



CLAUDIA JUESTEL

@claudiajuestel

Writer: **HEIDE VANDOREN BETZ** @heidebetz
MUA: **BARBARA LEE SYCIP** @bsycip
Copy Editor: **KIEDO VILLANUEVA** @kei_villanueva
Art Director: **NIGEL JOHN DEL MUNDO** @nigeldelmundo
Photographer: **VINCENT GOTTI** @vinniegotti



Design Making a Difference

by *Heide VanDoren Betz*

Heide Betz: Please provide a brief background about your upbringing and education.

Claudia Juestel: I was born and raised in Salzburg, Austria. Both my parents are very creative, my dad being a Jazz musician, painter, and furniture maker; and my mom a cartoonist and artist. As post-war children, a proper income to support a family was their priority, so they established the family business in hospitality. They first opened a restaurant and discotheque (and later a hotel); the first Jazz club is in Salzburg and the first Mexican restaurant in Austria. My mother has always been a very fashionable woman and my father came from a family of artists, craftsmen, and musicians. That heritage got me involved in hands-on projects at a young age. I was helping my father to upholster leather benches for the restaurant or paint Alpine floral designs on armoires for the hotel's guest rooms. I was always surrounded by music, culture, great food, picturesque landscapes, and stunning historic buildings, which formed my appreciation for classical architecture. The latter has given me an almost subconscious understanding of proportion and scale. I was always drawing, even during class, which at times led to some punishment by the teachers. I knew that I wanted to be an artist from a very young age, but my parents felt that it was important to learn a "serious" profession first. So, I went to Klesheim, a prominent hotel management and cooking school, before coming to San Francisco to study art.

We all, of course, have many influences in our life. Claudia studied in Austria, worked in the hospitality industry; she was an art advisor in various galleries, worked with Ralph Lauren stores and hotel design firms gathering experiences which brought her to today's path with Adeeni Design Group and Adeeni Design Galerie, a firm and design gallery which she founded.

HB: Who or what influenced you the most?

CJ: As a child, I had a major interest in art, fashion, and dance. I loved to create things. From my parents

I learned to work hard, and to be versatile and entrepreneurial. My uncle, a prolific artist had studied under Oskar Kokoschka. He immigrated to the United States in the 1960s. He lived my dream and inspired me to become an artist and to move here. But, growing up in Austria shaped my outlook on art, architecture, and design.

HB: When and why did you choose interior design as your profession?

CJ: It was not a straight road at all. I first wanted to pursue fashion and fine arts, and got a bachelor's degree in fine art. I loved conceptual art and was always looking for a deeper meaning in my work. My head was (and still is) spinning constantly with new ideas. But making a piece of art can take a lot of time. I felt that I had more ideas than the time to physically realize them. After graduation, I helped friends with the design of their home and a small retail store. It made me realize that interior design would allow me to implement many more ideas while not having to physically complete them all myself. I also loved the concept of collaboration with other creatives and clients. I was hooked!

HB: In your youth in Austria, did you foresee yourself being an interior designer?

CJ: Never! It was not a common profession in Austria. Even today, most retain an architect for the heavy lifting. They go to showrooms to design their bathrooms or kitchens, and to a furniture store for the rest. While I helped my dad remodel the hotel and restaurant, I loved spending time with my uncle who had a window treatment and upholstery shop. My aunt did window displays for a home design store. At that time, I never thought of going into the design profession but the influence was everywhere. Looking back at my childhood, I also realize that I liked to draw three things—faces, fashion, and interiors, like bathrooms all based on shells. Working with my family is probably why I love furniture and product design. I learned how things are supposed to be made.



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HB: What is your work process with your clients when you begin a project?

CJ: I believe that truly understanding and getting to know clients is key before starting a design. I feel that a designer with great taste and design skills can create a beautiful interior for anyone. But to me, it is important that a home reflects its owners. So, for our residential work I like to know our clients' quirks and passions to get a design direction. For commercial projects, I study the brand and the long-term goals of the business. From there it becomes a very collaborative process.

HB: Describe your role in influencing the design of a client's home or work venue.

CJ: Interior design is more complex than it ever was. Today, clients have access to so many more resources online and get bombarded with options, advertising, tips, etc., without being able to vet the avalanche of information properly. In addition to providing a beautiful, functional, and comfortable design, I feel a designer can provide a lot of value advising clients on how to navigate all these options. I want to get our clients the most value for their money. Sometimes, that may mean pulling them away from shiny objects or encouraging them to spend a little bit more for significantly better design and quality. Also, many years of technical expertise of a seasoned designer are worth a lot.

HB: Do you create interiors to please your clients, or please yourself, your vision, your esthetics?

CJ: As you know our projects are quite varied, ranging from historic restorations to contemporary spaces, and from understated palettes to very colorful rooms. I never needed a signature style. The clients and their personalities and passions, the architecture and the surroundings, inspire me and shape the esthetic of each project.

HB: Do you have a specific design/esthetic philosophy?

