

# InFocus

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*Bente Medelbye Hansen*







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### Title

Design Director

### Company

OSK Design, Copenhagen

### Graduation

Danmarks Designskole, Copenhagen

### 2 + 2 = 8

Bente Medelbye Hansen tells us that her take on the world was very creative even as a child, when she would ask herself why "2 + 2" shouldn't equal 8? "After looking at the shape of the two, and rotating the other two and merging the two figures, I almost got the shape of an eight." With this kind of thinking in childhood, she was almost destined for a career in design! A logical step for Bente was to study interior design in Copenhagen, graduating from her course in 1985. She also had the privilege of "sleepless nights thinking about interior design processes ever since," laughs the Design Director, who oversees the Maritime Interior & Architecture section, describing her dream job.

### Inspiration from the natural environment and the environment moulded by humans

Working as a designer is not a job to Bente; it is just part of her DNA. Personal and professional inspiration merge into one. The sea and the forest near to her home are big influences, as is art, whatever form it takes. Shapes, colours, textures and compositions from nature and art also find their way into her own artistic expression in her pottery. "The main focus of my work is sculptural objects that have textures and shapes inspired by nature." Speaking about a third source of inspiration and one of the main prerequisites for successful design processes, she also waxes lyrical about the importance of collaborating with talented colleagues.

### 'Giving form' as the soul of design

When asked to name some role models, the Dane points to Karim Rashid, Zaha Hadid and Nanna Ditzel for their understanding of design. It soon becomes clear that she sees design as an extensive process of analysis, creation and

experience. "In Denmark, we have a perfect word for design - 'formgivning' - which means something along the lines of 'giving the design a form'. This means proportions, a setting, flow, textures, colours, details - and, last but not least, it means understanding the needs of the end consumer. Design in 'formgivning' (giving form) terms is the psychology behind the creation and configuration of a space.

This basic understanding of design also influences what Bente needs when creating the perfect guest experience: She vividly explains that some of the key elements of a room design, such as the acoustics, may not be visible to the guest, yet each design decision contributes to the guest having a smooth and unforgettable experience. The ambiance created and the design should also support the client's brand and story, to bring it to life emotionally. "Designers need to be able to wrap a brand inside the design in a way that makes it noticeable and visible to the end user and therefore tangible."

### Child of the North

Talking about the 'icy climes' of Svalbard, Norway, as a dream destination for inspiration, Bente reveals much about her Nordic roots: "I'd like to experience another truly Arctic environment, where you feel the severity, the harshness and the astounding lighting conditions - before it's too late." However, the designer also immediately makes reference to Japan, where traditions dating back thousands of years fuse with new innovations: "Despite all the cultural differences, Japanese and Danish design actually share the same design philosophy, simplicity and love for detail and form."

### Drafting as a circular process

Once she has an idea of the scope of the task set by the client, and the latter's brand identity, Bente gets to work familiarising herself with the architectural proportions and the geometry of the space. In the drafts, she allows herself total creative freedom in order to 'break the ice', as she puts it. "I draw lines and shapes until I have the feeling that the space makes sense. A clearer vision of the space starts to come alive in the draft, you could say."

As part of a circular process, the designer re-drafts while also retaining a number of forms already found, with a view to finding the best 'flow' for the ship's crew and passengers. A more solid floor plan is then created based on this, all while taking ambiance and individual design elements into consideration. "I don't need a VR headset to experience the space and the design in the drafting process," Bente points out. "As a designer, I need to be able to walk through the space in my own head."



### Focus on material and colours

"Materials and colours are extremely important because they enrich the design and, together with the mood lighting, create the look and the atmosphere that the guests experience straight away when entering into a space," Bente tells us, explaining the selection process. Throughout the drafting process, she and the team keep reviewing the materials to

determine which are most suitable to round off the ambiance of the interior and balance the composition of dark versus light, coarse versus smooth surfaces, and so on.

When choosing the material that will help her to achieve the depth, texture and balance required to realise the vision, the design director relies on the manufacturers' input: "Suppliers know their products and materials best of all and are in a position to advise us on wear and tear. Suppliers are as important as designers to the design process."



### Courage to challenge the client sometimes

When asked to name her favourite project, Bente gives a wise response: "I'm proud of all of the projects I've collaborated in. How can I distinguish one project from another?" At the same time, she is also able to pinpoint the factors pivotal to the success of a project: Everyone involved must work towards the same goal – i.e., to make the project a success for the client and their guests. She also calls for courage – by both the client and the designer: "A project will be successful if the client trusts the designer and believes they are capable of delivering a brilliant design. The client should give the designer freedom and expect the unexpected. And designers should challenge the choices made by the client, and their preferences, sometimes."

### Sustainable design trends in the hospitality industry

Bente hopes that demand for sustainable design will continue to grow. Environmental aspects should be taken into consideration in the initial drafting and planning phase of a project. And whenever trends are being factored into the design, they should be implemented in a way that ensures that they can be replaced easily at a later date without any impact on the environment.

Sustainability is already proving significant for the work of OSK Design. The design director gives us an example: "We did an in-house case study for a cabin, in which we calculated the CO2 emissions of the materials. That gave us an incredible amount of insight into and understanding of how we as designers could help to make interior design projects 'greener'."



Photo: OSK Design

Materials and products with, for example, EPD certification, would always be a go-to choice for Bente. Despite there not being that many of these yet, the designer is confident that sustainability can soon find its way into the maritime industry too. "I'm yet to meet a supplier who was not prepared to share their knowledge with me or even recommend someone who perhaps has just the right material or product I've been looking for," she says, once again emphasising the importance of collaboration. She adds: "Dansk Wilton leads the way when it comes to sustainable product design and is constantly on the look-out for ways to improve the life cycle. I love that!"

### Person-centred

Successful design is about seamless connectivity: Good design will connect up all the visible design elements in the draft. These are the underlying basis for configuring the 'look & feel' of an interior design. Bente sums up what is happening in her industry: "For many years, ships were designed to have large static features and a wow factor, which had a resounding impact on the look and ambiance of spaces." Nowadays, however, interior design is more about creating flexible surroundings and individual guest experiences. "At long last, humans, not the function, are the centre of the design!" she quips.



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