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WANDERING STARS

BY MICHELE KOH MOROLLO

“Travel and change of place impart new vigour to the mind,” wrote the Roman philosopher Seneca. And while there’s no substitute for training and practice, there’s no doubt that architects and designers benefit greatly from widening their experience and fuelling their creativity through travel. Here, six movers and shakers from the design world talk about their adventures around the globe



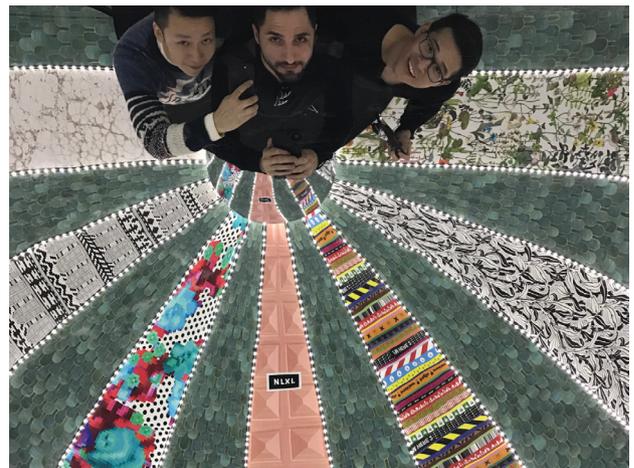




NELSON CHOW

NC Design & Architecture principal Nelson Chow believes that as a designer, it's important to see how different cultures approach design differently. At the 7132 Hotel thermal baths in Vals, Switzerland, designed by Peter Zumthor, Chow admired how the Swiss architect integrated the architecture with the landscape. He enjoyed winter swimming there at midnight. He had mastered a “chaotic but fun” trip to Salone del Mobile with his team and Uber-ed around to beaches, museums and galleries in Los Angeles.

“The more places we visit, the more knowledge we will have when it comes to providing design solutions. There is never a single answer to a question, and travel certainly helps broaden how we approach problems,” Chow says.





EVE MERCIER

Eve Mercier, founder of Hong Kong’s Insight School of Interior Design, travels half a dozen times a year, combining work with pleasure. She’s drawn to places with unspoiled landscapes, such as Australia’s Margaret River and the Swiss Alps.

“One of my most memorable trips was skating on a remote ice-dam lake in Switzerland before eating a cheese fondue heated up by our guide on a camping stove in the middle of the lake,” she recalls. “We could hear the glaciers melting all around us: it was terrifying, and strikingly beautiful at the same time.” On a recent trip to Japan she stayed at Amanemu in the Ise-Shima National Park and at the Ritz Carlton in Kyoto, noting that the interiors and service were impeccable. “I found the modern twist on Japanese architecture in those two hotels particularly impressive,” she says.





ELAINE LU

Together with her husband Vincent Lim, Elaine Lu founded award-winning inter-disciplinary, Hong Kong-based architectural design practice Lim + Lu. Born in China, and raised in Atlanta, Lu studied and worked in New York before moving to Hong Kong and is no stranger to overseas adventures.

“Travelling always gives me fresh perspectives,” she says. “Our design inspiration comes from everyday objects and situations that we observe wherever we go.” She travels at least once a month to either China, Europe or the United States to speak at various industry events, while she also heads overseas two or three times a year for pleasure. “The two most memorable trips I’ve done were a 10-day safari in Tanzania, and a week-long drive through Iceland. I love the Venice Biennale and evenings at Piazza San Marco, while I also love French destinations for the art, design, culture and amazing food,” she says.

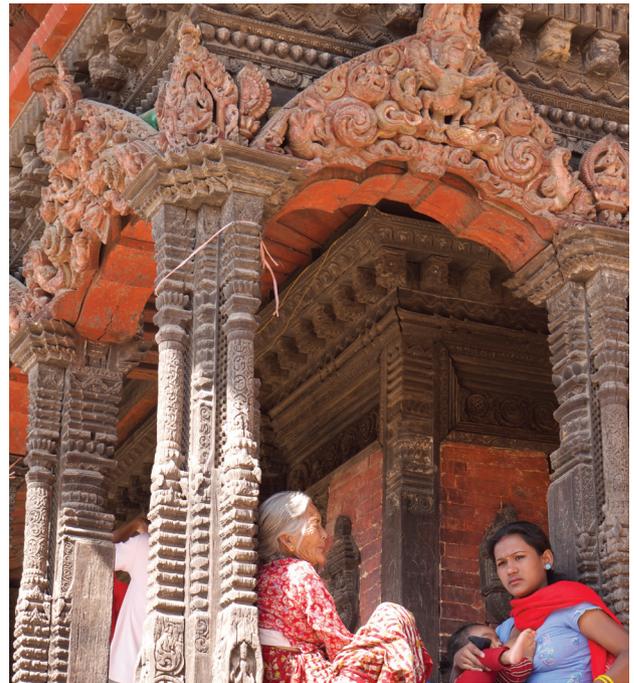




KENNETH COBONPUE

Internationally acclaimed Cebuano furniture designer Kenneth Cobonpue says he tries to travel as often as his schedule permits. “Travelling allows me to be in an unfamiliar place, which gets me excited and eager to learn about the country’s people and culture. It also makes me more attuned with nature,” he says. “This openness has led me to be more sensitive about how beautiful the world really is, and how furniture influences and affects our daily lives and moods.”

