

hospitality design

the *women's* issue

#BXNGR01 *****CAR-RT LOT**C-003
#0212166/CB/6#
JL2 HOSD1 JUL10 0001 #150 #22911
CHARDONNAY PICKARD -- PR COORDINATOR
CLODAGH DESIGN
670 BROADWAY FL 4
NEW YORK NY 10012-2318



Clodagh

Founder and Principal
Clodagh Design
New York

The creation of her design studio 25 years ago has resulted in a wide range of projects: hospitality (the W Fort Lauderdale; Miraval Hotel & Spa in Tucson, Arizona (shown); Sasanqua Spa in Kiawah Island, South Carolina) and furniture and products (Ann Sacks, Designtex, Dennis Miller, Tufenkian). The Irish-born Clodagh, long a proud New Yorker, has for decades been recognized for her iconic signature style. Drawing on her soulful inner spirit and her international travels, she generously gathers influences from myriad sources to create her much-lauded work.

Says D.B. Kim, associate principal of Pierre-Yves Rochon Design, "Her sensitive nature has defined her signature aesthetics: comfortable, universal, and timeless. Her palette is earthy and organic, concepts are sustainable, and designs are collages of textures, as if in a garden of Clodagh's world."

A champion of environmental sensitivity well before the current boom, Clodagh's ideals manifest themselves in enriching human resources as well. Through Clodagh Cares, she oversees the support of schools—"to bring the power of education to children in the neediest and most remote places on earth." Her fundraising efforts (often held as part of riotous, colorful parties in her studio) have resulted in hope and resources for children in Ecuador, Cameroon, and Kenya.



break on through

Complicated answers to one simple question: what does it take to be a successful woman in this industry?

“The first rule about fight club is there is no fight club.” And the first rule about being a successful woman in this industry is there is no glass ceiling. Now, once you probe a bit, and start asking the questions, that’s a different story. Off the record, the men in certain large architectural firms are still making more than the women. Off the record, the men at certain large hotel companies are being promoted way more frequently than women. Off the record, certain design principals have an unwritten policy against women having children. Off the record, certain high profile women stand in the back of the room while their male employees do business in some of the hottest global markets. Off the record, some women like being the only woman in the room. Off the record, sometimes women designers have an advantage over men whose sexuality is “suspect”. Off the record, this would be a very different story if I had guaranteed anonymity.

Off the record, the truth about women is we’re way tougher than most men would ever give us credit for. And the first unwritten rule about being a successful woman is never let ‘em see you sweat. So is there a glass ceiling? Hell no, no one would ever admit to that. But are there about 1,000 more social, cultural, and business factors that women need to consider than men when developing their strategy in how to handle each and every situation they encounter in this industry each day? Ah, there’s the rub.

One look through the sea of dark suits at any hotel investment conference is all it takes to see the lack of diversity. There are, in designer terms, punches of color, but mostly in the form of a few Indian power players. And there are very few women. The hotel ownership and development side of this business is a man’s world, that doesn’t seem to be even up for debate. Some women in the design arena actually suggest that works in their favor. What is up for debate (and a heated one at that) is the veritable minefield

of “negotiations” that female designers and architects have to make when dealing with issues of travel and family and the homogenous suits or dishdashas on the other side.

Over the past several months we’ve broached this topic with women of all walks of the industry: designers, architects, purchasers, executives in hotel corporations. Some young women with small firms of three to five people, and some, gender aside, arguably the most powerful names in hospitality design. Some we discussed with one on one, and many in a roundtable forum at our leadership summit. Here we let the women of our industry speak for themselves.

The Female Advantage

“I think it is an advantage to be a female,” says Rebecca Jones, principal, RD Jones & Associates, Washington, DC. “Because primarily, the opposite side of the spectrum is all men and [design] is something that they are not totally involved in, so they have a respect for what we do.”

“I actually think the corporate world, and maybe men universally, like dealing with women,” says Sue Firestone, founder/chairman, sfa design, Santa Barbara, California. “I think that it gives them an opportunity to deal with women outside their households in a respectful way. Again maybe it’s not OK to say that or admit that, but I’ve heard it and I just know that it’s reality. If you’re a woman and you’re competent and you’re successful, there’s a mystique I think that makes you more intriguing, and I just think that has an advantage to self promotion and having a woman-owned business, I think there’s a caché to that.”

“I personally think I’ve never been in a situation where it’s been a disadvantage to be a woman,” says Margaret McMahan, managing director of the New York office of Wilson Associates. “In the Middle East

we're dealing with Saudis now and I think it works to our advantage to be women quite honestly. I think they sit up straight and they listen to us more believe it or not. Maybe there is a glass ceiling and I just don't care."

principal designer of her Santa Monica, California-based firm, Indidesign. "Just the fact that when you go into a room and the ratio is one woman to 10 men it says something. Probably that balance is changing and it's changing quickly but it's definitely something that cannot be denied," she says, noting a current project

“ I think women have to curate their lives more carefully than men...”

Design is Different

"It gets back to the basic starting point, which is that the design business has always and historically been an OK business for women to be in in the first place," says Jill Cole, managing principal, Cole Martinez Curtis and Associates, Marina del Rey, California. "So you take someone like Eileen [Slora] or Glenn [Wilson] and you say, OK, those are male dominated corporations but it's OK to be a woman in the design department. But the president of the company isn't a woman, and the chief engineer isn't a woman."

