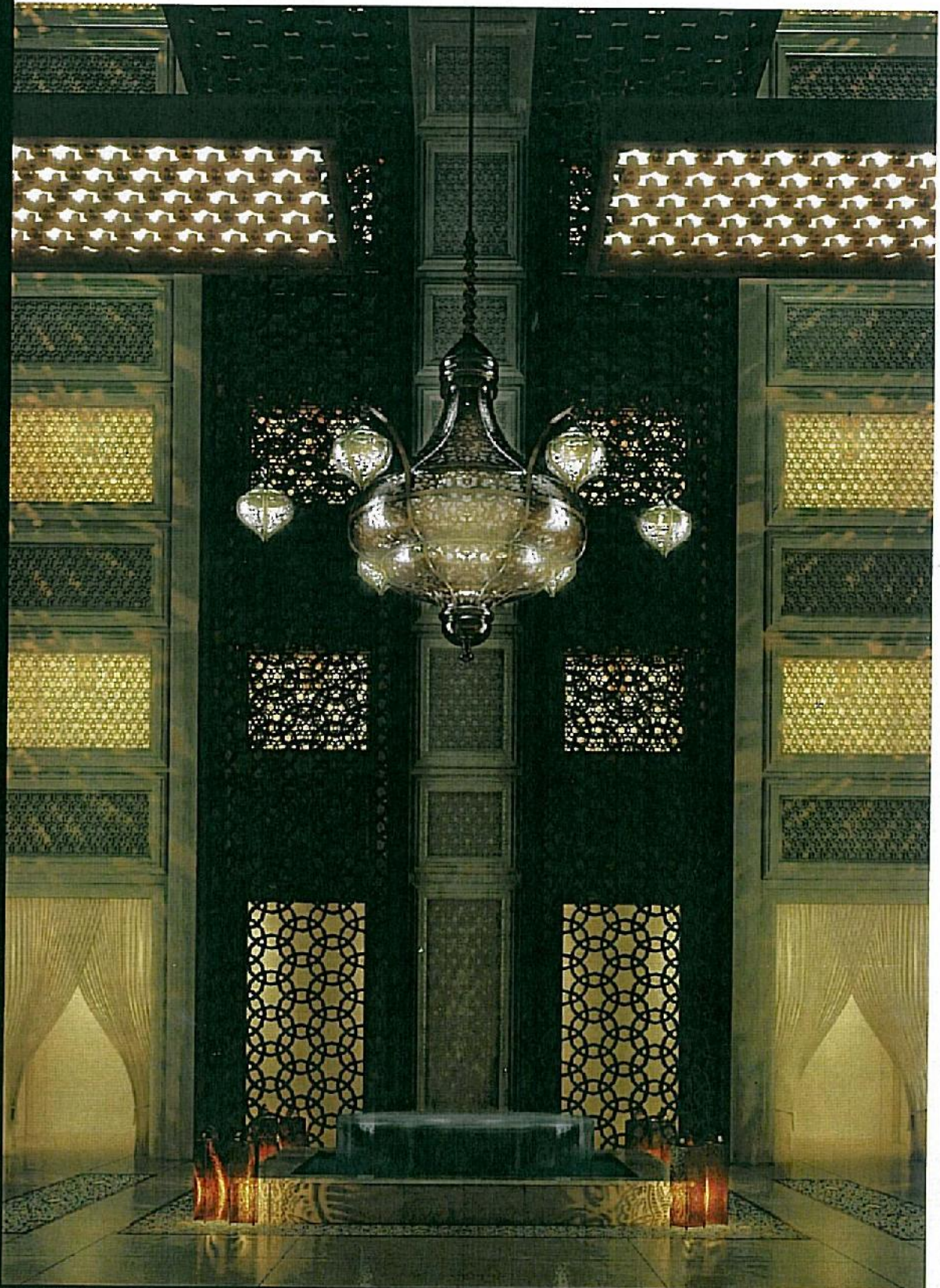


SPECIAL REPORT



DESIGN



DEFINING THE ULTIMATE HOSPITALITY EXPERIENCE

By Bev Hermanson

Circulating in the rarefied atmosphere of Givenchy, Six Sense, Chi and Amarita, as well as the developers of prestigious and exclusive international projects, the divas of the newly-created Darley Interior Architectural Design (DIAD) are carving a name for themselves in the high end hospitality, leisure and residential markets. In an exclusive interview with DESIGN> magazine, they shared some insights into their design philosophy and their vision for the future.

