

SPACE

INTERNATIONAL HOTEL DESIGN

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LINDA BORONKAY

FOUNDER AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR,
LINDA BORONKAY DESIGN STUDIO

According to Linda Boronkay, luck, serendipity, and being prepared, is the recipe for success...

WORDS BY EMMA KENNEDY

AT A GLANCE

Recent projects include

Osborn House: Southern Highlands in Australia.

In the pipeline 2025

Sir Prague, Prague

Thompson Rome.

Undisclosed 5- star hotel renovation, Nice

Growing up in a city famed for its architectural splendour and rich history will inevitably leave its mark. Throw into the mix creative parents happy to indulge a culturally inquisitive child, a house filled with objets d'art and antiques, and the result might look something like Linda Boronkay.

Born and raised in Budapest, Linda grew up convinced her future belonged in fashion. Fulfilling her ambition, she travelled extensively, before realising her true calling was in interior design. Having secured her place in the interiors world as Design Director at Soho House, her future looked certain. And then the Pandemic hit, followed by a series of chance events, resulting in the launch of her eponymous studio. Now in its fourth year, with a growing portfolio of celebrated projects, and many more in the pipeline, she is more in demand than ever. Not wanting to get ahead of myself, I start by asking Linda to take me back to her childhood.

"Growing up in Budapest undoubtedly influenced me from a very early age," she begins. "I think we always underestimate the impact of our surroundings when we are young, but it just creeps up on you, you just develop this sensitivity towards beauty and aesthetics."

Assuming her love of interior design stemmed from her architect father, Linda is quick to

correct me. "No, from a very young child, I was convinced that I was going to be a fashion designer and I never even thought about architecture. It was actually my mother who was my biggest influence. She was an art teacher and a fashion writer, before going on to set up a design magazine, that won a Pulitzer Prize."

Moving to Paris to study fashion design, she quickly crossed over into modelling, using it as a passport to travel the world. "For the next eight years I lived in Hong Kong and Tokyo, Sydney and New York. My sole aim was to see and take inspiration from as many countries and different cultures as possible."

Watching her as she tells her story, it's easy to see why she was snapped up as a model and had she not 'fallen out of love' with the industry, I imagine she would still be gracing the catwalks. But one industry's loss is another industry's gain, and thankfully, for her many clients, her new love was interior design. Was it an easy decision to switch careers I ask. "No. Fashion is a hard industry, and for me, it was too cutthroat and transactional. But I was still in love with painting a fantasy – working with colours and new concepts. Interior design meant I could carry on being creative, but now creating something I felt was more substantial – and hopefully longer lasting."

On completion of a degree in interior design at London's Metropolitan University, the next few years involved working for some of ►



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF LINDA BORONKAY DESIGN STUDIO



Osborn House



Here and right, Osborn House



As designers we all evolve like artists and painters, who have their 'blue' era, and then their 'cubist' period – we all go through different phases.

today's most sought-after interior designers, including Tom Dixon, Martin Brudnizki, and Tara Bernard. That's quite a line up I comment. "I know!" she smiles. "When I was still in my second year, I entered and won a design competition, organised by the British Institute of Interior Design, and the prize was to exhibit at 100%, which at the time was big deal. Tom Dixon was one of the judges – and a huge hero of mine – and a year later, when I graduated, I went to work for him." She makes it sound so simple.

Keen to move around and gain as much experience as possible, her next role was with Martin Brudnizki, and I ask Linda what it's like to work for a designer who has such a strong aesthetic. "It was interesting, especially coming from Tom Dixon – who is the polar opposite in terms of design aesthetic. To be honest, Martin Brudnizki's style was a diluted version of the Martin Brudnizki we know today. As designers

we all evolve like artists and painters, who have their 'blue' era, and then their 'cubist' period – we all go through different phases," she observes. "But I guess it did feel quite traditional. It was a much smaller studio then and so I was working directly under him – and he taught me so much."

