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To the Max

Interior designer Martin Brudnizki
turns spaces into experiences

By Sahar Khan



Martin Brudnizki's competitive spirit led him to pursue interior design. He was in his early 20s when a friend studying the subject showed him his work. "I looked at it, and I thought, *Oh, I can do better than that*," says Brudnizki, now 55, on a call from his London office.

He has certainly lived up to that conviction. The AD100 star is the creative force behind lush spaces such as The Beekman hotel in New York, where a vast skylight looks upon a patchwork of Oriental rugs and jewel-toned furnishings bathed in moody lighting, and Annabel's nightclub in London, where a women's pink-on-pink bathroom adorned with a rose marble vanity surrounded by blushing Murano glass flowers has perhaps spawned more mirror selfies than any other powder room in the world. Brudnizki's evocative style has garnered him a devoted following and his firm's largest number of in-progress hotel projects to date: nine worldwide, with seven in the Americas alone.

Despite that fateful show-and-tell with his friend, Stockholm-born Brudnizki's plan to study interior design

went on the back burner when he was offered work as a fashion model in Paris and Japan. When the early 1990s recession hit, though, he recalls, "All [modeling] work dried up, and I decided, *Let's do this design course*." He went on to graduate from the American University of London and work with contemporary art gallerist David Gill and interior designer David Collins.

In 2000, Brudnizki set up his own studio in London. His first big project,

in 2006, was the renovation of Scott's in Mayfair, a treasured seafood restaurant that dates to 1851 and where Ian Fleming allegedly learned that martinis should be "shaken, not stirred." Designing Soho Beach House in Miami in 2012 helped cement his status, and that same year he opened a New York office; he now oversees a transatlantic staff of 90. A product line, *And Objects*, debuted in 2015, and last year he released his first standalone collection, inspired by the 1920s Swedish



This page, from top: the lobby bar at The Beekman; a room at The Fifth Avenue Hotel; opposite page: Martin Brudnizki

Oli Kearon (portrait); James McDonald (The Beekman); Annie Schlechter (Fifth Avenue Hotel)



From top: Annabel's nightclub; the pool at Soho Beach House

Grace movement, which he describes as a Scandinavian “version of Art Deco that’s a classical blend with Modernism—quite stylized and geometric.”

Given the luscious and layered looks of his projects, one might be tempted to place Brudnizki in the Maximalist category—but he would disagree. After 22 years of running his own design firm, he says he’s explored each of the four pillars of design: Classicism, Modernism, Minimalism, and Maximalism. “What I do now,” he explains, “is take little bits from everything.”

Two recent efforts illustrate Brudnizki’s flexibility. The yacht club-inspired decor at Evelyn’s restaurant at the new Four Seasons Hotel and Residences Fort Lauderdale exudes elegance: Brass lamps wash pale shiplap walls in a sunset glow, curved banquettes edged in glossy walnut mimic the lines of a sailboat, and plush navy-and-sand-colored furnishings nod to the nautical with discreet aplomb. On the other hand, he says The Fifth Avenue Hotel, debuting in

Manhattan this fall, has an “unashamed classical approach” inspired by someone “who collects things,” such as bedside tables in mother-of-pearl and Murano chandeliers, which in his hands are set

against “extreme modern colors,” like eggshell blue walls. “When a project succeeds, you see people enjoying it,” Brudnizki says. “That’s why I enjoy hospitality, because you think, *How do I want people to react?* I try to craft this space that is going to give the people who use it a certain experience.”

That idea extends to the West Sussex home Brudnizki shares with his life and business partner, Jonathan Brook. He calls the experience an “Arcadian fantasy,” and it’s easy to see why: The flat is set within a 17th-century manor on an estate that that was once home to Prime Minister Anthony Eden, and it looks as if it was decorated by a Jane Austen character on opium. Eighteenth-century prints of monarchs hang beside contemporary abstracts, gilded mirrors adorn daffodil-colored walls across from gilded fireplaces, and a bedroom beguiles with matching chintz wallpaper, drapes, and bedspreads. It is here, Brudnizki says, that he most feels the impact of his accomplishments: “Great success, for me, is that I can create a life for myself that I can enjoy. It’s starting to come together now.”



James McDonald