

Jon de la Cruz

by LINDSEY SHOOK photography by TAGGART GORMAN



THERE ARE MANY experts in the design industry but few with a pedigree like Jon de la Cruz. From curating memorable homes in the Bay Area and New York to making a lasting impression inside iconic restaurants including Carbone, Marlowe and Sadelle's, he knows a thing or two about custom design, tight timelines and effortless style. Just off the heels of debuting "The Upstairs Keep" inside this year's San Francisco Decorator Showcase, we caught up with Cruz to find out more about his passion for design and his hopes for the future.

What inspired you to become an interior designer?

I love to draw and I love to shop. I went through several different majors when I started art school—fashion, graphic design, advertising, industrial design—and eventually landed in interior architecture because it really is a confluence of all of the other disciplines.

Rather than discuss your signature style, what is your intention when approaching each project?

Good designers should be clever. It's easy enough to pick a style for a project and pick what's pretty at the design center to accommodate the style. But I like to be clever, and I always want to make sure that every project makes my clients' life a little better than expected—whether it be more organized, more comfortable, more functional, or more inspirational—not just more beautiful. Exceed expectations, that's always my intent.

You have worked on major contract and hospitality spaces. How has this influenced your work in residential design?

Hospitality and residential work is intrinsically connected. A well-designed restaurant makes you immediately feel at home; an elegant and well-appointed home should function seamlessly, like a five-star hotel lobby.

From New York to L.A., you have designed homes and restaurants around the country. What makes designing in the Bay Area unique?

The Bay Area is much more food-focused rather than interested in high design, more so than Vegas or SoCal—so it is absolutely necessary to have a light hand in the design of a restaurant interior. I start with a strong concept that reflects the food, and then it's constant editing, refining and focusing on what is functional and essential. Concentrating on what will stand the test of time—in both durability and aesthetic. Homes are very much the same way: quality and comfort at a different price point that's not ostentatious.

In what ways do you feel the California design industry needs to shift?

After 25 years in the industry, I have seen how big box retailers like Amazon, Ikea and Costco have shaped the modern consumer. No, you can't have that overnight. Yes, you have to pay for shipping. No, you shouldn't just throw that old sofa away. No, it's not cheaper if you buy more. The old-school California style embraced effortless beauty, sophisticated yet casual comfort, artistic craftsmanship and eclectic global savvy. It's our responsibility as designers in California to shift the focus back to what makes our California style special and unique.

Go-to design book or resource for inspiration?

Travel, travel, travel is my number one resource for inspiration. I am a Sagittarius so wanderlust is in my charts!

If you weren't a designer, what career path would you take?

I would love Anthony Bourdain's old job at CNN.

If you could design a home for anyone, who would it be?

My end game has always been the White House.