

COMMERCIAL

Interior design

The essential guide for Middle East interior design professionals

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Downtown Design
AN INSIDER'S GUIDE TO
DUBAI'S NEW DESIGN FAIR

CID Awards 2013
Special Issue



EVANS

CID INTERIOR DESIGNER OF THE YEAR WINNER

AWARDS 2013

Interior Designer of the Year

Winner: Karen Michelle Evans, HBA International

Karen Michelle Evans was crowned with the distinction of Interior Designer of the Year at the 2013 Commercial Interior Design Awards.

Described as having dedicated her career to create unique and inspiring hotels around the world, Evans has worked in nearly every region, from Europe to Africa, Asia and the United States. Her ability to successfully adapt to any culture, while also maintaining a keen eye for concept design and creative problem solving, put Evans ahead of her competitors.

One judge specifically described the winner as a "hospitality specialist with a true understanding of different cultures, who creates bespoke designs suited to clients' individual needs." Another judge was particularly taken with her ability to create truly experiential spaces.

Evans exclaimed: "It means an awful lot to me personally, and to all the other designers and the people that I work with, because it is also a team. So it's for them as well."

She continued: "I think as a designer, every project becomes very personal. So [the projects from the past year] have all been challenging and enjoyable to be a part of."



Highly Commended

Diane Thorsen,
Pringle Brandon
Perkins + Will

Shortlisted

Ben Corrigan,
Bluehaus

Jacinda Raniolo, GAI
Architects

Vibha Sawhney,
Samuel Creations

Roca

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INTERVIEW



INTERVIEW

In the spotlight

KAREN MICHELLE EVANS, MANAGING ASSOCIATE AT HBA INTERNATIONAL,
TELLS CID WHAT LED HER TO BECOMING INTERIOR DESIGNER OF THE YEAR



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always wanted to make things. So my whole career started from that when I was very young," Michelle Evans starts out. In conversation, she's soft spoken, with a kind tone that makes you open to asking her more about her life, which has seen many corners of the Earth, from Brunei to Brazil.

"So when I went to school, I chose an art direction and made a conscious decision to go to art college... I was interested in architecture, even from

then and it became a natural progression," the managing associate at Hirsch Bedner Associates explains.

Having always displayed a passion for textiles, surroundings and design, it didn't take much wavering before Evans found her career path; however, where that path would take her seemed to be up to the universe.

She always managed to maintain an openness that would enable her to take on such opportunities—opportunities that would one day lead her

to be crowned Interior Designer of the Year at Commercial Interior Design Awards 2013.

After spending her childhood in South Wales, Evans made her first move to Birmingham, where she studied three-dimensional designs, leading her to take up interior design. "From then on, I never wanted to do anything else," says Evans, claiming: "I became more and more involved [in interior design] and decided to learn more. At the same time, one of my

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The Living Room
lounge in Grand Hyatt
Dubai.



passions was travelling. Even from an early age, I wanted to go overseas to explore different cultures. And it's very visual when you're younger and you have an interpretation without experiencing it. And when you're older you can actually go there, absorb and take more in. So I was always attracted to the challenges in different countries. It was really about exploring."

Through Evans' recounted memories, one gets the sense that she embodies the mantra of "do what you love". Standing there was someone

who very successfully fulfilled her childhood dreams. From travelling to creating, she managed to zone in on what was important to her and made a lifelong career out of it.

Evans continues: "After my studies, I started working with design companies and then after that took off, I went overseas for a position to Zimbabwe, and since then...well, I haven't been back to the United Kingdom for work."

These few words, "I haven't been back", were something we'd hear quite often throughout the conversa-

tion. And they seemed to surprise her as much as they did us, as though she was just realising that while telling her story.

"After [Zimbabwe] I went to Brunei and I remember when I got to the interview I didn't actually know exactly where it was. But after I got the position, I looked into it and found that it was actually in Asia—and I remember telling my parents I got a job in Brunei and I was leaving in 2 weeks. And they responded by asking, 'where's that?'" Evans laughs off.

