

A Fine Eye for Detail – Interview with the founder and CEO of XO Atelier, Vera Dieckmann

Founder and CEO of XO Atelier, Vera Dieckmann discusses attention to detail and following your gut

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What do your first 30 minutes of the day look like? I wake up very early, usually just before my alarm rings. I start my day with a 10 minute meditation, a practice I

started while I lived in Asia. Then it's a double coffee while I check my phone and then squeeze in a gym session ahead of a full day's work schedule.

What influences your design aesthetic? All my work is creatively influenced by elements in nature; the subtle shades that surround us every day, the reflections of light on surfaces like glass and water. Materials are always at the heart of what I do; the beauty of natural



wood and stone, the delicate textures and patterns are art in our natural surroundings. Tell us about your role as Founder and

CEO of XO Atelier. How did you know it was the right time to start your own company? XO Atelier is a young studio so I'm involved in all

the processes from design to project coordination. As the face of the studio I do the entire client interfacing and liaise between them

and our team who work across three countries. It's inspiring and extremely challenging but I love it. It's a far cry from working in a large agency or a big hospitality group like I did for 23 years, but it was time to live my own dream not to build someone else's. I wanted to work under my own set of values, to create a studio that reflects me, and allows me the freedom and creativity to express myself.

When approaching a space, what is the first thing you envisage? As soon as I step into a space, the key element is always the light, and most importantly how the user will experience it. It has to fulfill its function in the most elegant way. Good interior design communicates with you on many different levels, it's visceral, not just visual. I can usually visualise an

entire design scheme from the very first moment, and it's this vision that guides my process.

Which designs are you most proud of and why? I'm very proud of our first project Toplum. It has launched us so prominently in the international and regional industry, is nominated for five awards and has already won Best Global Restaurant at the International Hotel & Property Awards. The other side of my business is product

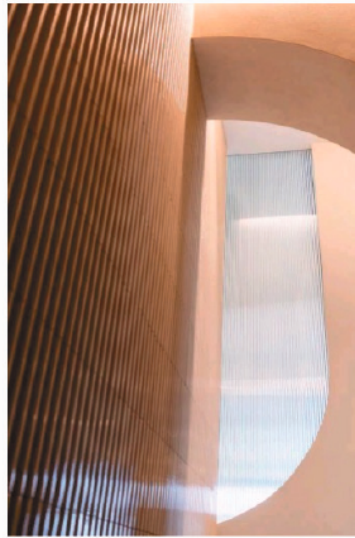
Design, which has also been extremely successful for us, with some of our lighting designs represented by established NY and Singapore based Galerie Philia.

What in the architecture industry is luxury? In our industry, Interior

Design, the biggest luxury is having creative freedom and a client who trusts your vision and your ability to transform that into reality. Which design pieces are your real hero buys for any space? I adore mid-century collectible pieces, ideally a chair or armchair

by Pierre Jeanneret, lighting by Charlotte Perriand and a large scale artwork to really establish the mood. Do you see any aesthetic patterns emerging globally as a result of COVID-19? What we see are more creative directions rather than aesthetic 'trends' or patterns.

People want comfort, outdoor space, fresh natural materials and a real home where they can rest and recharge. Which Instagram accounts do you follow for inspiration? Studio Olafur Eliasson @Studioolafureliasson, Jose Parla @joseparla, Adam Mork @adamork, Victor Ash @victor.ash.studio, Delfina Delettrez @Delfinadelettrez. What effect has social media played in the design industry and its growth? I think the impact of social media specifically in the GCC is substantial. We receive a high number of requests on Instagram and LinkedIn even though we are a young studio and our accounts were established only fairly recently. Instagram has become a crucial tool for those of us in the creative industries as a way of reflecting our brand identity and

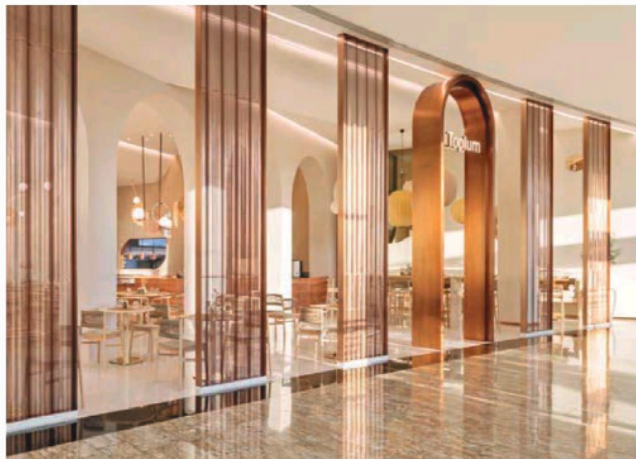


showcasing our work.

What advice would you give to your younger self starting out? To work diversely, in all kinds of studios, both boutique and estab-

lished, as well as getting exposure to young talent and famous designers. Getting a global perspective is key – so to try to work on every continent and get as much experience as possible. Listen, observe and never take criticism personally as it will motivate you to push harder, be a better designer and fulfill your potential. Don't choose this profession to get rich, because it will be a challenge, but through this you will grow and learn every day.

The final truth is that rejection and failure is the best preparation for progress, but no matter what happens, remember to be grateful and acknowledge every single person who has contributed to your success: Never forget to be kind. If you were not the Founder and CEO of XO Atelier, which other role



would you choose careerwise? I originally wanted to study art under Joseph Beuys at the academy in Dusseldorf, but my father discouraged me. Instead, I opted for architecture and graduated as an

engineer. Today, I incorporate my love of art into my work, producing limited edition pieces that are listed with my gallery.

This is The Fine Jewellery Issue,

what is fine design to you? For me fine design is in the detailing, manufacturing and selection of materials. The method and process for this is similar whether it's a bespoke lighting installation or a piece of fine jewellery, only the scale is different. Our light feature "Flow" for example, shares many similarities with fine jewellery and now we're working on a small-scale pendant for a chain based on the initial design of "Flow" combining gold and opal.

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