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“don’t put us
in a box”

Venus Williams, V Starr

hd Presenter of
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CHAMPION'S MINDSET

From tennis to design, the seven-time Grand Slam winner details her drive to succeed



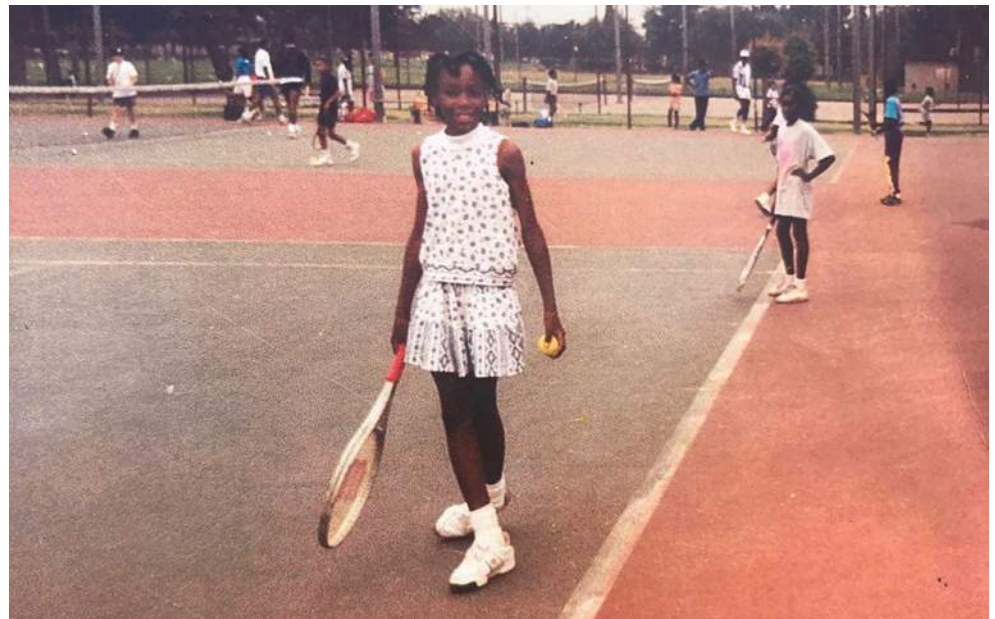
On childhood

School, tennis, the ice cream truck, and church three times a week. That was my early childhood—very, very sheltered. Growing up, my parents said, 'Your best friends are your sisters.' I have four: one younger and three older, and honestly, that's all I knew. It was the best experience. I was super happy, super naïve, and super oblivious. There was always someone to laugh with, to turn to. I couldn't imagine it any other way.

Williams donning EleVen by Venus apparel



A collage of snapshots from Williams' tennis-filled childhood



Photos courtesy of THE WILLIAMS FAMILY

We left Compton, California for Florida when I was 11 to pursue tennis fulltime. It's not like I never left the 'hood, but I didn't see what was the worst to see. I think if I had gotten older there, then maybe I would have started to be aware of what was around me, what I maybe didn't have and the situation of the community around me, but I never got that chance.

My dad had a plan for me [and my sister] Serena before we were born, as he tells the story. I remember he was telling my aunt, his sister, 'My girls are great. They're going to be champions.' And she would say, 'You're just a proud father.' I believed what he told me; when you're five years old, you believe your parents. There was a ton of work that went behind it.



A muted coastal vibe pervades Atlantico at Alton, a residential community in Palm Beach



Mirrors and sconces add drama to Atlantico at Alton's clubhouse kitchen

First design memories

As a child, I remember trying to sew clothes for my Barbie dolls and not being able to do it. As a teenager, I guess at about 18 years old, I was struggling with the question, 'Do I go to school for interior design or fashion design?' I ended up choosing fashion because Serena wanted to study fashion, too, and we do everything together. I found a school in Fort Lauderdale, an hour from where I lived, and that's how it started. Because of my tennis schedule I could only go once a year, in the fall for a quarter, so it took me seven years to complete the program.

Then I ended up going to school for interior design for a year—it was only a matter of time before I had to get back into interiors and give that a real go—and ultimately transferred to a business program to complete my BA in business administration before going to school for my master's degree in interior architecture. I have eight classes left.

Tennis lessons

Education and knowing who you were as a person off the court was important to my dad. When you spend every waking hour on the court from a young age—4 years old—that can just become who you are. Quite frankly, it still is who I am and who I always will be.