"In a larger company I still think that there is that stigma," says Amy Hulbert, now director of interior design at Best Western International, but at the time of this interview director of interior design, Latin America and the Caribbean for Hilton Worldwide. "And there's certainly more men being promoted within some organizations, and this isn't just us, it's a lot of hotel companies. I think in the interior design world it's definitely an advantage [to be a woman], but once you get into the realm of a larger corporation, especially a hotel corporation, I think [the glass ceiling] still exists."

"I've seen a lot of promotions happen within the company and it's generally men, it's just not women," says Eileen Slora, executive director interior design at Fairmont Hotels and Resorts. Even if you look at the industry outside the design arena, if you look at the [hotel] general managers, it's very few women. And the point that you may have an advantage being a woman [designer] working with [men as clients], there could be, but within the organization there definitely is a huge glass ceiling."

"I think it's naïve to say that the glass ceiling doesn't exist," says Italian architect Beatrice Girelli,

in Malaysia where the majority of the consultants, including structural engineers and MEPs are women-owned businesses.

"We have a mentorship program at our firm that we are really actively trying to promote the women in the firm," says Nancy Nodler, principal at Gensler. "So I think that is the case; I think that will be the case. We will see change."

Global Scale

"By the time you're winning projects in an international arena you're dealing with a different kind of executive," says Anita Degen, principal at Seattle-based Degen & Degen architecture and interior design. "I don't do any work in the Middle East, but I do a lot of work in China and being a woman has never been an issue. And very often I'm the only woman in the room."

"India and China everything is, 'I respectfully request,' and you're real low key with that," says Slora. "My personality totally changes there."

"I think it's dangerous to stereotype. There are a lot of parts to the Middle East. Saudi Arabia is very different than the Emirates," says Firestone, noting a Saudi residential client in California with whom she will never meet in person due to his royalty. "But I find it very different in Abu Dhabi and Oman and Dubai. I think the men there and the sheiks that we deal with are extremely respectful toward women. I have no feelings like I have to hold back who I am."

"We were doing a project in Doha and we purposely didn't send the female project manager because we really wanted to talk turkey," says Trisha Wilson, president and CEO of Wilson Associates. "We explained to her why, and it is easier for someone like me to explain that to a woman. I didn't go either, but I

think if I was a male, even if I thought that would have the best outcome for the team, I'd probably not say it because of the way it would be taken."

Carefully Curating

"I think women have to curate their lives more carefully than men, because there are pulls. Men don't get pregnant. So there are nine months and a few months afterward, but I just kept on working and I curated my time. I decided what time I wanted to spend with my children," says Clodagh, principal of her New York-based design firm. "We welcome kids at the studio here just as the same as we welcome dogs. Somebody comes in with a baby and wants to work for a while, no problem."

"You're always negotiating; whether you are negotiating childcare or negotiating just your life or negotiating your boundaries. I think it's a constant negotiation because what we all do is at a very intense level," says McMahon. "We all have to travel much further than we had to travel before."

who somehow do it."

"I think that's what begs the question of is there a glass ceiling? If there is, it's of your own making," says Degen. "If you're the kind of person like we are, there is no glass ceiling for you because you're willing to do whatever it takes to get the job done and to pursue what it is that you're after. The ones who have the glass ceilings are the ones sitting at their desks not promoting themselves, wondering why they're not being promoted. It's up to every individual to break out of it."

Speak Up

"You have to be able to promote yourself," says Helen Jorgensen, vice president, design and procurement, Host Hotels & Resorts. "And it took me a long time to get that. You just think you're doing this great job, this great design, and people are going to recognize it. Whatever you're doing you have to be promoting it."

"In corporate America in our industry, the hotel industry, it's a male dominated industry, it's a tough

Now if they look at me and say, 'that bitch' I don't care because I know where I'm coming from...

"If you think about the leaders in residential design, in Dallas here, they're mostly women. And that's different. I think that with hospitality what makes it more difficult is the travel," says Wilson, who is working internationally in pretty much every market, including 19 hotels in Mecca. "For me, I think it would be really hard to be a great mother and a great business leader and not feel guilty about neglecting one or the other."

"The reason I think there's not a glass ceiling in our neck of the woods is, not everybody wants to do this," says Dolly Ross, COO at Los Angeles-based Design Group Carl Ross. "When it gets to the real nuts and bolts of it, if we were to ask around any of our offices would you be willing to work Sunday, Saturday, Friday, are you willing to get up at 5 a.m. to do that conference call, are you willing to do the conference call in the middle of your kid's soccer game, and the answers would be no, no, no. So the few of us who've decided to somehow do this are the ones

industry, why we ever got into it in the first place is beyond me, but I've been in it practically my entire life and I love it," says Slora. "But it is a male dominated organization, and like Helen [Jorgensen] said, unless you promote yourself and unless you get out there and you make the meetings and you talk and you network with women in the industry and in your own organization and figure out how you can do this then you will sit at that desk. I created my position years ago and I keep pushing forward through it."

"Unless the women raise their voices to the same level as the men's voices they do not get heard," says Clodagh, noting a personal breakthrough at a Speak Up program about 16 years ago. "I really felt if I was pushing myself forward they were looking at me and thinking, 'that bitch'. Now I've pushed myself to the right level, and if they look at me and say, 'that bitch' I don't care because I know where I'm coming from, I know what I want to convey, and that is good design."