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DESIGN DIARY

INTERNATIONAL

Lori Morris

DESIGN THAT LIVES,
BREATHES, AND
BELONGS TO YOU

DECOR

FURNITURE

ART

DESIGNER

PROJECT

BRAND PROFILE



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COVER INTERVIEW
THE HOUSE OF LMD
Lori Morris

Lori Morris wrote this in an email, in response to a question about the long minimalist years, the decades when the design world had collectively decided that restraint was the only intelligent position and richness was something you either apologized for or quietly dressed down, and what is remarkable about the line is not its content but its temperature, because it is completely room temperature, no heat in it, no score to settle, just a person stating something so settled within herself that the argument ended a long time ago and what remains is simply how she works, how she has always worked, and how she intends to keep working regardless of where the broader conversation decides to go next.

Morris is the founder of the House of LMD, a Toronto-based practice that has spent more than three decades building interiors of a kind that ask a great deal of the people who walk into them, rooms that are layered and specific and emotionally loaded, rooms that carry within them the particular personality of whoever lives there, built from custom furniture designed to the exact proportion of each space, carpets conceived for a precise atmosphere, seating scaled to an architecture that nothing in any showroom could ever answer to, and the cumulative effect of all of it, when it works, which it does, is that you feel something before you have had time to understand what you are looking at, which is not an accident, it is the whole point, it is the destination toward which every single decision in a Morris interior has been aimed from the very beginning.

Shweta of Design Diary International put a series of questions to Morris over email and what came back was not the careful managed language of someone protecting a brand but something considerably more interesting, the voice of a woman who has never once looked sideways to check what the rest of the room is doing, who decided early that originality was not a strategy but a position, a moral one almost, and who has spent every year since simply following through on that with increasing confidence and increasing scale and what she describes, without any apparent vanity, as getting better with age.



There is a question that gets asked of interior designers with some regularity, about whether a space should evolve endlessly or remain as a record of a particular moment, and it is a reasonable question in the abstract but it does not quite apply to what Morris builds, because a Morris interior is not trying to be timeless in the way that word is usually meant, neutral and quietly inoffensive and safe for whoever might come next, it is trying to be specific, trying to be this person and this life and this particular way of moving through a home, and specificity by its nature does not date the way fashionable things date, it simply becomes more itself over time, more settled, more complete, more exactly what it always was.

“When you walk into a room, you should feel something. The space should say something to you, because if it does not, you simply walk right past it.”



She is direct about this when the subject comes up, about the relationship between a space and the person who inhabits it, about the way a room should carry a story that you feel the moment you cross the threshold, and she uses the word story not in the vague mood-board sense it has been flattened to mean in recent years but in the precise sense of a narrative with a logic and an emotional destination, something that begins with a client and their personality and their daily life and their private dream of how a home might make them feel, and ends with a room that could not belong to anyone else, that is so particular and so complete in its expression of one life that putting anyone else inside it would feel like a category error.

Every design should carry a sense of surprise and personality, she writes, and when you walk into a room you should feel something, the space should say something to you, because if it does not you simply walk right past it, and the way she phrases that, the walking right past it, suggests a failure so basic and so total that it renders everything else about the room beside the point, the materials and the scale and the craftsmanship all meaningless if the emotional charge is absent, which tells you something important about how Morris understands her own work, not as decoration applied to a surface that was already resolved but as the creation of an atmosphere that is itself the architecture, the feeling and the space inseparable from each other, built together from the beginning and arriving together at the end.

A well designed space, she adds, feels seamless and cohesive to the eye, and when everything works together in harmony the beauty is understood almost instinctively, it lands before the brain has had time to process the individual components, and that instinctive recognition is for her the signal that the design has done what it was supposed to do, has arrived at the destination it was always heading toward, which is not admiration exactly but something more immediate and more bodily than that, something closer to the feeling of being held by a space that was built entirely around you.

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I usually see the finished product before it is even started. That vision becomes the starting point. Then our team works back from there.