I take countless lessons from tennis [for business]. Sport is life and life is sport, so it's all



blu 27 at Edgewater, a multifamily project in Miami, draws from the color palette of nearby Biscayne Bay



The two-story clubhouse at LaVida at Blue Lagoon, a Miami development, stars an open staircase with wood detailing

one and the same. There are wins or losses and you have to understand how to handle things emotionally. When people look at an athlete, they see this great person who's achieved something, but there is also the stereotypical thought that it's all they can do. There is an assumption that they're not thinkers or very cerebral, so how could they possibly be a good designer or good in business. I like proving those people wrong.

On launching V Starr

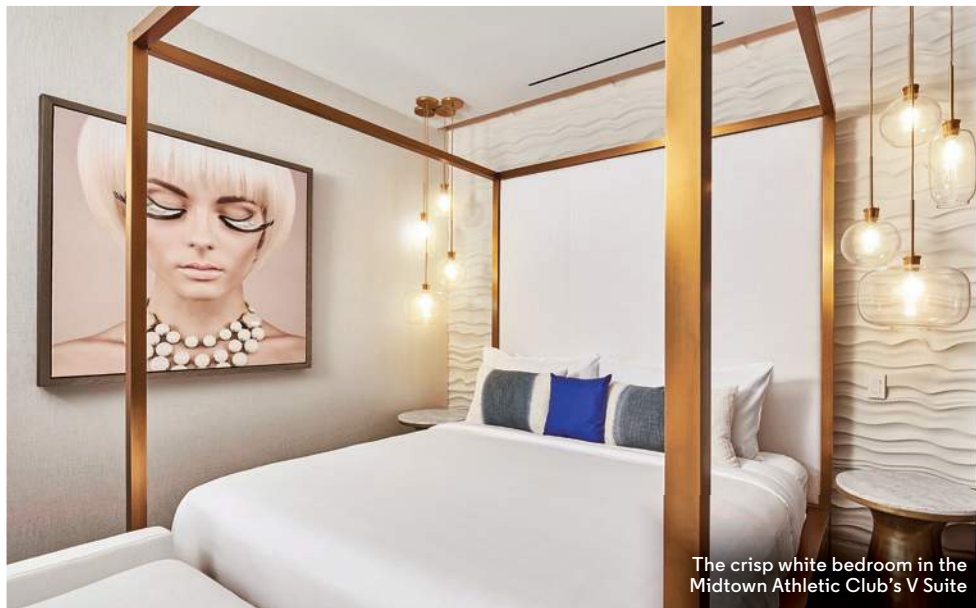
I started V Starr to make my parents proud, not realizing that I'd most likely already made them proud. I had a great upbringing and they instilled in me a work ethic, confidence, balance, and belief. All of these things they taught me were the catalyst. My father gave me an entrepreneurial spirit. He used to play foreclosure tapes [teaching how one could make money off of foreclosed properties] for me and Serena in the car on the way to tennis. I was 8 or 9 years old, but the lesson is still there of how to think outside of the box and for yourself.

It was tough, of course, in the beginning. You have to hire the right people and it took me a minute to find a team that synced. It's tough to get that first client—our first big project was for a basketball player and we were just so happy—and tough to get people to realize that you're not just a tennis player, that you are more than that. Residential is where we started, but after a while we wanted an opportunity to have a broader impact, eventually switching to commercial design right in the middle of the financial crisis in 2008. It was an interesting time to do that and somehow we made it.