The DIAD design team: Shiree Darley – Managing Director, Amanda Elliott – Design Director, Sarah Forman – Creative Designer, Caroline Dann – Operations Director and Design Architect.



Offshore restaurant – trendy cocktail destination set amidst the ocean with undulating moods and sleek, contemporary finishes.

It was only last year that Shiree Darley, Caroline Dann, Amanda Elliott and Sarah-Jane Forman took the brave step-away from the world renowned, US-owned hospitality interiors giants, Wilson & Associates, to branch out on their own and establish a wholly South African-owned specialist interior architectural design service. Given the world recession and ongoing economic turmoil, this took a leap of faith and an unshakable confidence in their abilities, but the partners are upbeat and raring to go.

Proclaiming that they 'don't do mediocrity', these design divas consider pushing the boundaries to be their norm. Passionate about every aspect of their profession, they agree that starting DIAD has been the ultimate high of all of their careers. It's given them a sense of freedom and the support and encouragement that they have received from the industry has been exhilarating.

If you scan through the list of what they offer, you may well ask what landscaping-, swimming pool- and specialist water feature design may have to do with interior architecture? "When it comes to the hospitality industry, the seamlessness of the guest experience is paramount," answers DIAD Managing Director, Shiree Darley. "The effectiveness of the space begins at the Porte Cochère, from where the arrival experience has to follow through to the main reception lobby and the public spaces. For resort and leisure properties, where people love to experience the outdoors, the terraces, gardens and pool surrounds become part of the guest experience, so we have to extend our designs to encompass these areas, working hand-in-hand with the landscape architects."

While some local hospitality groups may still consider that interior architecture is secondary to the general architecture of buildings, internationally, interior design is seen as crucial to the success of a project and the

interior design architects are brought into the loop from the concept stages. Considering the fact that international groups are looking to expand further into Africa via South Africa, this is especially exciting for the partners at DIAD.

“Interior design architects can make an enormous difference to the guest experience,” continues Shiree. “While the guests don’t have any say over the way the interiors have been designed, or over the choices of colour schemes, fabrics and finishes that contribute to the ambience, they respond to how the experience feels. The décor and the functionality of the spaces, just as much as the quality of service they receive, determines whether a particular resort will be a favoured destination in the future.”

Shiree adds: “The interior designer’s role has certainly changed over the years. In the past, it was left up to

the architects to do all the construction design and documentation. In the early stages, many interior design practices didn’t even use CAD. We were regarded by some as ‘pillow fluffers’ who added a few accessories here and there. This has all changed. There are a lot more layers to what we do, and from a technical and architectural design standpoint, we provide valuable input towards the end result - hence our need to be involved right from the beginning.”

Design Director, Amanda Elliott’s penchant is for researching location specific cultures to establish a context and common thread for the individual project. This leads the design. Drawing inspiration from the traditions, topography, landscapes and views, the identities and attitudes of the interior spaces are devised and the ‘story’ is pieced together creating a script for the professional team.

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Hotel lobby terrace opening up to ocean views with comfortable conversation areas expanding on Arabic traditions.

