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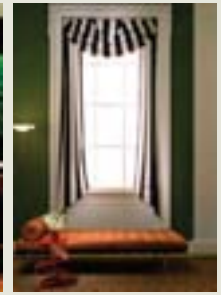




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5 questions for...

Cheryl Rowley

After 25 years with your firm, and 38 years in the business, you are retiring, or as you say, reinventing yourself. Why now?

I went from being a senior designer at James Northcutt, to starting my firm in the basement of my house with one employee, to a staff of 40. It's hard not to get big when opportunities present themselves and there's exciting, global work. I found myself, even though I was designing all the way to the end, getting further away from that, from where I started, which was a boutique company with small projects. The recession was an opportunity to look at my business and personal life. My family has been up in British Columbia—my husband for five years, daughter for two years. That was really the impetus. Should I continue to ride this out and build the business again or does that make any sense?

So what's next for you?

Even though I am closing my LA office, I am still a designer, and always will be a designer; it's part of who I am as a human being. I am keeping the business name, and expect I will be doing design up in Canada. First I want to take a break and regroup. There are some things I need to do personally—I own a home up in Canada, and I want to get outside and work in my garden.

What design opportunities would pique your interest?

Maybe I will take on projects in keeping with what I used to do: more local, smaller, intimate. I am a child of the '60s and '70s and really a hippie at heart. I want to get back to doing things with my hands.

What are some of the milestone projects of your career?

Personally, a huge project for me was the Hotel Hana-Maui. I started it with Northcutt and it was where I learned my chops in construction management and the essence of what good hotel design is all about. We had a fabulous client in Rosewood, particularly Bob Zimmer. That gave me the opportunity to start my own business—my first projects were capital improvements for Rosewood. After that was my early work for Kimpton, the Beverly Prescott in Los Angeles. That was the break out project for me—at the time everything was beige, and we put coral and ivory striped wallcovering in the guestroom, the first time that had ever been done. And the last big project I worked on is still in construction: the Four Seasons in St Petersburg, Russia. It is a highlight of my career.

What are your greatest lessons learned?

I think listening, being a really good listener. Trying to understand not only the client and where they are coming from, but also the intrinsic nature of a project. Equally important, you cannot underestimate the amount of detail you have to pay attention to. Lastly, be out there in the world and take it in. Travel and open yourself up to different cultures, smells and tastes, experiences. And be appreciative of people. The hardest thing is saying goodbye to all the amazing talent I have had the opportunity to work with. I can't say thank you enough.