

LUXURY WITHOUT COMPROMISE

Robb Report

SINGAPORE

Future Calling

Cartier's new Tank Must SolarBeat unites its design legacy with pioneering sustainability



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EDITOR'S LETTER

Designed by Jean-Michel Gathy, the much-anticipated Aman New York pays homage to the Crown Building's striking architecture and significant history.

IN AN INTERVIEW with Jean-Michel Gathy, the principal designer of Denniston and a bona fide legend in the upper reaches of hospitality design, he surmises that an artist's sensibilities are not actually cultivated, but are, in fact, an organic result of being involved with certain forms of art. "The sensitivity is then subconsciously translated into shape, form and design," he says. "It is not a physical or intellectual process; rather it is a natural development of one's sensitivity."

For Gathy, whose 40-year career has yielded a multitude of design accolades and regular invitations to be a jury member at the International Design Awards, the expression of his art is a completely natural one which flows from his being. "You would probably never ask an artist why they paint a picture a certain way or how they picked a certain colour," he observes. "They would probably say that shade of blue was just the right colour because it simply felt like it. It is very natural, at least for me."

In the following pages of this November issue, our tribute to design and home transports you to all manner of places and brings you close to many design geniuses. In Ibiza, meet a couple who created a vacation home inspired by the artwork of Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson. The final result maximises the property's picturesque natural setting and resembles, to a large degree,

a work on canvas. There's also time to introduce futurism in the form of 3D-printed furniture. These scintillating and wondrous pieces are becoming a genuine alternative to achieving highly bespoke pieces.

Then, be whisked onto the palatial spaces of full-bodied yachts, a trend of the present. With the recent global events, a new generation of owners prefer life at sea than exploring foreign shores.

Our issue explores the idea of design in sound, with stories of how luxury brands create the exact tone to infer refinement or, in the case of the automotive makers, a throaty roar or smooth purr to fully express the promise of power and performance on a fully electric – and mightily silent – vehicle.

Read on also for our coverage of how first-class cabins have been updated to cater to those taking to the skies, and take a gander at our monthly restaurant and bar round-up by senior editor Hannah Choo to discover your next new favourite joint for the weekend to come.

Enjoy the issue.

Robb Report Singapore Editors

JEAN-MICHEL GATHY

From Aman New York to the Four Seasons Bangkok, the designer's work has been instrumental in making travellers feel an exquisite sense of arriving at somewhere quite special.

Words: Kenneth Tan
Photography: Ken Seet

IT'S BEEN 40 years since Jean-Michel Gathy decamped to Asia from his native Belgium, arriving to a new world in 1981. Not that this was anything surprising. Since he was a child, Gathy would be tasked to organise family holidays across Europe, where his talent and inclination for geography and architecture would shine. This instinct to find the magic in new destinations led him to found Denniston – an architecture office that specialises in designing for a specific niche: luxury hotels, residences and the hospitality sector. Gathy would soon form the core of the Three Musketeers who established the DNA of Aman Resorts from its formative days. This year, the first urban Aman Resort in the US opens in New York's century-old Crown Building and, across its 83 guest rooms and 20 private homes, one finds Gathy's signature touch of what he refers to as inspiration from his 'travel experience library'.

What are some of your earliest inspirations?

I have travelled my whole life. My 'travel experience library' has been building up unconsciously in my mind every day. There has neither been one particular element that changed my life, nor one experience that has specifically thrilled me. Rather, it's the thousands of collective experiences that have established my growth as an individual.

When I design, these elements and my experiences progressively accumulate and express themselves without prompting. It is as natural as how the people from the countryside, whether in Morocco, Bhutan or any other places, live simply and build their homes with the resources they have. They would build their house to balance the weather and put a roof in stone because that is readily available to them. They would paint the walls white in a hot country because it reflects heat, or dark in a cold country because it absorbs heat.

Why did you take on the Aman New York project?

(It was) a challenge to conquer. We were tasked to transform an old office building into a contemporary hotel. That is fundamentally complicated because in this former office building known as the Crown Building, the architect designed the floor plans to maximise square footage, and therefore potential rent income. In contrast, hotels are not about square footage. Hotels are about service, guest experiences, amenities, food and beverages and yet, to support that, you will need good flow, operations and an appropriate 'back of the house'. To the benefit of the guests, we turned this challenge into an opportunity.

PHOTOGRAPHY: AMAN RESORTS, FOUR SEASONS HOTELS AND RESORTS.





Top: Jean-Michel Gathy curated the art collection at Four Seasons Hotel Bangkok at Chao Phraya River.

Centre: Aman New York's dramatic 10th-floor double-height Sky Lobby features subtle Asian influences in tribute to Aman's Asian roots.

Above: Aman New York's 83 guest rooms each have a functioning fireplace - a rarity for the city.

Your work with Aman has taken you through its early years to today. What is your observation of elements that have remained and what has evolved?

I have been part of the Aman team from the first day, being part of the trio that established Aman's DNA in terms of design; architecture, interior and landscape architecture. I would compare our progression to Porsche which has consistently improved for over 70 years without changing its look, its feel, its purpose, its DNA and therefore, its clientele.

What kind of projects attract you most?

A project with a challenge. I like a physical challenge like a historical place, an old building, a gorgeous lake or a view to the mountains. I like when the project has personality and an identity, or if the site is challenging. It invigorates me to dig deep into my resources and my brain to find a solution. If it is too easy, I find it boring.

Your biggest career challenge in memory?

One challenging project was Amanwana on the island of Moyo in 1989, where no contractor wanted to go due to the inaccessibility. My firm had to organise the construction despite the fact that we are architects/designers and not builders. There was no way of landing on the island and there was no water, no electricity, no facilities. It was extremely difficult, logistically speaking. It took us three years to build something that should have been quite simple if we had the right equipment and landing craft. We ended up doing everything 'by hand' in a sense, so the result almost feels like a sculpture. That was very challenging.

Where do you find calm?

The ultimate peaceful view for me is a lake with snow-capped mountains behind it. I also feel calm when I am on a wildlife safari in Africa or India, or when I am designing. In my office, I am surrounded by 180-degree views from big windows, yet I would rarely ever notice when night has fallen. I feel utterly at peace when I am focused on my designs and I would be unaware of my surroundings.

After almost 40 years of Denniston and a great career, what would you say has been your most valuable lesson in your professional career?

Recently, I was interviewed by students from Switzerland who asked me the same question. I told them to study what they love and not think about the path to material wealth or what they are instructed to do in their life. You need to love what you do and hone your craft well because eventually, success will follow. That is my secret. I do what I love with passion and I work extremely hard.

What else would you like to design in your lifetime?

A hotel on the moon. People are designing hotels under the sea and the like, but those remain accessible. The moon would be extremely interesting to work on because of all its characteristics and challenges. I would certainly need substantial technical advice to proceed with such a project. (Laughs) I would like to design the first hotel on the moon and I would recommend that hotel be named Mars! 🇺🇸