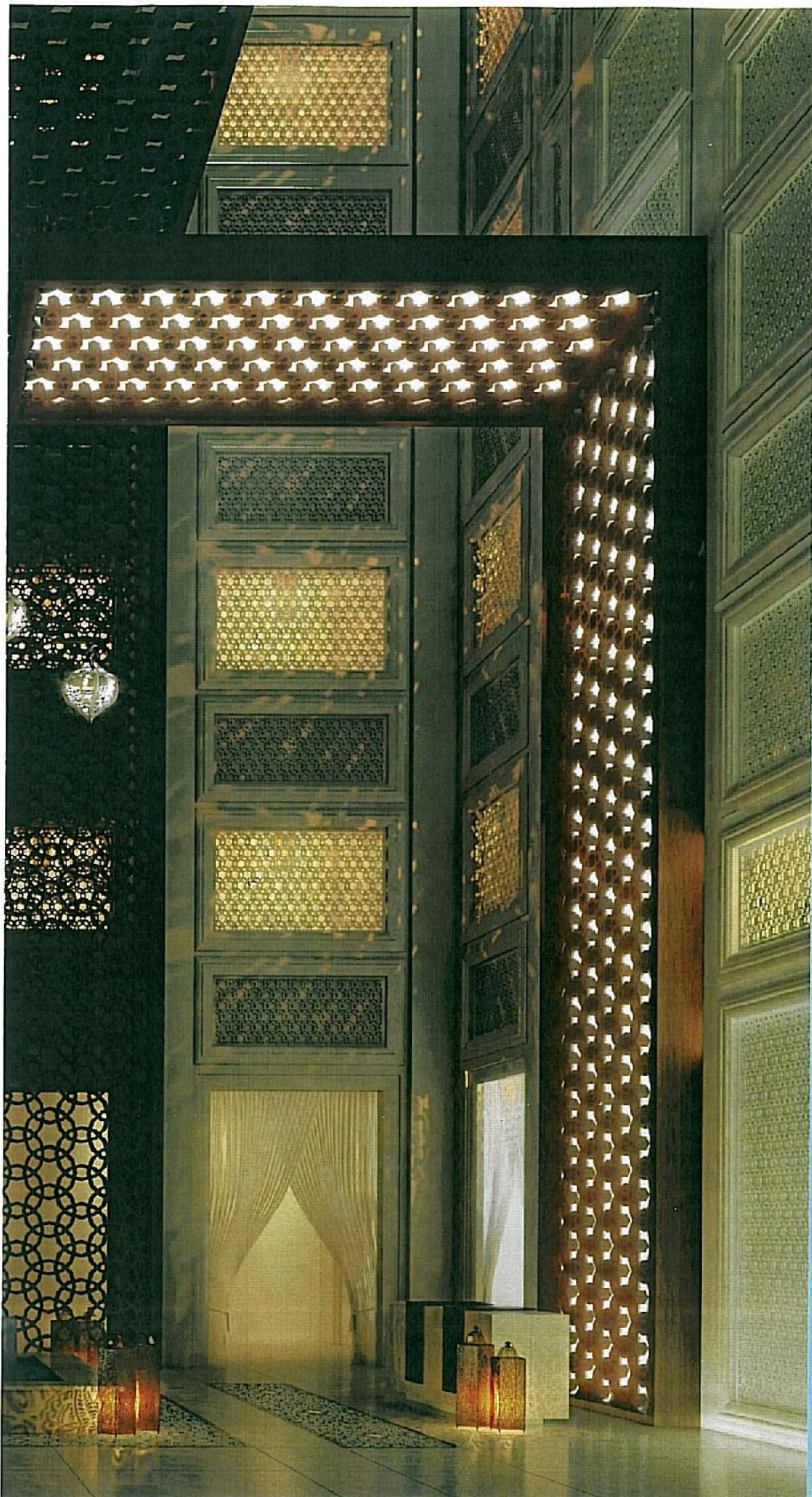
“The story gives the building a sense of place. Once we establish the vision, it’s easy to elaborate. The background research gives you so much to work with. Then you start to add the ‘atmosphere’ and decide what aspects create an exciting guest journey throughout the interiors,” Amanda explains.

“We also try to design so that the spaces are not difficult to understand and are easy to maintain,” adds, Caroline Dann. Her skill is ensuring the functionality of the spaces, which is critical when it comes to getting hospitality establishments to operate smoothly. Sporting a Bachelor of Architecture Degree and having had more than 10 years’ experience working in Europe, Caroline understands that the correct juxtaposition of spaces is vitally important to the success of the operation, “... this extends to determining the

correct spatial volumes,” she elaborates. “The guest may not be able to pinpoint what it is that makes a particular space work, but we need to create the right ‘zone’ for them. We also have to ensure that the operations management relates to the spaces and that the design interpretation for the interiors will withstand management turnovers.

An important aspect of space planning for hotel guestrooms concerns the relationship between the bedroom and the bathroom. “Bathrooms a few years back formed roughly a third of the en suite accommodation,” Caroline continues. “But these days it’s pretty much 50:50. The top end hotel groups aim at creating distinguishing signature features, unique design elements including private view windows, outdoor bathrooms and integrated feature baths.”





Yemen lobby: Elegant, contemporary Middle Eastern Hotel Lobby with subtle Arabic interpretation and creative use of architectural elements to humanize the high, narrow volume.



A suite in a private residence Middle East.