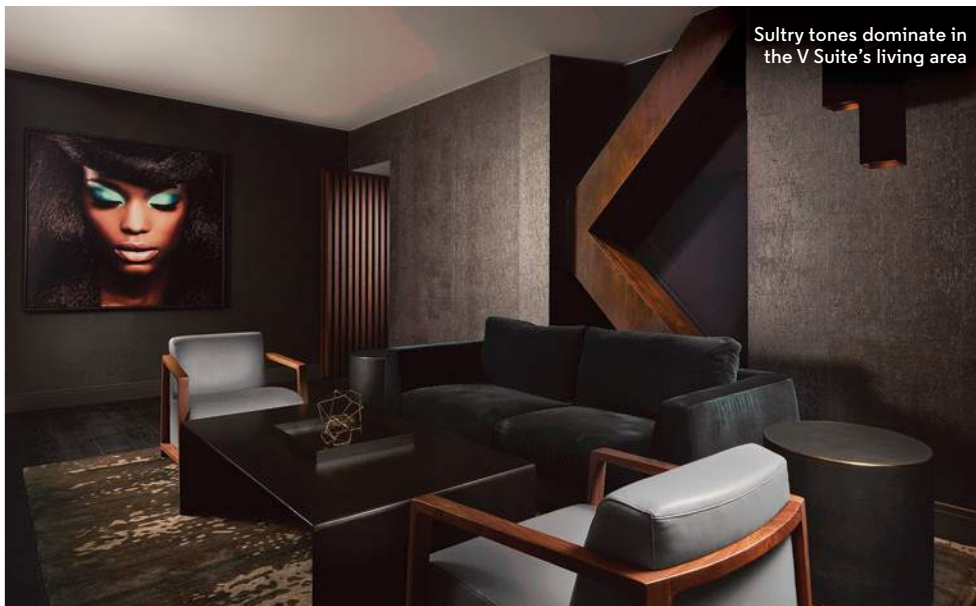
I like to build out my teams organically. In the beginning, I just asked a friend of mine, one of those people who always knows someone, 'I'm looking to go into commercial design. Do you know anyone?' I was introduced to [V Starr's principal Sonya Haffey] through a friend of his. It turns out we lived across the street from each other. It is such a small world. I love working with her and I trust her. She's a good person and she puts the interests of others ahead of her own.



The Tennis Lounge at the Midtown Athletic Club in Chicago features a wall composed of tennis balls



The crisp white bedroom in the Midtown Athletic Club's V Suite



Sultry tones dominate in the V Suite's living area

Where V Starr is now

I hired the best team in the industry to run V Starr. We now have projects across the nation with over 20 active projects running at any time, including bars, restaurants, hotels, spas, multifamily, and selective residential. Everybody's racing toward a deadline and success is dependent on the team working together, so I enjoy that aspect—an opportunity where your opinion and your expertise really does matter. We all know our parts that we play. Obviously, that takes time, but you also have to let people take pride in what they're doing and consider the business their own as well. To succeed, it is vital that we nourish our ideals and culture on a daily basis. That's the most important part and what keeps us going forward and surviving in all these difficult and challenging times.

I love winning a project. Winning never gets old. V Starr designed the V Suite and the tennis lounge at the Midtown Athletic Club in Chicago. It was one of the practice sites for a tournament when I was 17, so it's pretty fun to go full circle. We are also renovating the spa at the PGA National Resort & Spa in Palm Beach, Florida. I've been going there forever. It's my hometown, so I have a lot of pride in the project. The team is very excited to have such a significant hospitality project in our backyard.



Eclectic artwork covers a wall inside the airy clubhouse at Town Lantana, a residential complex in Lantana, Florida



Underneath the dramatic staircase at the Town Lantana clubhouse, a birdcage-style greenhouse nods to the surrounding landscape

On community

Even though I love design, I think some of our most fulfilling work is the community projects, like the Southeast Tennis and Learning Center in Washington, DC, an amazing place for young people who a lot of times are only getting their meals there and at school. The Yetunde Price Resource Center in Compton, opened in honor of our oldest sister [who was killed by gun violence], provides resources to help families recover from trauma and move forward. What's most important is that you are always giving more than you're receiving, and there is so much joy in that.

On wellness and growth

I've never been busier, but that's a good thing. Knowing that I have something to give definitely keeps me motivated. I found an opportunity not only to help during COVID through all of the #CoachVenus workouts I did on Instagram to encourage others to stay active during quarantine, but it also gave me so much more, keeping me encouraged, hopeful, and active by engaging with my community.

It's been a significant year. At EleVen by Venus Williams [my fashion line], we focus on activewear and are in a really exciting time of expanding the business to include other lifestyle products, like our beauty collaboration with Credo Beauty. Top design


houses are also executing activewear and leisurewear pieces beautifully, so the industry is definitely evolving. I love that because an active lifestyle and practicing wellness leads to a healthier, happier life.

This is so important for me at this moment, especially with people stuck at home and wanting more than ever to be healthy. I think more people are going to be working from home because organizations will recognize that their bottom lines benefit if they're downsizing on office space. I believe that the athleisure, relaxed look can change the way people are dressing and what people expect in terms of dress for the workplace. That's where I think the world's going. It's pushing me to design more and stay creative.

