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INTERIOR MOTIVES

Driven by a restlessness for travel, leading hotel designer Clint Nagata of BLINK Design Group dreams up culturally nuanced spaces with subtlety and grace. Interview by Eleanor Edstrom

Long before he landed his first role in an interiors firm, young Clint Nagata was sketching miniature worlds and building Lego houses on his bedroom floor – early signs of a creative mind that would take him around the globe. Now based in Bangkok as Founder and Creative Partner of BLINK Design Group, the Japanese-American hotel designer has become one of the most sought-after names in the luxury hospitality industry.

Despite an enviable portfolio of high-end properties (Regent Phu Quoc, The Fullerton Ocean Park, Hotel Hong Kong, Six Senses Kyoto and W Dubai – Mina Seyahi among them), Nagata

remains disarmingly modest. “I had all the opportunities in the world,” he says of his early years at international design firm WATG, crediting his success to good fortune and timing. “Thankfully, I didn’t screw it up too bad,” he laughs.

It’s no coincidence that Nagata’s interiors carry the same measured, unpretentious presence as their creator. Founded by Nagata in 2006, BLINK Design Group favours a ‘less is more’ philosophy; their spaces don’t clamour for attention but exude a quiet conviction guided by restraint, clarity and sensibility – qualities Nagata attributes to his Japanese heritage. “We always try to create spaces that last the test of time,

spaces that feel open and not enclosed,” says Nagata. “But also, certain principles are key to us, such as balance.”

Spending his childhood in a small town in the Hawaiian countryside, the designer recalls being gripped by a sense of restlessness from a young age. “I never felt like staying in one place.” Nagata’s desire to venture beyond his homeland deepened when he began travelling to Asia with WATG. “I had a very American view of the world,” he reflects. “Having this opportunity to travel and meet people really opened my eyes to seeing things differently.”

This fascination with diverse cultural contexts not only led Nagata to relocate



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Interiors

01 Balanced interiors by BLINK Design Group at Banyan Tree Dongguan Songshan Lake © Lit Ma 02 A serene colour scheme at Roku Kyoto © Ben Richards 03 At the Six Senses Kyoto pool a feature wall depicts mystical clouds © Ben Richards 04 Design mastermind Clint Nagata

to Thailand’s capital to establish BLINK, but underlies the brand’s bid to imbue each project with a marked sense of locality. “That’s only possible by really understanding what makes that place special and ensuring those stories emanate from those who have grown up or live there,” says Nagata.

Six Senses Kyoto, which is located across the road from the Heian-era Myōhō-in Temple, embodies this approach. A nuanced nod to the arts and folklore of Japan’s Heian period, the lobby recalls the Tale of Genji with an evocative wall scroll and concertina-style wooden ceiling that folds like origami. Meanwhile, the door handles of each

suite, fashioned from recycled washi paper, playfully reinterpret traditional Kitsune fox masks.

One of BLINK’s most recent projects is the transformation of Caesars Palace Bluewaters Dubai into Banyan Tree Dubai. Similarly resonating with its distinctive environment, the refreshed space embraces a local material palette of artisanal banana-leaf wall coverings and Omani ivory stone, while curvaceous lines echo the region’s sand dunes.

Despite the inevitable risks that come with starting a business, Nagata never let worries get in the way of bringing his ideas to life. “It’s OK for me to, you know, make mistakes,” he says. “I’d rather do

something and learn from it than regret not doing something.”

This bold yet graceful spirit has helped BLINK evolve into the powerhouse it is today. But for Nagata, the brand exists as much to empower the next generation of leaders as it does to fulfil his own creative visions. “I always wanted to create something that lived past me,” he reflects. “My job as a creative director is to make younger designers better, not for them to make me better. And there’s a difference there, right?” Committed to creating timeless sanctuaries of calm, BLINK’s team will doubtless continue reshaping the luxury hotel landscape well into the future. blinkdg.com ♦