

# First place

As leading interior architect Tara Bernerd launches *Place*, a new book with Rizzoli, the designer tells **Ellen Millard** about her inspirations, the secret to a good hotel and celebrating 15 years in business



**A**gatha Christie famously required a bathtub and a bag of apples to pen her whodunits; Mark Twain favoured a remote cabin in California; and Jack Kerouac, Thomas Wolfe and Dylan Thomas would hole up in New York's now closed Hotel Chelsea. The writing caverns of the world's best wordsmiths are particular at best, but none hold a candle to the 15,000sq ft island retreat that interior architect Tara Bernerd fashioned for one of her author clients recently.

Located in Mallorca, the sandstone build boasts unrivalled views over the bay of Palma, best seen through a floor-to-ceiling window that stretches the length of the client's study, in front of which the author has studiously placed his writing desk.

The villa is one of many featured in the designer's new book, *Tara Bernerd: Place*, a retrospective and nostalgic look at some of her and her team's best work over the past 15 years, ranging from a penthouse in Westminster and a yacht in Istanbul, to a collection of lodges and tree houses for Center Parcs. For Bernerd and

her team, it was a chance to pause and reflect on what they have achieved.

"It was so interesting to look back at the past 15 years; it was a great reminder of the body of work that we have done," she tells me. "Through imagery and personal instinct we took a selection from each part of our journey, and had to be a bit ruthless about some of the others."

A protégé of Philippe Starck – with whom she worked at the YOO Studio during the '90s – the designer established her own company, Tara Bernerd & Partners, in 2002, and quickly gained a

FROM TOP: THOMSON CHICAGO; PHOTOGRAPHY: PHILIP VILE; TARA BERNERD; PHOTOGRAPHY: JASON ALDEN; BOTH © TARA BERNERD; FROM PLACE BY TARA BERNERD, RIZZOLI NEW YORK, 2017



» reputation for her sleek eye for interior architecture, which has transformed lofty towers and cavernous penthouses into slick spaces for private clients, hoteliers and developers. Her USP is 'a home from home', crafting hotels and yachts into comfortable spaces to retire to.

"Hotels are very much our main focus, but we feel very attuned to that marriage of the residential feel within a building that so many people enjoy," Bernerd explains.

"In a sense, hotels are the lifestyle homes of today. We understand the philosophy of what might be a beautiful bedroom in someone's house, but instead there are 200 of them – and what might be a marvellous study may become a lounge or bar in a hotel."

The name of her new book, *Place*, stems from her desire to produce contemporary projects without infringing on the local area. For instance, the Mallorca-based villa comprises materials used on the island, while a chalet in Gstaad features grey quartzite extracted from a nearby quarry.

"When we're in a place, our aim is to be very indigenous and to bring out what the area demands, what the local neighbourhood might want from it and what the client is looking for," Bernerd says. "Each project has its own life and its own DNA."



Travel and hospitality design has been an interest of Bernerd's ever since she was a child. As the daughter of property developer Elliott Bernerd, a passion for high-quality service was instilled in her from a young age and she recognised early on in her career that the design of a building is just the beginning of a hotel's road to success.

"I was very fortunate to be able to travel a lot as a girl. I was always so interested in the hotels and these different worlds that we went into," she tells me. "When we are designing, I think what inspires me is that you're creating an atmosphere. It's not just about wall finishes and different trends, it's about layer upon layer of decisions and how, after each one is applied, you are creating an atmosphere that will make people want to return. That's something that still intrigues me today."

**"What inspires me is that you are making an atmosphere it's not just about wall finishes"**

Although she admits that she's "not great with favourites", she praises the Belmond group for having "some of the most beautiful hotels" and staff members who "are such characters". Her stand-out hotspots include the Belmond Hotel Caruso in Italy's Ravello ("it's so beautiful and so tasteful"), and The Mercer in New York ("I can still walk in and think 'wow'. When André Balazs first did that hotel with Christian Liaigre it was so cool... and it still is"). She also has a soft spot for Claridge's, where she likes to meet her mother for lunch.

Of her own projects, the ones that she recalls most fondly are Sixty Soho in New York and Thompson Chicago, although she struggles when it comes to her out and out favourites.

"Each project has evoked so much and there have been so many incredible people involved that every one is a family member in itself," she explains. "There are projects that I'm very close to just because of the people involved. Each one is an experience."

As the company celebrates its 15th anniversary this year – which Bernerd hopes to mark with a party at The Hari hotel in Belgravia – the team is working hard on projects in the USA (a New York office is opening imminently), and looking forward to the future, in which the designer plans

to expand the brand and continue to work on projects around the world. Reflecting on the past 15 years, Bernerd comments on how much the industry has evolved since she started.

"It has changed in two ways: one is how we constantly try to understand people's preferences, whether it be a living space and how people might want to use that," she explains. "What might have once been a traditional layout for a living room may not suit how people live today."

"The second fold is how we work in our studios," she continues. "It's very hard to go to a presentation without computer-generated images, so our design process is far more technical."

When it comes to her own home, Bernerd favours mid-century furniture, but cites The Conran Shop as her go-to for ceramics and glassware. Her own apartment in Battersea is the first featured in her new book. The space is the ultimate representation of Bernerd's design style, but it was actually the location that drew her to the building in the first place.

"I run every morning in Battersea Park and I love my view of the river. I think Albert Bridge is one of the most beautiful in the world," she enthuses. "I like the energy that London has and I think that it's one of the most creative hubs globally. The amount of talent that comes out of here, we're just spoilt by restaurants and chefs, museums and art galleries."

But with projects based all over the world, it sounds as though Bernerd gets to spend less time in the capital than she would like, and when I ask

her about her plans for the future, she laughs at the prospect of looking further than the next few weeks, which are set to be hectic to say the least.

"Right now, I feel that if I can make it to the airport tomorrow and get to Hong Kong in one piece, then come back to London and go to Paris, Munich and then Mexico, we'll be on the right track." Passports at the ready... ■

*Tara Bernerd: Place*, £42.50, [rizzolusa.com](http://rizzolusa.com)

FROM TOP LEFT: WESTMINSTER TERRACE PENTHOUSE WITH ARTWORK BY JIM LEE AND CUECO MOCARDO; PHOTOGRAPHY: PHILIP VILE; TARA BERNERD'S HOME IN BATTERSEA, PHOTOGRAPHY: PHILIP VILE; ALL OTHERS: BELMOND, FROM PLACE BY TARA BERNERD, RIZZOLI NEW YORK, 2017

