



DIANNE KRAUS

Gensler's 42 offices have a reputation for taking on innovative or niche commissions. From Houston Ballet's Center for Dance to visions of what London could become in 2050, the San Francisco-based architecture and design giant is used to thinking outside the box, big or small. Its recently created Health and Wellness division brings the same attitude to the hospitality world, putting holistic design front and center. Veteran Gensler interior designer Dianne Kraus is crossing over from hotels to the world of wellness to head up the new initiative. Here, she talks about the similarities and differences between these two hospitality sectors.

Q What made this the right time to launch the Health and Wellness division?

A Our new practice area looks beyond spas, beyond hotels and even beyond healthcare to truly get to the heart of the human experience of health and wellness. We found that we could pull from different design disciplines (healthcare, hospitality, even workplace design) to create an environment that is truly user-centric. It's not only about the client or patient; it's about all the caregivers involved in healing. As the founder of the Urban Zen Foundation, (fashion designer) Donna Karan, once said, "It's not about me, it's about we." Because Gensler is involved in so many aspects of health and wellness and the discipline's specific needs, we are able to provide spa and hospitality clients with a focused approach that creates a better experience overall.

Walk us through your typical site visit.

I visit the site to get a feeling of the space and the surroundings. I usually sit there and just experience the space. I listen to the sounds, and I usually like to go back several times a day to really sense what is happening. I take lots of photos and notes. I pay special attention to the landscape and the colors surrounding me. What has excited me most about being a part of Gensler's new health and wellness practice is that I am able to explore wellness in a broader level than just a spa or a hospital setting.

What takeaways does spa design have for the rest of the hotel?

The spa aesthetic is definitely influential to hotel design. For one new hotel concept that we are currently working on, we are riffing from spa experiences that pamper the guest, such as tea salons, relaxation spaces, high-back chairs that provide privacy in a big space and low-level lighting. We also integrate Eastern interior design traditions.

What's on your inspiration board?

I am so inspired by great music. Right now I am into (indie rock group) Polica. I love music that takes me on a journey. Currently on my vision board is Urban Zen's philosophy "to inspire change in the areas of well-being, preserve cultures and empower children in mind, body and spirit"; a Pucci dress that I just love; an Equinox postcard that says, "It's not fitness, it's life"; an El Cholo's menu; a driftwood lamp concept I am working on; images of Soho House, Miami; and photos of where I want to travel to next—Haiti and India.

What drives you creatively?

I love being able to provide people with a healing experience, especially when they don't even know it is happening to them. I have loved art, interior design and fashion since I was a little girl. It's in my blood. I came from a family of designers, so I guess you could say I was born this way! **HS**