CJ: While I am not drawn to a particular style, I have a more European approach to design. I want interior and exterior spaces to feel layered in time and place. I am drawn to homes that show the owners' character and are inviting and approachable. I aim to implement that in my work as well.

HB: Do you have a life motto?

CJ: Yes. "Be generous with your heart and knowledge." As for a design motto, "Buy the best you can afford, nothing less."

HB: We always tend to want to do more, just one more thing with our projects. How do you know when you are done... when to stop?

CJ: I learned that back in art school, and I look at a space like the composition of a piece of art. There needs to be balance in color, texture, and proportions. I just know when it's done, and that is absolutely key! Even the best maximalists do. But as designers, we also must allow our clients to grow their collection of art and objects, and plan ahead. I am also often asked back to make sure that new additions are integrated properly.

HB: What do you like most about what you do?

CJ: While I often tell myself that we are not saving the world, I also know that what we do as designers does make a big difference in people's everyday lives. There is literally nothing better about my job than a client sharing with me that I've made a difference in their life.

HB: And Least?

CJ: The worst nightmare for a perfectionist like myself is when our design is not properly executed by craftsmen or contractors. I also don't enjoy telling clients that something they found for less, but appears to look just as good as what we proposed, is actually of terrible quality or design. But it is my job after all.







HB: Tell us a few highlights of your career, favorite clients, favorite projects, favorite places to work.

CJ: I tremendously enjoyed my position as the Creative Director of a new boutique hotel chain in India. I worked with an incredible client and a most talented Austrian architect. We came up with all the concepts for their first hotel, its restaurants, bars, and spa. Unfortunately, the recession and some zoning issues put that project on hold. I would love for it to come to fruition one day. My favorite clients are those who trust that I have their best interest in mind and allow me to pull them out of their comfort zone. As for favorite places, I do love when either the project or the research and sourcing take me to interesting locales that expand the mind and eye.

HB: And perhaps a few challenges, difficult clients, difficult projects?

CJ: I feel one of today's challenges is that we have to continuously educate our clients on the value of good design because there is so much misleading information out there. Difficult projects are generally those with underqualified contractors often chosen due to cost savings. I strongly believe that a successful project is the result of putting a good design/build team together in the very beginning which allows for respect and problem solving ahead of time. And as a result, saves everyone stress, time, and money.

HB: You are well traveled internationally and have a base in your beloved Austria. If you were not living and working in San Francisco, where would you want to be?

CJ: While there are many more places in the world that I want to see, I always need to visit Europe regularly. I love my homeland Austria, and it is always the starting point. I would like to spend more time in Europe overall, as I like to travel around to experience the different cultures, food, art, design, architecture, and fashion. Italy is also one of my favorite places.

HB: Tell us a bit about Salzburg. I understand you will be celebrating a special Birthday there next year. What makes Salzburg so desirable?

CJ: Most think of Mozart and Sound of Music when it comes to Salzburg. While the city offers an incredible history of classical music and breathtakingly beautiful scenery, there is so much more to experience. When I am home, I am part accidental tourist, part explorer, part local. I decided to celebrate my next birthday with friends in Salzburg to share some of the less obvious secrets with them. Growing up in hospitality planning, an event comes very naturally to me and I am extremely excited about planning this trip for everyone.

HB: What is your favorite pastime? Any passions in the arts?

CJ: I love traveling, preferably getting a local experience, cooking, and entertaining. Hunting for unique objects and art for my design gallery and clients is a unique pleasure. I would love to find the time to paint again. And, I can never get enough of music and dance—both stir my soul.

HB: What influenced you to establish an Austrian inspired open-to-the-public design gallery near Union Square?

CJ: I noticed that we no longer have enough boutiques offering unique quality home décor—the kind of pieces I look for as a designer when completing a project. I also realized that on the West Coast, not many are very familiar with the rich history of Austrian design and prolific design masters like Josef Hoffmann and Adolf Loos. At **Adeeni Design Galerie** we sell a curated collection of European Modernist art, décor, furniture, lighting, and tabletop objects, unique boutique brands as well as our own private label line. I am proud to represent three iconic Austrian brands, *Augarten Porcelain*, *Lobmeyr Crystal*, and *Werkstätte Carl Auböck*, introducing San Francisco to the breadth of Austrian design while sipping coffee or tea from Vienna's favorite gourmet store, *Meinl*.

HB: Do you have a secret passion?

CJ: I really enjoy mentoring design students and my staff. If someone shows the desire to learn and work hard, it really inspires me. I would love to teach.

HB: Your favorite food?

CJ: I feel so blessed to live in a city that has food from all parts of the world. But if I would have to pick one, it would be Italian. Of course, there are many Austrian treats like sausages, breads, and desserts I could not live without.

HB: How would you like to be remembered?

CJ: Wow! That is big one. I hope to be remembered as someone who provided inspiration and had a positive impact on those around me.

HB: What lies ahead for you?

CJ: Looking back, I feel blessed to have found a profession that allows me to express all the various things I have learned. Looking forward, I am excited of what else may be around the corner. As a creative person, I never stop dreaming.