Future aspirations

As an athlete being fit, well, and healthy is critical to my success. I would love to see the concept of wellness as a whole being applied to every type of project that we work on so that everyone can reap the benefits.

Every day on the court is different. The opponent, the surface, the wind's blowing, the sun's in your face, you can't see the ball. My passion for fashion and interior design mirror those challenges I experience on the court and will allow me to continue evolving my story. **hd**

 Hear more from Venus Williams on *HD's "What I've Learned"* podcast at hospitalitydesign.com

be a legend **elena camps biondi**

By Alia Akkam

Photos by Ana Arrieche and courtesy of EleVen
by Venus Williams and Antiqua Collection

COLOR STORY

EleVen by Venus Williams' art director isn't afraid to be bold



Elena Camps Biondi was recently standing on a Florida dock when she was struck by the glimmering water surrounding her. "I could see these little ripples in the sea and it had an iridescence," she remembers. "To me, everything that I create has much to do with forms of nature."



Biondi in front of a mural she was commissioned to paint for the Antiqua Collection on its storefront in Miami's Wynwood neighborhood

As the art director at EleVen By Venus Williams, Camps Biondi often draws from the landscape for inspiration, and is particularly enthralled by the vibrant colors of her native Venezuela. Growing up there, crayons and blank paper were her “whole world. I had a vivid imagination. I still do,” she says.

Although her parents were artistic—her mother painted and her father made wood furniture—they weren’t keen on their daughter venturing into the design field. Camps Biondi compromised by studying advertising and then headed to Spain for a master’s degree in art direction. Buoyed by joyful childhood runs to the fabric shop with her grandmother, where she would pore over the cloths’ infinite patterns and wonder why they “had no end and no beginning,” she pursued a surface design program as well.

Back in South America, Camps Biondi founded a production company and also embraced her love of textiles by launching a handbag brand that garnered much national attention. But as the political situation in Venezuela worsened, she was forced to make a change: “What’s worse? Staying in the same place, where you don’t see a future, or just risking it

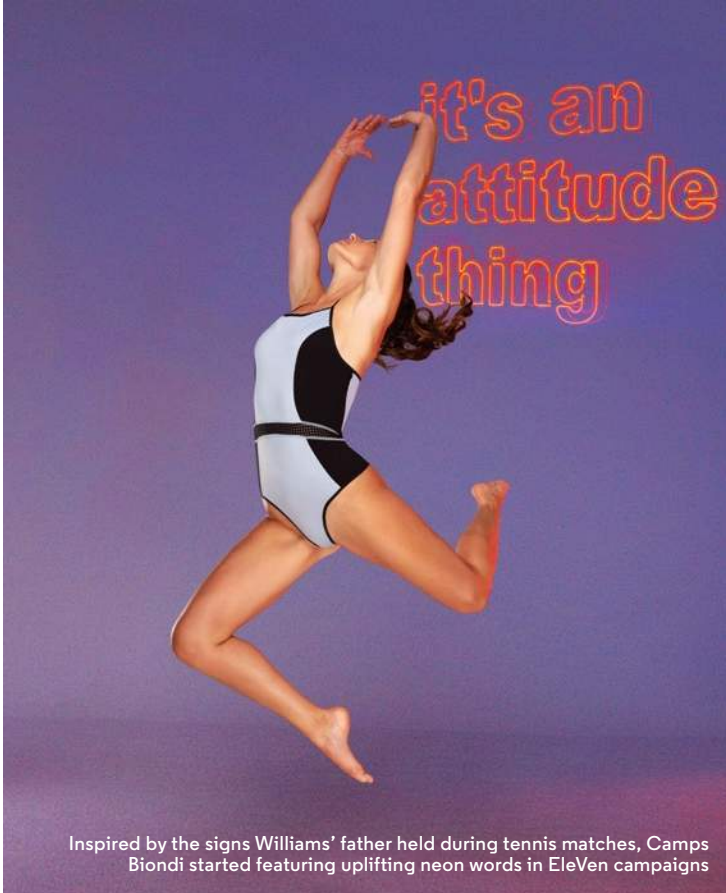
and leaving everything that you know for the uncertain?”

