



“Clarity and poetry are not mutually exclusive”

INTERVIEW: ANNA RAYMANN

Mia Kepenek designs private homes and business premises as carefully as a chef puts together their dishes. She spoke to design journalist Anna Raymann about how she creates atmospheres.

MIA KEPENEK'S SPACES

Mia Kepenek grew up in Stuttgart among the opulent stage sets of the state theater. After training as a carpenter and studying to become an architect, interior designer and scenographer, she initially worked for the stage herself until she devoted herself entirely to her passion for interior design. Kepenek has been making a name for herself as an interior designer since 2012 with her Zurich-based studio for corporate architecture, interior architecture and design. Her design signature can be found, for example, in the VIU flagship store in Zurich, in the Sky Lounge in the Schindler visitor center, and in sensitive remodeling projects for private individuals. kepenek.ch



How does a space have to look to make you feel good?

I personally love an interior design that is harmonious and coherent – and I don't have the slightest problem with using a term like beauty even today. For me, it describes something special about spaces that is difficult to grasp, but palpable: When I am welcomed and accepted by all the things, colors and materials that make up a space. When everything works together, enters into a quiet, subtle dialog, radiates hospitality and closeness – then I feel comfortable in a space. And that's exactly the atmosphere I want to create in each case.

When did you realize you had a talent for creating interior design moods?

I came into contact with a very special place at an early age: the Staatstheater Stuttgart with its opera. As that's where my parents worked. My father designed stage sets, my mother created costume designs. I grew up in the theater, so to speak. And to experience such an opulent, generous space with all my senses and to be able to look behind the scenes, into the workshops as a child – that had a great impact on me. So I got to know the different trades in a theater at an early age, made friends with craftsmen, watched them at work and even gave them orders! All of this

With the “Record Room”, Mia Kepenek stages 20,000 records from a private collection. The bright room perfectly accentuates the colorful covers.



The famous Sigg bottles were once produced at Walzmühle.

The existing shed was converted into eight spacious loft apartments.



left its mark on me. I carry these memories and experiences with me – and they have created the desire in me to rethink spaces themselves. To transform them.

How do you combine home trends and the space's character?

Of course, I've been following home trends for years, visiting international trade shows, exchanging ideas with colleagues, reading magazines and blogs.

And yet it's important to me to also step back and maintain a certain distance from some trends. Because creating spaces with character also means creating something that isn't flashy and

will last. As a designer, it is important to me to sensitively combine functions and emotions. Clarity and poetry are not mutually exclusive.

Quite the opposite: I want to make things talk in a space, I want them to tell stories. Like, for example, the bar counter I created out of a million-year-old boulder. It brings the Swiss Alps into the space and becomes a symbol of my client's "Swissness". A rock as an eye-catcher – and at the same time a counter that no one who has seen it will ever forget.

You bring a lot of international experience to your projects. Which countries and cities have influenced you?

That's true. Each of the countries I have worked in so far has shaped me culturally. Starting with Australia, where I lived for two years in Melbourne and Sydney, among other places. But my decision to work in Amsterdam also helped me personally. Innovations and ideas count for a lot there – projects are approached in a fun manner with an open mind. And now I have been a designer in Switzerland for many years, where quality and precision are important. All this has completed me as a designer and broadened my spectrum.

You design private homes as well as large lounge and restaurant areas in companies for very



The bar counter, made out of a seven-ton boulder, represents Schindler's "Swissness".

Mia Kepenek designed the exclusive Sky Lounge for the new Schindler visitor center.



different requirements: How do you know which mood suits your client?

Close, open dialog based on trust is crucial to find the appropriate aesthetic language. You have to understand the history and values of a company and translate them in design terms to be able to achieve a credible result as a designer. All this can only be accomplished by listening, thinking and mutual understanding. And that's exactly what I strive for when working with my private clients.

How important is teamwork to you?

Fortunately, I can rely one hundred percent on my very experienced team.

I know exactly what my employees' strengths are and try to make the best possible use of each and every one of them so they can fully develop their creativity. Of course, I also get fully involved in every project myself and am always kept up to date on the status of things. For example, it goes without saying for us to adhere to costs and deadlines in order to ensure a smooth process. But above all, we are committed to developing truly innovative, tailor-made ideas.

And what, in turn, gives a space that personal touch?

There's no magic formula and that's why I deliberately decided against a recognizable style. Because every space

is different and my clients appreciate the fact that I come up with very individual and sometimes surprising solutions for them. With this attitude we always find new, fresh concepts with a very personal, unique character.

ANNA RAYMANN is a trained designer and works as a design and culture journalist for "CH Media", "Hochparterre" and other media.