

RIVIERA

1ST ANNIVERSARY ISS

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HOME FRONT DESIGN

BY STACY N. HARRIS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BOB ALLEN



BAR BUTERA (clockwise from left): Designer Barclay Butera of the revamped L'Auberge in Del Mar. Below: The hotel's beach-chic lobby. Above: The W's new look.

THE ROOM BOOM!

From Downtown to Del Mar, A-hot designers are upping S.D.'s hotel scene

Air kisses, Andre! Hello, dahling Thomas! Looking fab, Barclay! Great to see you, Martin! As San Diego continues to *ouduo*-itself with its hotel and restaurant scene, some of the country's big-name interior designers are employing va-va-voom looks to replace the local staples. Just take David Rockwell: For the soon-to-open Setai Downtown, the award-winning New York City-based designer (he also did Nobu in the Hard Rock) is creating a wowing statement in the lobby with a floating staircase, backed by a 4-D art installation of thousands of handmade ceramic fins. The hotel restaurant, for its part, will don a signature dramatic look courtesy of L.A. hot shot Dodd Mitchell. And let's not forget that *Queen Eye for the Straight Guy* star Thom Filicia, who recently retooled the W San Diego's lobby and restaurant.

SoCal designers are fast becoming major players on the uber-luxe hotel scene. For example, designer Barclay Butera (his coffee-table book is hot off the press from French publishing house Assouline) recently handled the oh-so-beachy-chic redo of L'Auberge Del Mar to the tune of \$25 million. With so many stunning spaces to work with, Butera has created the ultimate coandrum at the property: Where to sit? The ocean-view terrace (with steak, water features and classic cabanas), or the gorgeous lobby (boasting seashell-encrusted credenzas, a baby grand and cozy settees for light bites)? "I wanted to surprise the community and create a new destination resort," says Butera.

Come this fall, James Beard Award-winning designer Andre Kikooki (also New York-raised) will complete the L'Auberge Del Mar package with its much ballyhooed (and still unnamed) restaurant. Think Santa Monica beach house meets four-star resort oasis for the indoor-outdoor space, which will feature an open kitchen, two bars, and a private dining room that doubles as a wine cellar. Design highlights? An elegant palette of cream and white,



rich leathers, dark millwork, bubbled glass antique mirrors, a waterwall, a sexy tiled fireplace, private outdoor cabanas surrounding a firepit, and a lush landscaped garden. "San Diego is a magical place with the perfect combination of an outdoor lifestyle melded with all that is good about life: beautiful beaches, superb people, great hotels and fantastic restaurants," says the Salk Institute lover, who is now working on transforming a very straightforward builder's contemporary home in Long Beach.

For the W's relaunch, the hotel threw a blowout hosted by Filicia and Nicky Hilton, attended by action sports pros like MTV's Ryan Sheckler and Carey Hart. As the first boutique property downtown, the W needed to keep up with the Joneses—namely, the Ivy, the Hard Rock and the Setai, where Rockwell is bringing in all his fave artists. It shed its *minimal-chic* image, mixing out the SoCal vibe with a surf painting over the lobby bar and surf fins lining a wall.

Meanwhile, New York City architect Martin Valera just completed Jai by Wolfgang Puck at the La Jolla Playhouse. "I love driving on the steep winding roads in La Jolla and looking at the precariously perched houses on the hillside," he says. "I wanted to do a project here so I could get a feel for what the lifestyle is like." Inspired by Philip Johnson's Glass House, the restaurant's design hinges around the bar and the cantilevered back bar, replete with sleek Onda stools from Design Within Reach.

So what does S.D. still need, per Kikooki? "More direct flights from New York City." ■

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