

Philippe Starck's Seattle hotel is a place to be 'uplifted' and 'in love'

PSBJ Interview

Mar 20, 2015



Philippe Starck, the noted French designer, displays renderings for the SLS Seattle hotel he's designing inside the Fifth + Columbia tower in downtown Seattle. Starck also is designing a restaurant and event space in the old church sanctuary next door.

You may not have heard of Philippe Starck, but there's a good chance you've sat in one of his Louis Ghost armchairs, a redesign of the classic Louis XVI chair made of translucent plastic. Or you have run across products, from tape dispensers to toothbrushes, he designed for Target. He also was key to launching the designer hotel concept, which is why last week the French designer was in Seattle, where he's designing the SLS Seattle, part of the Fifth + Columbia hotel/office tower under construction downtown.

The tower is next to a 1908 church sanctuary that Fifth + Columbia developer Daniels Real Estate is turning into restaurant and event space (which Starck also is designing). The Business Journal interviewed Starck in the office of ZGF Architects, which designed the Fifth + Columbia tower.

Question: A biographer wrote that you're "a tireless and rebellious citizen of the world" and strive to make your work "a political and civic act." How do you do that?

It's complicated. You can make what industry wants or you can make what people think they need, but it's not honest. Good design is a duty. It's almost religious, and it's driven by a mix of creativity, poetry, vision, ethic, know-how, humor, tenderness and a lot of work.

Question: But politics?

In design, you have a clear political position because a project can be from the right or the left. It can be cool or fascist. Everything is a choice and everything is political. When you design something, you're essentially voting. My work is only political. I follow my truth, my ethic. Me? I'm clearly left.

Question: How would you define a design with a leftward bent?

Left designs tend to be more feminine, more intuitive. Right designs are more macho and represent power, brutality, and aggression without reason. I designed a motorcycle, the Aprilia Moto 6.5. A lot of people said bad things about it. They said it was too feminine. I asked why is a motorcycle obligated to be uber macho. It's ridiculous.

Question: You're a leader in the democratic design movement. What is that?

A good example is the Louis Ghost chair. When I started in design, a good chair cost around \$1,000. I did not understand that. I felt deeply it was not fair. Little by little, model by model, I took out two of those zeros. It was a long fight and it is done. I have won. Today almost everybody can have the right product at the right quality at the right price.

Question: What is your vision for SLS Seattle?

Seattle is very special. It is for the world a city of intelligence. Here you can make the most intelligent project because you know the people will understand what you do. I love intelligence. I love intelligent people. I try to produce intelligent design. Seattle is for me a real opportunity.

Question: What is your approach to hotel design?

I strive to create a place where friends and members of my tribe can have a better time, to be at their best, where they will be uplifted, more sexy, more intelligent, more creative, more sparkling, more in love. And that's all.

A blog post with more from the Business Journal's interview with Starck is at bit.ly/1EjwFBv.

A closer look: Philippe Starck

Age: 66

Job: Starck is designing the interior of SLS Seattle, a luxury hotel in the Fifth + Columbia tower. Now under construction, the 43-story tower also will have 528,000 square feet of office.

Family: Wife Jasmine Starck and five children

Education: Studied at Notre Dame de Sainte Croix in Neuilly

Favorite place to visit: The fish market in any city: "What I love is to feel the energy and to feel the energy I like to go to the fish market."