She decided to take the leap and found refuge in Panama, working in an advertising agency that looked after heavyweights like Nestlé and L’Oréal, until the States beckoned. Securing an American artist visa was an arduous process, but with that in hand, Camps Biondi was able to send out her resume, ultimately landing the job at EleVen and settling in Palm Beach in 2018.

At EleVen, Camps Biondi is a storyteller, nurturing ideas and melding her design and video skills for each new project as she works alongside Williams to refine all concepts. “What she’s envisioning,” Camps Biondi says of her boss, “I can put onto paper.”

Consider Neon Dreams. When the activewear collection, defined by standout splashes of hot pink and limeade, launched in early 2020, Camps Biondi looked to Williams’ past to piece together the ideal campaign. She recalled hearing how Williams’ father held signs emblazoned with empowering phrases like ‘Don’t Stop’ at Williams’ tennis matches, so she translated that memory to Neon Dreams, fittingly illuminating the word





Inspired by the signs Williams' father held during tennis matches, Camps Biondi started featuring uplifting neon words in EleVen campaigns

'Confident,' for instance, in neon. It's a visual that also carries over to the campaign for the soft and flirty Glam collection, which gives 'Strong' and 'Courageous' the spotlight.

Beyond her work at EleVen, Camps Biondi tackles independent projects. She designed the tropical Casa Paraiso range of swimsuits for the beachwear brand Antigua Collection, for instance, and painted a geometric mural onto the wall of its shop in Miami's Wynwood neighborhood. For Holy Shakes, an upbeat milkshake parlor in Doral, Florida, she dreamed up the branding and maximalist interior, mixing commanding elements like a bright terrazzo-patterned ceiling with neon signs.

No matter who Camps Biondi partners with, there is a sense of integrity that underpins her multifaceted work. "Venus always says you need to give to people," she says. "I'm not talking about charity; I'm talking about teaching what you know, helping others be better, showing different perspectives about design. I want to do good." **hd**



Limeade is one of the colors defining the Neon Dreams activewear collection

The gold, Swarovski crystal-adorned Wonder Woman Peak Windbreaker paired with the racerback Record Sports Bra and Player 7/8 Legging



be a legend **linda and brad johnson**

By Matt Dougherty

Photo courtesy of Post & Beam; rendering courtesy of V Starr

FAMILY BUSINESS

The husband-and-wife founders of Post & Beam Hospitality have a flair for narrative



Brad Johnson caught the design bug from his father. When Howard Johnson became the owner of popular nightclub the Cellar on Manhattan's Upper West Side in 1973, he turned it into a celebration of Black culture by displaying black and white photos of jazz luminaries throughout. "Just those touches made it personal and resonate with our customers," says Brad, whose first job was washing dishes at the restaurant. Growing into the role of operator, Brad managed to book Keith Sweat and Chris Rock as entertainment at the Cellar, and then moved to Los Angeles to pursue his own career as a restaurateur. It seemed he found his calling: His first project, nightclub and blues lounge the Roxbury in 1989, was a hit, and became the setting of the 1998 comedy *A Night at the Roxbury*.



Then, in 1993, he opened upscale Southern restaurant Georgia on Melrose Avenue with high-profile partners including basketball legend Norm Nixon and actor Denzel Washington. It was there that he was introduced to his future wife, Boston-raised Linda, by a mutual friend. "I admired his ability and approach to creating different rooms with warm and inviting hospitality," she says. "How customers feel in the space affects sales, how staff efficiently maneuver in the space affects labor, so design is critically important." They became fast friends, but when Linda helped Brad open New England seafood concept Menemsha in LA's beachfront Venice neighborhood, their relationship sprouted in different but complementary directions. Today, they're partners in life, and in business at Post & Beam Hospitality. "As CFO, Linda is clearly the more analytical and tends to bring reality to my crazy schemes and dreams," Brad says.

Together, they opened the midcentury modern restaurant Post & Beam in LA's Baldwin Hills neighborhood, which Brad points out is surrounded by the top three wealthiest Black communities in the U.S. Sourcing some of the furniture and fixtures from Craigslist and other secondhand sources, the space is decked out with atomic hanging lights, Eames dining chairs, vintage wrought-iron patio furniture, and pebble art. Now the Johnsons, with the help of V Starr, are restoring the iconic Sunset Lounge in West Palm Beach, Florida, where Louis Armstrong and Ike and Tina Turner once performed. "Paying homage to that era while also creating an unpretentious, sophisticated vibe is no small challenge," Brad says. "V Starr exceeded what I thought possible."

