

BrandBook*Feature*

Educate*Me*

As an interior designer you can be part of the solution

How can interior designers promote the sustainable agenda? What opportunities and limitations are there and how can the individual be a flag-bearer and push the agenda?

Sharing her insights with us is:

Petra Ryberg

Interior designer, and Head of Design at P&O Australia

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Petra Ryberg
Head of design, P&O Australia

Petra Ryberg - background

After completing a degree in interior design in Sweden, Petra Ryberg founded her own business, Petra Viktoria Design, a design studio specialising in hospitality interior design.

Petra started her cruise ship interior design career working with the Tillberg Design of Sweden team. Petra worked on various projects and had the chance to learn from some of the best marine designers in the industry.

Since 2016, alongside her own business, Petra Ryberg has held the position of head of design at P&O Australia, where she ensures quality across the P&O fleet in Australia.

Petra Ryberg started 'Cruise Ship Design' on Instagram seeking to promote cruise ship interiors and helping students to gain an understanding of the industry.

As an interior designer you can be part of the solution

“As an interior designer we have a lot of power in what materials we specify. Once you start educating yourself you understand the difference between materials, and I think that is where the opportunity lies.”

Petra Ryberg wants to present solutions instead of problems. She would like to make it easier for everyone to make the best choice of materials and calls for collaboration. She shares some ideas on what elements that could possibly help support interior designers in taking the sustainability agenda from awareness to action.

Her insights are inspiring to interior designers in all hospitality projects, not only the cruise industry.

Educate yourself, share your insights and raise awareness

For Petra Ryberg, taking responsibility is an opportunity. It comes down to three things: Educate yourself, share your insights and raise awareness. Educating yourself is essential, Petra believes:

“As an interior designer you have a lot of power in terms of what you specify. Unless you have the facts about what the different solutions are, it is difficult to know what the better choice is.”

Education involves asking your suppliers better questions. However, knowing what kind of questions to ask, is challenging. Sustainability is complex, but once you start to educate yourself you understand the difference between materials better.

Another important aspect is raising awareness of sustainability. One way could be to talk about it in different forums and simply show your interest. In this way you might be able to get more people on board. Raising awareness is also about sharing your knowledge gained from your learnings:

“It is in everyone’s interest to ensure that information gets out to everyone. The industry always said that we do not compete on health and safety. It would be nice if we got to the point where we said, we do not compete on health, safety OR sustainability”.

In addition, Petra would love to work alongside suppliers to encourage them and share knowledge in the industry:

“Every person you introduce to a more environmentally friendly option is a win.”

Calling for greater collaboration is also the starting point for Petra when it comes to ensuring a more sustainable product selection.

Tools to make sustainable product selection easier
Petra Ryberg would love to make a sustainable selection of materials easier.

She points out that it would be a great help if there was a classification within the marine industry. A system looking at already IMO approved products that adds a sustainability ranking. A point system that could encourage everyone to work with sustainability. Something like the land-based building certifications that defines what kind of products ensure extra credits and what to look for in products.

Such a system is unfortunately not in place. What can be initiated today is a greater cooperation between designers and suppliers, as Petra points out:

“We are nothing without our suppliers. We can really get insights and they help us to understand the different materials. And this starts with the demand from the person specifying. As a designer we need to request this information and actively make that choice. In this way we also drive the agenda.”

An intensified cooperation could also include an expert group, a forum, as Petra suggests. In such a forum, designers could ask for advice when selecting different materials and learn from each other’s experiences.

Limited experience and data – combined with the complexity of sustainability - are exactly what makes it difficult to make an informed product selection.

Certifications enhance trust

One of the challenges according to Petra Ryberg is that making the right sustainable choice feels overwhelming:

“Everyone has the best intentions of bringing up the subject of sustainability and focussing on it. I think what is lacking is how to make this concrete when specifying. We all agree it is important to have a broader picture on sustainability. But it is almost like you want to boil it down to ‘here are five steps you can do today as a designer’. So, make it more accessible and easier to digest – pass on tips for what you can do. I think that is what is lacking.”

