

DESIGN AGENCY

This award-winning firm is taking the hotel industry by storm

BY DANIELLE SCHALK

Toronto-based DesignAgency — founded by partners Anwar Mekhayech, Allen Chan and Matt Davis — has made a significant mark on the city's hospitality scene in recent years.

“Growing our portfolio in the lifestyle and luxury sectors is exciting,” Chan says of the firm's recent projects, such as the St. Regis Toronto and the ongoing transformation of The Ritz-Carlton, Toronto.

However, the company has designed a wide range of projects since its inception, spanning commercial, residential and hospitality, with the trio cutting their teeth in restaurant design.

“Allen and Matt met in university and formed a strong bond, regularly collaborating on projects. Matt worked at my family's restaurant — which is how I met them both,” Mekhayech explains. “In 1998, we came together to form a company called Precipice Studios to design a restaurant I was going to own and run called SpaHa, which attracted local and international attention. From there, we jumped into the business.”

“From the beginning, we envisioned a design studio that functioned at the crossroads of various disciplines,” says Chan. “Our academic backgrounds are landscape architecture, architecture and engineering, respectively, but our passions have always stretched much further, including travel, food, art, graphic design, branding, industrial design and music.”

Precipice Studios ultimately became DesignAgency a decade later and the now well-established company boasts three studios (Toronto, Barcelona and Los Angeles) with more than 70 employees.

“We've had a series of big breaks that have helped us grow,” explains Mekhayech, citing Soho House Toronto and Momofuku's first Canadian flagship — which resulted in a long-term relationship with the brand. “And certainly, Generator [Hostels] was a big break that catapulted us into the global hospitality market,” he adds.

Over the years, the company has received a number of accolades, including recent recognition from the ARIDO

FAST FACTS

- Partners/ founders Anwar Mekhayech, Allen Chan and Matt Davis hosted the second iteration of HGTV's *Designer Guys*
- Though founded in Toronto, the company has since launched two international studios in Barcelona and Los Angeles
- The studio's recent hotel projects include Motto by Hilton, The St. Regis Toronto, The Ritz-Carlton, Toronto, The Broadview Hotel and Victor Restaurant at Le Germain Hotel Toronto Mercer

Awards, Urban Design Awards and *Azure* magazine, as well as *Hotelier's* inaugural Design Award for “200+ Rooms – Restaurant/Bar Design” for its work on Fairmont Tremblant's Choux Gras Brasserie Culinare.

“All three of us are actively engaged in design — it's our passion,” adds Davis. “We each have our strengths, but they also seem to have gelled over the past 21 years, in terms of a creative point of view, as well as the fine art of running both the ‘business of design’ and the studio.”

Another key project the studio has brought to life is the Motto by Hilton brand concept, which was unveiled in October 2018. “We worked with Hilton to develop Motto by Hilton, a micro-room hotel concept with a footprint of 163 sq. ft. that will be popping up in urban cities around the globe,” says Davis. “The rooms have the ability to connect and are highly efficient — space saving, multi-functional, technology driven and designed to tie in specific characteristics to their respective cities.”

Looking ahead, Mekhayech says the team is “focusing on growth, but at the same time on maintaining our high level of quality, creativity, attention to detail and client relationships.” ♦