Despite the pandemic, the pair is exploring opportunities to extend the Post & Beam brand. "It's certainly not a time for the faint of heart," says Linda. "We chose to use this time for reflection, reorganization, and reprioritizing how we want to live and work." Brad's focus has been on writing, podcasting, and other forms of expression. "The hospitality industry, in particular restaurants, is a microcosm of the culture," he adds. "There is a neverending source of storytelling that is essential for honoring those who came before us, sharing the culture, and bringing people together." **hd**



A rendering of the forthcoming Sunset Lounge, a Jazz Age landmark in West Palm Beach that is being resuscitated by Post & Beam Hospitality and V Starr

be a legend **shai zelering**

By Matt Dougherty

Photos by Nathan Kirkman and courtesy of Brookfield



CLIENT CONFIDENTIAL

Form meets function for the managing director
at asset management company Brookfield



As managing director of Brookfield's real estate group, Shai Zelering oversees the company's comprehensive hospitality portfolio, which includes the upcoming overhaul of the iconic golf retreat PGA National Resort & Spa in West Palm Beach, Florida, and the recently opened bleisure hotel Yours Truly DC in the nation's capital. A Cornell University graduate with an MBA from Northwestern University, Zelering cut his teeth in all things hotels while at LXR Luxury Resorts and Hotels, then Blackstone's hotel operating platform, and

at Thayer Lodging (which was then acquired by and eventually absorbed by Brookfield). Though the COVID-19 pandemic has offered its challenges, Zelering says it has also allowed them to start multiple renovations. "We're going to step on the gas and be ready for recovery—that's the plan for 2021," he says. Here, he details his love for design, working with V Starr, and the effects of the pandemic.

On the importance of design

When you get into a space that is well designed, it automatically uplifts you and puts you in a great headspace. If I walk into a space that was thoughtfully designed—unpretentious but ambitious—it really changes the vibe and the whole energy around the people in the room. And you can see it. You can see hotels or venues that are designed for the masses versus those that are designed for serenity and with true hospitality in mind.



The bar at the South American-inspired Mercy Me in the Yours Truly DC hotel, the handiwork of Simeone Deary Design Group



Yours Truly DC's Living Room, filled with natural light, greenery, and rich tones

On buying the PGA National Resort & Spa

The PGA is the most amazing athletic retreat. We're renovating all five golf courses—some of them more expansively than others—and the tennis courts. We're going to be adding an activity pool with a lazy river. We're completely changing the restaurant scene to focus on a well-balanced diet. We're taking a hotel that has been a stagnant resort for a long time and we're polishing it. The reason we chose the PGA is that it has so many opportunities for families and individuals to benefit from a fantastic vacation, one that you come back from feeling much better [than when you left].



A rendering of the PGA National Resort & Spa's lobby, another collaboration with Simeone Deary

On working with V Starr on the PGA spa

When we bought the PGA in West Palm Beach, we were looking for local designers because what's important is that people get an experience that is different than what they would get at home. If somebody is coming from Georgia, the Northeast, Canada, wherever it is, they want to know that they are in a different place. They are looking for an escape. Secondly, we were looking for somebody who personally and professionally can really relate to the need for wellness, and there's nobody better at that than V Starr. There are some fantastic designers out there, but when you go and partner with an athlete who pushes their body to the max, they know exactly what the design should be like from a more layered perspective. It's not only paint and furniture, it's the mobility, serenity, and functionality; it's what makes sense for the body. Having that perspective was important specifically at PGA where people come for long days on the golf course or an intense tennis practice. This is the complete opposite of a beach retreat. It is an action-packed vacation where you need to take care of your body.



A king guestroom at the PGA National Resort & Spa, shown in a rendering

On post-pandemic hospitality

We're an industry that likes to throw parties. We design hotels that are used to celebrate, to hold conventions, or events. And all of a sudden it stopped. Mentally, it's difficult to keep people's heads in the game. I know as an industry we'll get through it and we will recover, and we'll benefit from the pent-up demand. We will all go through a phase that we need some healing. People are not made to be distant and away from their families, away from gatherings. After that, I think we will have an entrenched appreciation for social interactions—for having dinner at a restaurant, getting together with friends, going on vacations with the family. This has been a humbling experience in terms of not taking anything for granted. **hd**