He enjoys Cuba for its vibrant energy and authenticity, Turkey for its history, and says he’s also had memorable times in Kathmandu and Marrakech. “Being immersed in exotic cultures is such a source of inspiration. These travels were highly remarkable because I found a common thread of beauty, warmth and timelessness in things made by hand. I explored markets, artisanal shops and the local cuisine, and extended these experiences to my new collections.”

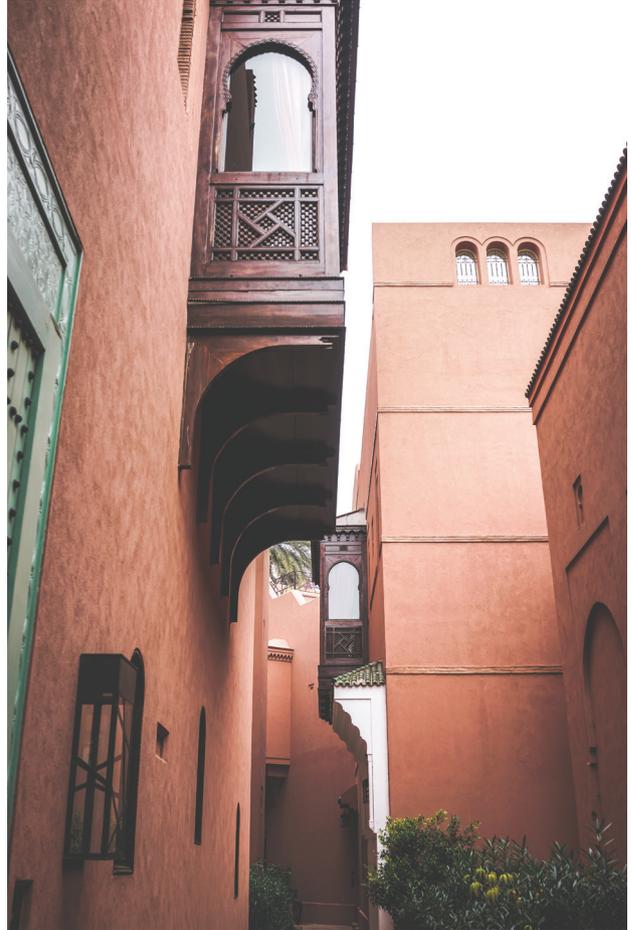




SACHA LAKIC

Luxembourg-based, Serbian designer Sacha Lakic has created numerous products for brands such as Venturi, Voxan and Roche Bobois. His favourite destinations are Italy and the US.

“I go to Italy many times a year, and am still impressed by the quality of the food and wine. I also love the US, especially South Beach in Miami, where the sky can change from blue to dark grey within a few minutes,” he says. His most memorable travel experience was a road trip through the Pyrenees with his 9-year-old son on a motorcycle he had designed for Bimota, while two of his favourite hotels are Eremito in Umbria, Italy, and the Royal Mansour in Marrakech. “Eremito is a magnificent spot built on the plans of a monastery from the 14th century. There’s no Internet or telephone network, so you are cut off from the world for a few days,” he says. “At the Royal Mansour, everything is incredibly elegant while still respecting Moroccan culture and traditions. Travel allows me to replenish my creativity, and refocus on the essentials. On top of that, it’s a great way to alleviate stress. This is why I must travel often!”





YOUNJIN JEONG

“I usually travel for pleasure once a year – without a plan. Rather than create an itinerary or schedule, I simply make decisions spontaneously. This helps me break away from the routines of daily life, which helps stimulate creativity,” says Younjin Jeong, co-founder and creative director of Seoul-based design and modular architecture studio Urbantainer.

When travelling, she takes all her photos in black and white – a technique much suited to her winter trips to South Korea’s Seoraksan mountains, where she enjoys driving through the snow. She’s also a fan of Beijing. “Chinese people have so much self-confidence. What fascinates me is how China is rapidly growing in every aspect, not only economically, but culturally too.” Her favourite hotel is Shanghai’s PuLi Hotel & Spa. “I love this hotel because they have such a strong brand identity – you can feel their style everywhere, even in the attitude of their staff. PuLi will be opening a branch in Beijing soon, and I can’t wait to see what it’ll be like.” ■