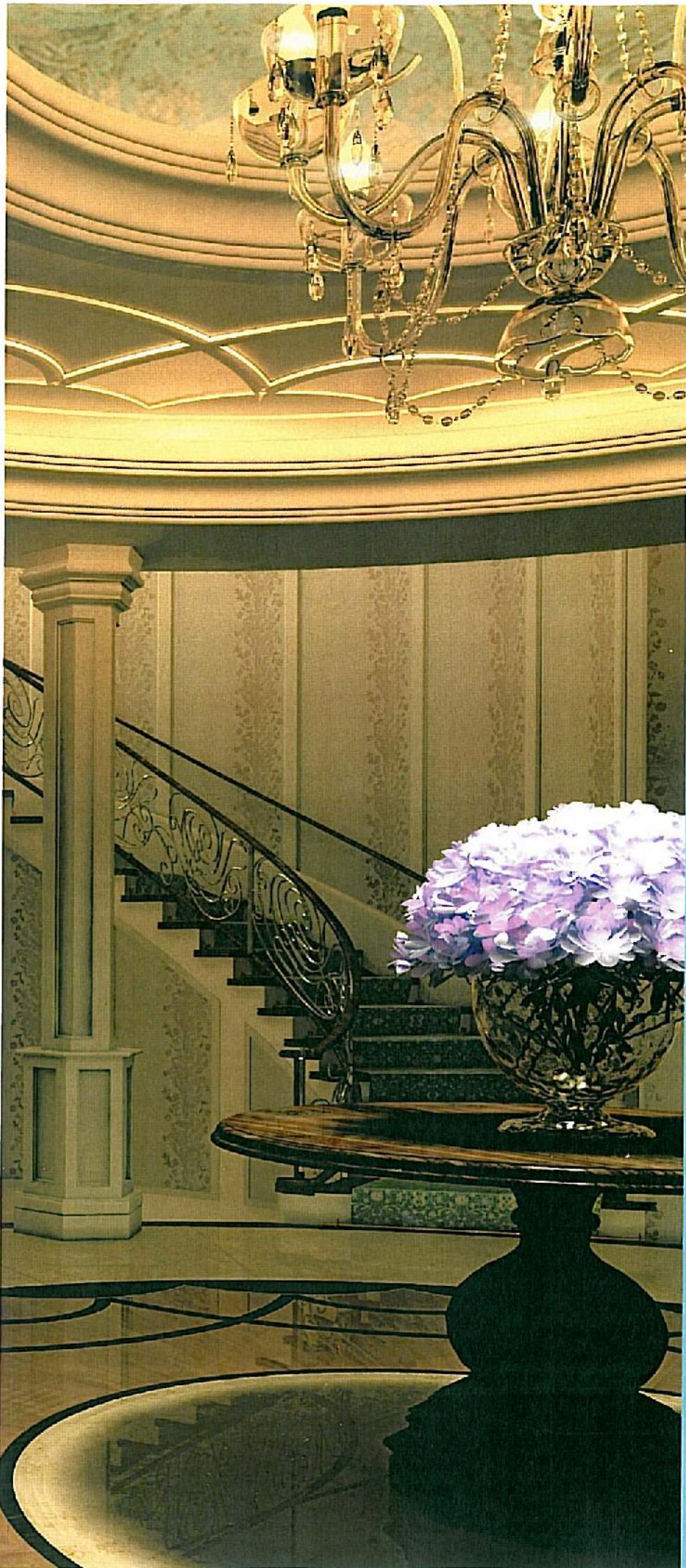
The saying 'it's all in the details' is often bandied about when it comes to hospitality and here, Creative Designer, Sarah-Jane Forman, comes into her own. The detailing starts in the conceptual stage and Sarah works extensively with the suppliers to achieve the right moods, textures and finishes to suit each project. "It can be an interior designer's downfall – not following through with the detail," she says. "The identity of the establishment does not only encompass logos on stationery and the personality of the wayfinding signage, but extends as far as the nuances of tableware design, the sizes and shapes of the glassware, the colours used for the accessories, even the bathroom fittings, the value-add brand name bathroom cosmetics and the contents of the mini bar."

