

Inside Jobs

On foundations as varied as architecture, political science, literature and world arts and cultures, these Bruins have built rewarding careers in interior design in the highly competitive L.A. market.

By Jessica Ritz M.A. '02

Photos by Jill Paider

SOME INTERIOR DESIGNERS enter the field with formal training and laser focus. Others find success via circuitous pathways. Regardless of each individual course, critical thinking and an open, collaborative spirit have proven necessary to Los Angeles area designers, whose creative work is by nature highly interdisciplinary.

Says David Montalba M.Arch. II '00, a lecturer in the UCLA School of the Arts and Architecture, "If you realize it's a team sport, then everyone has the interest of the larger project in mind, and you can achieve better work in general." He adds that architecture and interior design are overlapping and inextricably intertwined disciplines. >>







Designer and prop stylist **Lauren Alexander** '02 grew up surrounded by beautiful things in her mother's Marin County, Calif., flower and gift shop. After earning a degree in American literature and culture at UCLA, Alexander managed her mom's shop and expanded to a second location. She then honed her ability to craft sumptuous environments that feel personal and, in a sense, tell stories, while managing the home décor department at Bergdorf Goodman in New York and then Kelly Wearstler's West Hollywood retail flagship.

"I enjoy creating a home with accent pieces and things that communicate someone's aesthetic, lifestyle and history," she says. In 2015, Alexander opened her Manhattan Beach boutique, Dacha, as "a living portfolio," where her sophisticated yet down-to-earth style sensibility continues to evolve. The shop — with an eclectic inventory of vintage furniture, art, textiles, small home goods and accessories — enables Alexander to be an active part of a community without being siloed in retail. Her creative scope covers residential design and prop styling, as well as curating exhibitions at Dacha to showcase California artists.



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Alexandra Loew in a Marina del Rey home that she designed. She often incorporates repurposed materials, such as the 1930s blankets on the benches. (Right, top and bottom) Lauren Alexander in her store, Dacha, in Manhattan Beach.



“If you think about architecture in terms of color, mood, surfaces and environment, you quickly find yourself falling in love with interior design,” explains **Alexandra Loew** M.Arch. I '02. Her firm is based in a Beverly Hills home that she recently transformed into a studio/gallery, and she also keeps an office in Manhattan. Loew, who completed coursework toward a Ph.D. in architecture at UCLA, brings extensive knowledge of the decorative arts and what she terms “a more academic approach” to interior design. In addition to her design projects, she advises clients on how to build collections.

It was in UCLA’s Department of Architecture and Urban Design that Loew says she learned to think about architecture “as an atmosphere-producing endeavor.” As a result, although branded as an interior design company, her firm functions as “the hub for the interior on all technical fronts” for client projects.

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Alexis Readinger M.Arch. '99 specializes in hospitality architecture and interior design, where boundaries become “indistinguishable between the architecture and the interiors,” she says. “Restaurants are so emotional. They’re trying to create a very specific experience.” Among the clients of her firm, Preen Design, are prominent chefs and restaurateurs, such as Quinn and Karen Hatfield of Odys + Penelope, as well as those responsible for popular restaurants and food businesses in her Chinatown neighborhood, including the cookbook and culinary shop Now Serving and its in-progress luncheonette next door. Food industry pros have tapped Readinger for their personal projects, too. She worked with Rustic Canyon chef Jeremy Fox on his home, and for the Lopez family of L.A.’s Guelaguetza restaurant, she designed a house in Oaxaca.





After completing a degree in political science while taking classes in world arts and cultures at UCLA, **Sean Yashar** '04 studied design at UCLA Extension. There, he realized that while he didn't want to become a designer, he did want to champion the careers of design practitioners. So, in 2010, he founded The Culture Creative agency to synthesize his interests in branding, marketing, public relations, curating and talent management in order to guide emerging and mid-career designers.

Today, Yashar juggles a growing client roster and side projects that aim "to find and grow the space between art and commerce that many artists may not be able to see for themselves," he says. With his partner, interior designer Oliver Furth, he curates a roving pop-up gallery series in collaboration with artists and makers called *Furth Yashar &*. One recent installation featured the work of four artists and designers at the landmark Schindler House in West Hollywood. ❏

(Top left) Alexis Readinger at Odys + Penelope. Greek-style columns discovered during construction inspired the name. (Left) The olive tree and wood stacks are special design features. (This page, top and bottom) Sean Yashar in his office, a space he describes as "always evolving."