When the conversation turns to process, to where a project actually begins, what comes back is a description that sounds less like a design methodology and more like a form of inner sight, the finished room arriving in her mind whole and complete before a sketch has been made or a material chosen or a single conversation with a contractor has taken place, and she is matter of fact about this in a way that makes it sound entirely ordinary, which perhaps for her it is. If you are building a house from scratch, she explains, the process begins with the architecture, but the concept is always client driven, and before anything else she needs to understand what style they love, what they want the home to feel like, how large the house will be, how large the family is, how they live day to day, because gathering that knowledge and understanding those details is the foundation of the story she is going to tell through the design, and once that foundation is laid the project begins with a sketch of what she sees in her head, because she usually sees the finished product before it has even started, and everything that follows is a matter of working back from that vision, her team building out the full design package from a concept that already exists complete somewhere ahead of them.

It is worth sitting with that image for a moment, of a designer working backwards from a complete interior that exists first only in the mind, because it goes a long way toward explaining why her spaces feel the way they do, resolved and inevitable and specific in a way that has nothing to do with trends and everything to do with a singular point of view held consistently and without apology over a very long time, a point of view that does not need the external world to confirm it because it was never waiting for that confirmation to begin with, never needed the culture to arrive at the same conclusion before it felt justified in proceeding.



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Luxury is the feeling of enchantment, refinement, comfort, and serenity that a space creates when everything comes together perfect.



She talks about furniture the way an architect talks about load-bearing structure, not as objects placed within a space to make it feel inhabited but as extensions of the architecture itself, pieces that could not exist anywhere else because they were conceived for this room and this room only, scaled to its exact proportion, weighted to its exact atmosphere, colored and textured to complete a vision that was already whole before the first measurement was taken. In many of the homes we design, she writes, the rooms are quite significant in size, and you simply cannot walk into a store and find a piece of furniture that fits the scale or proportion or feeling we are trying to achieve, and so they design the pieces themselves, the seating areas and the coffee tables and the carpets and a great many other elements, all custom made, all resolved down to the exact colour and texture and scale that the room requires, and this is not a luxury in the sense of an added extra but a necessity, because the final vision exists first in her head and that vision is not something you can buy off the floor of a store, it has to be designed and developed and brought into existence so that it fits seamlessly into the architecture and the atmosphere of the home, so that it could not be anywhere else and nothing else could be there instead.

There is something almost obsessive in this level of specificity and Morris does not shy away from it, because the obsession is the work, the refusal to approximate is the whole philosophy, and a room in which even one element has been settled for rather than conceived is a room in which the vision has been compromised, and compromising the vision is not something she appears to have any particular talent for.



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Rather than following trends, we create our own, and we have always stayed true to that direction.



She wants clients to be overwhelmed when they walk through the door of a finished home for the first time, overwhelmed in the best sense of that word, that particular and unrepeatable sensation of a dream being returned to you more complete than you had imagined it, and after all the time and energy and investment they have put into creating their home, she writes, the goal is for them to feel that it was all worth it and that the result is even better than they imagined, and the emotional connection that produces is what makes her happiest, because the feeling a room gives you is ultimately what the space expresses through its design and its architecture, and that feeling was the point before any of the materials were chosen or any of the furniture was designed or any of the sketches were made, it was always the point, it will always be the point, it is the only point that matters when the work is finally standing in front of you asking to be felt.

She wants them to hug you forever, she writes at one point, not just to impress on first encounter but to keep working on you, to welcome you back every time you come through the door, which is perhaps the most honest and most demanding definition of what a home should do that you will find anywhere in contemporary design culture, and it is a definition that makes most of what passes for luxury residential design look like it has been aiming at the wrong target entirely.

The conversation around maximalism has been loud in recent years, the design press welcoming it back with considerable enthusiasm, treating its return as a cultural moment worth marking, and Morris receives all of this with the equanimity of someone watching a party form around a place she has been standing quietly for thirty years, because she did not leave, this has always been the style, and the broader culture catching up to it does not change anything about how she works or what she makes or why she makes it. No, it does not feel different, she writes, because we never left that approach, this has always been our design style, and rather than following trends we create our own and have always stayed true to that direction, and there is something almost clarifying about the plainness of that statement, the refusal to perform excitement about a vindication she never needed, because for Morris the validation was never the point and the absence of it was never a problem, she was going to make these rooms regardless, has always been going to make these rooms, and the world is welcome to catch up or not as it sees fit.

