

teddy mayer

Vice President of Design

Virgin Hotels
Miami

Growing up in Boise, Idaho, army brat Teddy Mayer (he was one of six, born in Kansas, then lived in Germany and California before moving to Idaho when he was 5) remembers "always creating environments from anything I could find," he says, including a playhouse out of a refrigerator box, complete with curtains.

It made sense then that he headed to the University of Idaho to double major in architecture and interior design, staying on to teach and get his master's degree in architecture. His big break came when he met Farid Iskander from SOM at an internship fair at Jacob K. Javits Convention Center in New York—he first interned at the company's Manhattan office, and after graduation, he joined the firm fulltime. "It was a great place to continue my education and training, and it was how I was introduced to hospitality design—I love the industry," he says, adding that he worked on projects for W Hotels and the James brand while there. Plus, it gave him confidence: "Coming from a small school in Idaho I held my own and even excelled over peers that attended New York and Ivy League schools."

Five years later, "I felt I had learned enough about the industry from a design perspective," he says, and "I wanted to learn about it from the operator-owner side." He jumped at the chance to take on a director of design and development role at Morgans Hotel Group "because of the importance they placed on design, and building on the legacy Ian Schrager left behind was also exciting," he adds.

His most challenging project during his seven years at Morgans was the Mondrian South Beach. He explains: "There were so many factors working against us. It was

Marcel Wanders' first hotel in the U.S., building in Miami is very tricky politically, and there was a lot of time spent onsite in the summer without air conditioning. It was also a great lesson in putting your ego aside. The design was one that I would not have created myself, but I was able to help execute the vision by embracing the concept and looking at the bigger picture for the Mondrian brand's growth."

However, the Ames hotel in Boston is one of his proudest accomplishments. "It is a beautifully restored historic building and the interior design [by Rockwell Group and design architect Cambridge Seven

Associates] was an even blend of historic and contemporary."

After a brief stint as director of hospitality for Gensler New York, where he helped build a local interiors practice, Mayer was given the chance to head up design for another innovative brand, Virgin Hotels, which was just gaining momentum. He joined the company and moved to its Miami headquarters after the inaugural property, the Virgin Hotels Chicago, opened in 2015. Now, with six active projects, Mayer says "it is exciting to see the brand come to life with a unique design for each neighborhood while still being unmistakably Virgin. The

challenge of creating the spirit of a brand and a rich guest experience without being cookie cutter is very rewarding."

He's looking forward to the upcoming Nashville project, located on an acre plot on the city's famed Music Row. Yet translating the Virgin brand into a hotel is not always an easy task: "Some hotel owners are used to doing things their way, so it can take some time to educate them on the Virgin approach," he says.

Mayer's personal style? "Simple and modern but casual and comfortable—not too fussy. I love the shoe brand Common Projects and clothing brand A.P.C." The architects and designers he admires include Faye Toogood, Dimore Studio, Tristan Auer, Apparatus Studio, and Lee Broom. "I know I should read more," he says, but movies are his guilty pleasure. "It is so nice to unplug and go to the movies. Plus, there's the popcorn."

As for his definition of success, "I heard [director] John Waters say, 'Not having to work with assholes,' and I love that!"

Select Completed Projects

Mondrian South Beach, by Marcel Wanders
Ames Hotel Boston, by Rockwell Group, Cambridge Seven Associates, and the Morgans in-house team
Delano Las Vegas, by the Morgans in-house team with MGM
Bungalow 8, London, by India Mahdavi

Select Projects on the Boards

Virgin Hotels in Nashville (design by Mark Zeff and architecture by BLUR Workshop and Hastings); New York (architecture by VOA); Palm Springs; New Orleans; and Dallas



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