Evans moved to Brunei and lived

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Chef's table, Park
Hyatt Maldives.



there for nearly six years without once again visited the UK. Having just arrived, Evans was too excited by the many new destinations that were within one-hour of flying distance to justify boarding a 10 hour flight back to her familiar home town. Having felt like so many new explorations were in her perimetre, it was a long while before she found herself on the move once again, and this time to the United States.

Landing in Los Angeles, Evans continued working there for another five to six years. After completing a project, a friend of the designer who was living in Doha invited her to the region on a short term contract. "I thought why not? It's only one to two years...well, that was 10 years ago," she said, before noting between belts of laughter, "and I haven't been back to the U.S. since!"

Evans continues: "Opportunities find you, even though it's not so obvi-

ous. So I moved to Doha, and I was approached by a company to move back to London. And I thought okay, this is a chance for me to get back to my roots. So I went to their office for three months, and they asked if I would like to go to Dubai—when I went back to the UK it had changed a lot in my perception and I thought Dubai's a new city with new developers, new projects and again with that region, you have so many places around it. So it was exiting to come to Dubai. The whole thing was a natural progression."

Like many people who've seen an array of different cities and cultures, Evans carries her experiences around with her, influencing her decisions, her preferences and her tastes as a designer. She doesn't see Dubai as simply a city in itself; she sees it in a much bigger picture—as a global hub, where the lights never turn off. "There's a whole world now that

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Golestan, Sheraton Bahrain.

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you can access, so you should really learn how to use your resources. It's a lot easier for designers to jump from country to country, to travel like clients do. And I really like where I am—it's a base and people can come from anywhere.

"For me, I get inspired by materials from my country, like natural resources. What I also like is if you're in a country that doesn't have those, it's nice to bring those things in so it changes what people see. It's nice to bring things that have a root in history, the spirit and the feel of moving forward and then to see people accept that. Whatever you're designing, you're not limited to that country."

The natural stone-lover prefers to start her design process off with an inspirational absorption of Italian themed locations that have applied rich palettes in colour and material. Then, as Evans explains, she likes to imagine herself as the person using the space. "I still work by hand," she notes, continuing: "The product is the most important thing. The architect

and the designer, they have to give the people what they want. And if for some reason it leans more to what I want, then that's fine and I'll become more involved. If you ask me then I offer, but I don't come in saying, 'I want this and I want that.' You go to these meetings and there are so many people there, and I'm not a decorator—I'm a designer. So you have to wait for people to discover that from you sometimes, and let it speak for itself."

From the Maldives to India, Doha and Dubai, Evans' work spans across the world, with recent projects being nominated left and right, including the Grand Hyatt Dubai and the Park Hyatt Maldives. She may appear soft-spoken in person, but her work stands for itself, and represents the many talents Evans is quickly becoming recognised for.

And it isn't only her work that's being recognised. Evans was recently awarded Interior Designer of the Year at CID Awards 2013.

"It the first time I've ever won an

award like this," Evans notes. She continues: "When I was shortlisted there was a lot of excitement in the office and I was excited, but quietly excited. I was sure nothing would happen. But everyone was saying, 'We must go! We must go!' and I kept thinking what if they don't call me and everyone will be disappointed? But the excitement in the office was something I was very proud of."

"Then on the night, I was calm. But as we got closer and closer to my category, I got more nervous. It was definitely more emotional when it happened, and I had these people around me who I had been working with for so many years and to have their support, you know... it was just very emotional. It was more like recognition for them as well—for us."

"It felt like recognition for all the hard work we had all done, not just for one individual. And that's what I wanted really; I wanted it to be more about us all as a team, rather than just about me. Because I hadn't done it on my own, I did it with them." ❧



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Library, Qasr Al Sarab, UAE.