Continuing to establish her own aesthetic, Linda's next design port of call was at multinational architecture firm Woods Bagot, followed by a shorter stint with Tara Bernard. "I loved being exposed to different styles and trying to find my voice within it. Even now, what I enjoy the most is getting different briefs from different clients."

As she continued to take on different roles, observing her career moves quietly from the sidelines, was Nick Jones – on the lookout for a new Design Director, for Soho House. Assuming the vacancy was already on her radar, Linda shakes her head vigorously. ▶



The Sessile



Osborn House

"No, I literally received an email completely out of the blue," she recalls, still looking slightly incredulous. "It was on my birthday, and I thought it was a joke from a friend – or spam. But it was genuine. I was just about to go on a backpacking trip to India for a month, so I was certain I would miss out on the opportunity, as it really was the dream job."

Fortunately for all involved, the position was held. Excited she arrived for her first day and was uncharacteristically overtaken with nerves. "You know," she tells me wide-eyed, "I'm not easily scared, and I love an adventure. I am always happy to just walk through a door and see what happens – but at the end of my first day at Soho House, I left having a panic attack. I didn't even say goodbye to anyone and was unsure if I would return. It was just so overwhelming."

Scared, but not defeated, the following day she returned. Steadily but surely, she found her feet and settled into a role that she describes as 'some of the most adventurous years of her career.' Now in a position to apply the knowledge she had learnt from working for a swathe of diverse designers she was finally free to put her own stamp on to the group's growing portfolio. During her four-year tenure, she oversaw 20 openings and grew a design team from 12 to 100, whilst continuing to indulge her passion for travel. "It was so great. It's very different working for someone like Nick Jones, and a brand like Soho House. The approach to design was very different, first we would consider the mood and the atmosphere we wanted to create, and then think about the aesthetic. It was almost like working backwards."

It's clear she loved the role, and I wonder what prompted her to leave and set up her eponymous studio in 2020. Mid-pandemic, and with a six-month-old baby, I would have thought that was an ill-timed move – even with an unshakable hunger for adventure.

"It was such a strange time," she tells me. "I was on maternity leave and travelling in Australia with my husband, when the pandemic hit. So many of the projects I was going back to [at Soho House] were either on hold or cancelled. The team was struggling, and it felt as if everything was pushing me in one direction, and that was to start my own company. We were all trying to guess how the world was going to change post pandemic and there was a chorus of negative voices, saying no one would ever want to go to hotels again... and then I received a call..." ▶



Bel Air residence



Bel Air residence



Above The Rooftop Orangery at The Sessile, a co-living concept by Way of Life

I'm beginning to see a pattern here, and I'm intrigued to hear who was on the end of the line this time. The abridged version involves another admirer, this time, of her work at Soho House. Property developer Lawrance Ryko was working on a hotel project and was persistent in his effort to hire Linda. And so, Linda Boronkay Design Studio was born.

Completed in 2022, Osborn House's interiors are an eclectic mix of furniture, artwork and finishes spanning different ages and styles that deliver the Members Club look of an English country escape.

Winning awards and accolades, Osborn House inevitably propelled Linda onto a roster of top designer hot lists, but this time under her own name and without the Soho power-house behind her. Does she credit the influx of work that followed to the success of Osborn House? "The answer is no," she tells me. "People know my name because of my work with Soho

House. When I became Design Director, Soho House made a conscious decision to really push my name out there, and let the public know they had a new Design Director, who was a woman. It was a good message for them to promote, and great for me. I was very lucky and took advantage of this when I launched my studio and lots of my clients came through that exposure."

In the four years since she launched on her own, Linda has accrued a team of 15 designers, working out of the studio in Clerkenwell. With numerous projects across all sectors including hotels in Nice, Prague, and Rome, restaurants and members clubs in Paris, Abu Dhabi and Beirut and a swathe of residential in Switzerland, Sydney, and London – once again she is quick to tell me how lucky she is. Surely, it's also down to talent, vision and hard work I say. "...yes," she agrees, "but I do think luck plays a big part in everyone's success, you just need to be prepared as well," she concludes. 🍀