that's what makes a space seem unique," says Mulvena.

For Hotel Shocard, a budget boutique near Times Square in New York, that meant simple guest rooms and a blowout arrival experience, complete with a dry bar and marquee-style signage. "People don't go to Times Square to sleep in their rooms, so we wanted 'wow' public spaces," he says.

For another project, the design for the latest store for 'Wichcraft, a restaurant and catering company founded in 2003 and helmed by chef Tom Colicchio, the designer found minimally processed materials such as wood, terra cotta and raw steel that matched the artisanal food. Plans are in place to redesign eight other locations and open a new outpost.

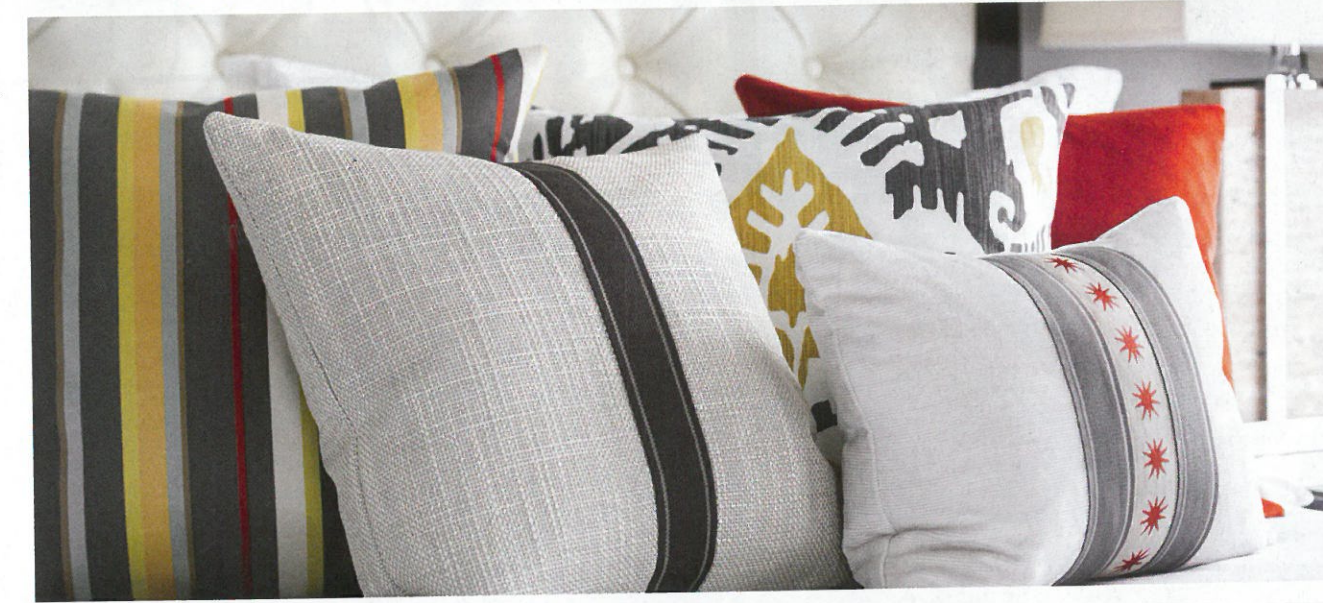
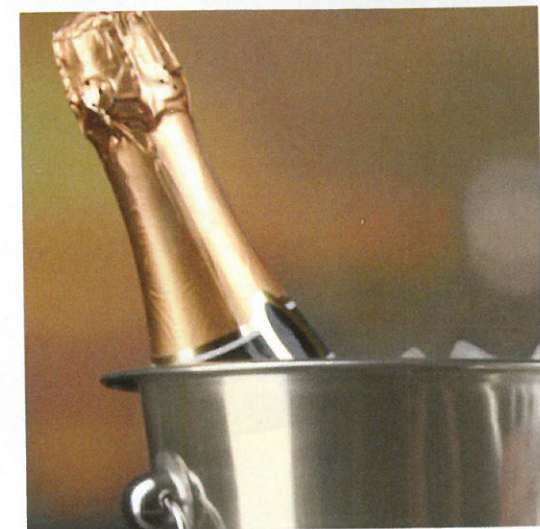
Firms like this prove that unlimited creativity is one piece of the puzzle. The rest is finding an authentic approach to design that resonates with clients. Time for some self-exploration? ●



6 The small scale of Hotel Shocard's lobby becomes an asset courtesy of MAPOS LLC's sleek design. Black floors add drama without occupying space.

7 A gold ceiling lights up Gleason's Tavern at Hotel Shocard. Upholstered banquettes add richness.

OLEG MARCH



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