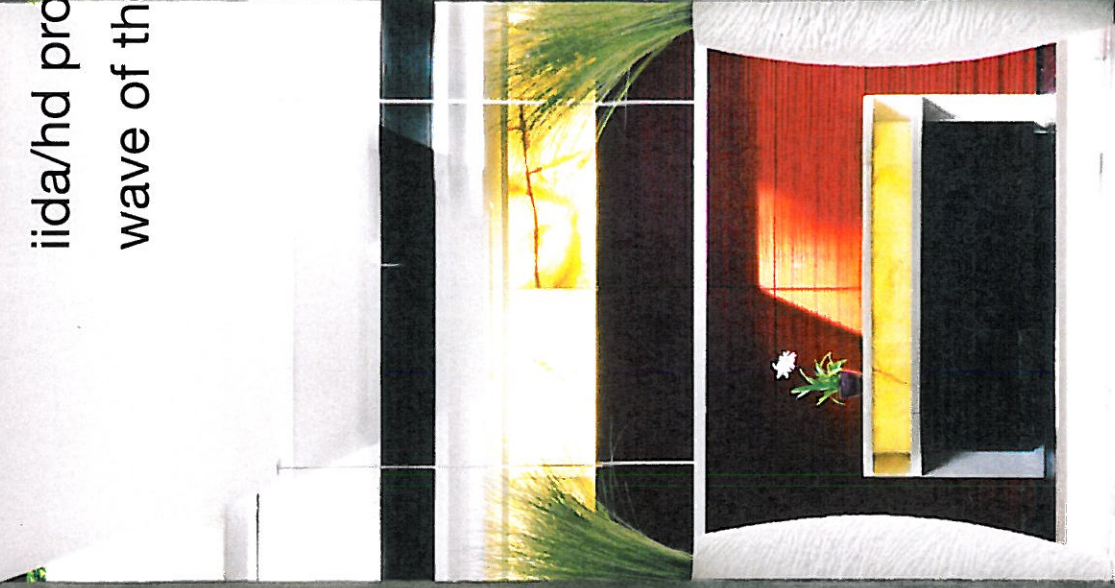


september 2008 hdmag.com

hospitality design

the seductive world of spa
iida/hd product winners
wave of the future 2008



Denise Corso
CorsoStaicoff
Portland
www.corsostaicoff.com

Denise Corso has always loved art, architecture, and design. But it took her until college to realize her passion could become a career. “In my third year, I threw out the notion that I was ‘supposed to’ major in business or teaching,” the 38-year-old says. “I started over and followed my dream of becoming a designer.”

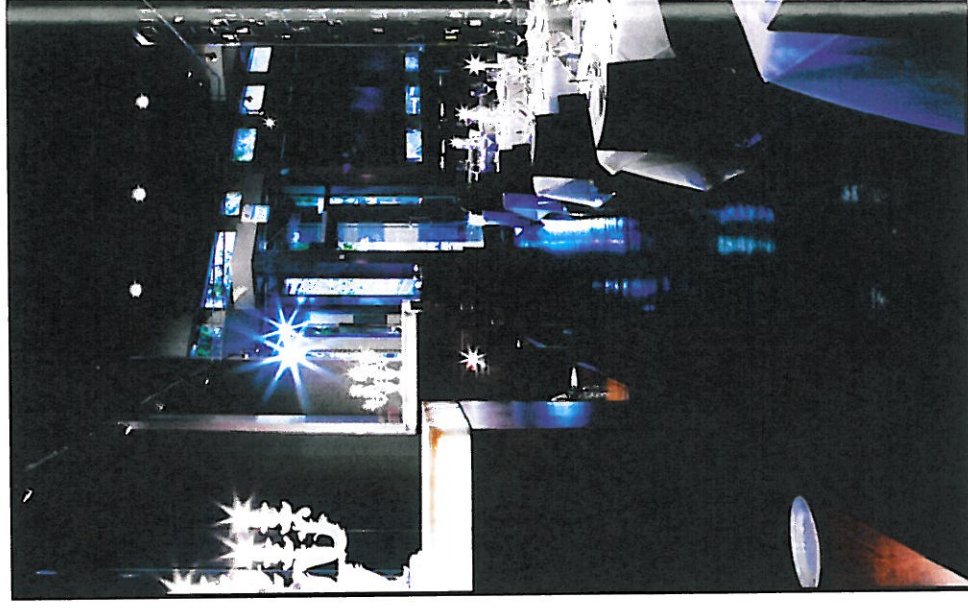
Her dream became a reality when she worked for Jim Staicoff (now her business partner) at Soderstrom Architects in Portland. “He tapped my passion for design,” she says of her mentor. After he left to start his own company, she went on to work at Ankrom Moisan Associated Architects. It was here that she got her big break: an introduction to hospitality design working on the Hotel Lucia. “It changed the direction of my career and gave me the confidence to forge ahead in the profession.”

But it wasn’t until she moved on to NBBJ in Seattle that she got an even bigger, life-altering break. “Provenance Hotels—the owners of the Hotel Lucia—asked me to design a hotel for them in Seattle,” explains Corso, who describes her style as modern and a bit edgy. “It was an opportunity I could not pass up.” So she set up a cramped office on the job site, hired a couple of designers and architects, and got to work. It was after she completed the Hotel Max (which celebrates local artists) that she merged with Staicoff to form CorsoStaicoff.

Her favorite project? The Hotel Murano in Tacoma, Washington, where she inventively transformed an old Sheraton into a boutique property centered around glass art—she worked with curator Tessa Papas and more than 40 artists from around the world to fill the hotel—to honor the fact that Tacoma is home to the Museum of Glass and Dale Chihuly’s birthplace. (It grabbed her a Hospitality Design Judges’ Award for Best Use of Art.) “The opportunity to work with famous glass artists such as Costas Varotos and Orfeo Quagliata was a once in a lifetime opportunity,” she says. “The team did not just design a hotel, we designed an experience. I believe it is the only hotel of its type in the world.”

Next up: A high-end hair salon, a few restaurants, a lounge/wine bar, a hotel renovation, and she’s hoping a couple of hotel opportunities overseas come through. “It would be an awesome experience to work with other cultures and break out of our comfort zone,” she says.

Why hospitality You are allowed to break the rules. It’s about coming up with the next best experience [and] you have to break the rules to do that. **First reality check** Waking up and realizing I was part owner in a design firm, that I wasn’t playing ‘office.’ It was the real deal. **Most challenging part of the job** Managing time, budget, and the creative process. In this profession you’re expected to be creatively insane yet rational. **Best part of the job** The ‘aha’ moment when you know you’re onto something. **Guilty pleasure** Red wine, stinky cheese, and sleeping in **Cities I am watching** Dubai and the Dominican Republic **Space I love** The Tate Museum in London by Herzog & de Meuron **Product I admire** Today I love the Luxo Great-1 floor lamp, Hella Jogerius and Paul Smith’s textiles for Maharam, and anything Moooi **Will wear anything by** Diane Von Furstenberg **Success is** Making a difference in someone’s life.





Clockwise from left: The lobbies of Hotel Modera in Portland; Hotel Max in Seattle; and Hotel Murano in Tacoma, Washington; the dining room of Barolo Ristorante in Seattle. (Photos of the Max and Murano lobbies by David Phelps; photo of the Modera lobby by Dan Tyrpak.)