She is frank about the fact that clients today are more engaged with their homes than they have ever been, more specific about how they want to live and how they want their spaces to make them feel, less concerned with whether a room follows certain expectations or traditional rules and more focused on whether the space will actually support them and their family in the way they need it to, and she brings to that conversation a confidence she describes as something she carries into the room with her, a confidence that gives clients confidence, that creates the conditions in which genuine creativity becomes possible because the fear of getting it wrong has been quietly removed from the equation before anyone has sat down. When a client comes to the House of LMD, she writes, they are usually ready for something original, they are open to creativity and individuality, and her role is to guide them through that process and help bring their vision to life in a way that feels authentic and truly personal, which sounds simple enough until you consider what it actually requires, which is the ability to hear what a person wants their life to feel like and then build the physical environment that produces exactly that feeling, custom and complete and entirely specific to them, down to the last piece of furniture and the last square yard of carpet.

There is a version of a long career in which the early instincts calcify into habit, the vision narrows, the work becomes a more refined version of itself but also a smaller one, and Morris describes something that sounds like the precise opposite of that, a career in which the confidence to execute has been catching up steadily to the scale of what she could already see, closing the gap between the finished room in her head and the finished room in the world, so that the work now is bolder and more adventurous and more complete than it has ever been, not because the vision has changed but because the ability to deliver on it has grown deeper and surer and more capable of going all the way. My style has evolved in the sense that I have simply become better with age, she writes, the originality and creativity have always been there, the artistic approach, the no rules attitude, the rebellious sense of luxury that I like to create, all of that has always been part of the work, what has really changed is the level of confidence in what I can achieve, and earlier in her career she could see the vision in her head but was sometimes still working out exactly how to bring it together, and today that confidence is much stronger, the ideas more expressive, the execution more complete, the homes larger and more ambitious, the clients more confident, the expectations on every side considerably greater and met with considerably greater ease.



She is better, she says, and she says it the way someone reports an observation rather than makes a claim, the way a person says something they have simply noticed to be true about themselves after a long time of paying close attention, and it lands not as arrogance but as something more interesting than that, as evidence of a career that has rewarded consistency not with comfort but with greater capacity, greater range, greater ability to deliver on a vision that was always this large and always this certain of its own direction, a vision that never needed the industry to validate it and never waited for the culture to arrive before it proceeded.

When the conversation turns to legacy, to what she hopes future generations will understand when they encounter the work, Morris returns as she does throughout this exchange to the idea of intention, to the full artistry of every element brought together like pieces of a puzzle, each one placed with care and deliberateness toward the completion of a whole that is more than the sum of its decisions, and she is clear that even though the work may appear very complex it is all very intentional, nothing arbitrary, nothing decorative in the shallow sense, everything aimed at something specific and everything arriving there. She wants to be remembered as an innovative and creative and artistic designer who set her own trends and created a distinct point of view that was always true to herself, who built a style so recognizable and so complete that you can identify it immediately, walk into a room and know without being told whose work you are standing inside, and given what the past three decades have actually produced that is not an ambition, it is already a fact, the rooms are already that recognizable, the point of view already that distinct, the voice already that clear and consistent and entirely its own.

The style is something very original, she writes, something that had not been seen before, and I would like to be remembered as an original innovator in design because that is truly what I have always set out to do, and reading it back you realize that this is not a statement about the future at all, it is a description of what has already happened, of a career built entirely on that premise and delivered on entirely, and the only question that remains is what comes next, which knowing Morris is probably already finished and complete somewhere in her head, fully formed, waiting patiently for the rest of the world to arrive.

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The work has become bolder, more adventurous, and more refined over time. Everyone wants to see what we can create, and we are here to deliver.



BLUEPRINT

Portside

A CALIFORNIAN RETREAT ON THE PACIFIC OCEAN

Project: Portside
Location: La Jolla, California, USA
Architect, Interior Designer and Landscape: Daniel Joseph Chenin
Architect of Record: H&S International
Design Team: Juan Salvo, Eric Weeks, Elena Armendariz, Esther Chung, Adrienne Marrero
Main Contractor: Hill Construction
Consultants MEP: Positive Energy
Lighting Design: Daniel Joseph Chenin
Photography: Tim Hirschmann, courtesy of Daniel Joseph Chenin