Some of the intangibles that reflect on the image of the establishment include the acoustics, the lighting and the technology. "Hotels have to be very up-to-date with technology, particularly if they are appealing to

business travellers. These days, there are even plasma TVs in the bathrooms, so that the business traveller can catch up on world news while bathing. Plasma screens can be built into the mirrors, so that they are discreetly part of the décor," says Shiree. "Hairdryers, plug points for cell phone chargers, iPod plug-ins and wireless connectivity are also part of the offering of the hi-tech hotel. But it's very important that all of these things are easy to understand and simple to operate – they must be user-friendly, otherwise they become a source of frustration to the guest."

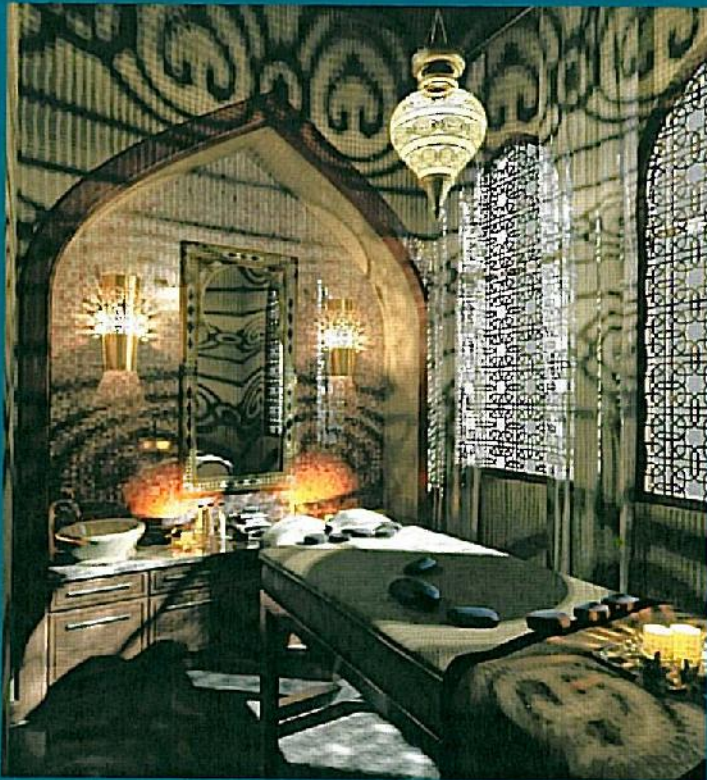
With the impending influx of more international resort operators, another aspect of hospitality that has to be taken very much to heart is the environmental consciousness of the operation. In South Africa you can still find yourself on a construction site where you are almost overwhelmed by the fumes from solvents and paints that, clearly, are not eco-friendly. Overseas, CE and other quality standards subscribed to do not allow





A 4000 m² private residence in the
Middle East with a French flavour.

DESIGN >



Spa treatment room with a peaceful serenity created with the juxtaposition of texture and lighting, maintaining the simplicity of design.

the use of any materials or substances that have detrimental long term effects or could be harmful to the people using or working with the facilities or materials. These requirements are second nature to the partners at DIAD, as they have all worked extensively in the international arena.

"It has become an international norm now that new developments have to achieve a certain number of points to achieve compliance with sustainable standards. The use of grey water for irrigation, using heat from air conditioners to heat water, the biodegradability of laundry detergents and energy efficiency are all aspects that have to be considered. It becomes part of the professional consultants' responsibility to ensure that there are no toxins in the paints, that the adhesives do not give off fumes and that the furniture and fabrics are from environmentally compliant manufacturers. It's very rewarding that we, as designers, can make that difference and play a role towards assisting our clients achieve the suitable 'green' status grading. The

discerning guest is becoming more and more aware of these issues and is definitely seeking out the establishments with the correct eco-ratings," Shiree states. "We are very conscious of these parameters and we do everything that we can to ensure, wherever we can, that sustainable products are specified in our designs. It is wonderful that we can make a difference at this level."

Part of the DIAD equation is that the partners, with their combined 37 years' experience working on over 50 projects worldwide, have the ability to understand local conditions, yet they are raising the bar to satisfy the demands of the global fast track in hospitality and leisure. "South Africans are highly respected overseas," concludes Shiree. "In Africa, we often have to find ten ways to do one thing, to circumvent the myriad of challenges that we face. This has given us a reputation of being tenacious and for thinking 'out of the box'. These are just a small part of the qualities, skills and talents that we have to offer." <