The question is how it can be boiled down without losing important facets.

It can be difficult to recognise what makes a difference in the material selection. On top of this, in the maritime market, the choice of materials is reduced by 70-80% due to the need for IMO approval. Consequently, material selection can prove quite challenging:

“It feels like you are left with what is IMO certified, but we need to understand what the better option is in terms of sustainability.”

It is very hard to know if choosing a specific product has an effect. In one aspect it could do, but using energy or water might cancel out the benefit of using that product.

Petra points out that this is one of the strengths of the Cradle-to-Cradle certification system; it embraces many aspects of sustainability and the whole lifecycle of the product.

**“But we do not know
what we do not know.**

**We must act with
what we have today
and keep on pushing that
demand and research.”**

Petra Ryberg
Head of design, P&O Australia

A certification also brings trust into the relationship as it is a 3rd part verification and not just a marketing tool:

"Everyone wants to be sustainable and everyone says they are."

According to Petra Ryberg the danger of sustainability is that it has become such a marketing tool that people might be in it for the marketing rather than the hard work behind it. You must 'walk the talk', otherwise it can backfire.

Sustainability is complex and it is difficult to know whether you are doing the right thing. Yet it is important to embrace it:

"This pandemic is a good example of a situation where you try to do the best with the information you have at the time. We are probably going to look back in 50 years and say, 'Goodness, we used that material that is terrible for the earth'. But we do not know what we do not know. We must act with what we have today and keep on pushing that demand and research. Get people on board with understanding how important it is to push for it."

When we talk about ensuring a more sustainable product selection it is important to address the challenges regarding price.

Sustainability at any price?

Ideally, the price should not be important when we talk about taking responsibility. However, it is a fact that price is critical:

"If a sustainable product is twice the price, it is hard to justify. I hate to say it, but it is true. I want to compare apples with apples; if it offers the same durability, the same price point but it is better for the environment - of course, I will choose the one that is better for the environment."

As Petra Ryberg argues, it is about making the product available to the market. It needs to be accessible to the wider masses.

Making the product offering interesting also applies to the design expression of the product.

To have more sustainable products selected for interior design, it is important to have enough appealing solutions available. If the design is not attractive, it is difficult for an interior designer to justify the selection. As Petra puts it:

"Make the product easy to specify - gorgeous, environmentally friendly, and at a good price point."

In her final exam Petra made two hotel rooms look the same, but with one using more environmentally friendly materials, then compared the differences. Her point was not to compromise on the design expression when meeting a certain sustainability standard.

Looking at the challenges with her positive mindset, Petra underlines that every little win is a win. And every step in the right direction is good. Doing nothing is not an option.

Change your mindset and act

According to Petra Ryberg action starts with yourself. You need to take responsibility and educate yourself. There are always possibilities connected with a development, as she says. Each day can be a small win.

The trend is going in the right direction. It is a culture-related thing, a new way of thinking. Applying this to the industry requires the various stakeholders to think differently in order to achieve a sustainable mindset.

A way of supporting positive change is to present options and solutions rather than just problems. As Petra Ryberg knows by experience, designers are short on time and this makes it easier to go with what you already know. Being presented with solutions makes the job easier.

To make things happen on the sustainability agenda, the owners must make it a priority:

"If the company or client is pushing and the specifications need to meet a certain standard, it is your job to go out and find products that meet these specifications and find those suppliers. And eventually that is what is going to go into the ship. It needs to be in the culture of the owner company. Everybody wants that and we are making it happen."

More*Inspiration*

We welcome you inside our exciting world of carpet creation!

In our brand book you will find information about and inspiration for carpets for the hospitality industry.

Moreover, you can read about interior design in the context of the megatrend sustainability and how this can be linked to creating a great guest experience.

Get our Brand Book

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