



# Corinna Kretschmar-Joehnk & Peter Joehnk

## Founders of JOI-Design

Led by founders and co-MDs Peter Joehnk and Corinna Kretschmar-Joehnk, JOI-Design's 35-year legacy encompasses over 500 one-of-a-kind hospitality destinations in Germany and abroad as well as serviced apartments, cruise ships and next-generation workspaces, all designed for comfort, wellbeing and belonging.

### What three words would you use to describe JOI-Design?

**Peter:** Co-operative (internally and externally), open-minded, futurist.

### With so many hospitality designers in the industry, how does JOI-Design stand out?

**Corinna:** We create imaginative solutions, designs with a sense of humour, and interesting details that guests notice upon second glance – these are the visible aspects that distinguish our work.

But what we do behind the scenes before the actual design is evaluate fitting concepts that relate to the city and the site of the project, to the given brief, to the anticipated guests, and to the brand. The concept then leads to an authentic story that is perfect for the project's microlocality and forms the inspiration for our design.

### What does design mean to you?

**Corinna:** Design is not art, and design is not personal taste!

Design is the solution to a challenge, the answer to many questions that aren't often asked. That's why our process starts by questioning each project, because that's what helps us develop the right concept and explain why our design has a certain look. Our goal is to always have reasons and arguments that support our 'visible' design choices.

### How can design be used to manage the guest's expectations of the hotel experience?

**Peter:** The guest experience is the result of the concept and story we create. Their expectations are often related to the brand identity, the location, and the quality level of the design. Design usually has the most influence on their decision about what hotel

fits them best, because it indicates what kinds of experiences that will have.

Three examples from our recent projects really illustrate this idea:

- Moxy Hamburg City

A party brand for younger guests, the design features a local touch by referencing Hamburg's famous carpet warehouses – all presented with a sense of humour (flying carpets are suspended from the ceiling and hang above street art).

- Vivanta Bengalaru

Designed with high-spirited energy in the bar, Wink, and, in Mynt restaurant, the glamour desired by young tech professionals, the interiors are an expression of their personalities and create a place where they will meet like-minded people.

- Fraser Suites Hamburg

This former tax office in a listed 1910 landmark had a very majestic – but not at all charming – appearance, and had to be converted into a hotel. Guests certainly don't expect to spend their money for a luxurious night in a tax office! Therefore, we came up with a concept that expresses the positive vibe of the times in which it was built – a design that celebrates the glamour, dancing and liberal attitudes of the emerging era, the Roaring Twenties.

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**Turning to the topic of authenticity of experience, how do you approach each project?**

**Corinna:** As previously mentioned, we find an authentic story for each place that can be supported by neighbourhood experiences. We work with local creatives, as seen for example with the street art in the Moxy Hamburg, who then become 'brand ambassadors' for the hotel by telling guests the story of contemporary Hamburg through their works.

In a draft concept we pitched for a luxury hotel in Vienna, we used the idea of a kaleidoscope to bring together varied types of authentic Viennese style – Empire, Art Deco and contemporary design. Hotel guests journey through different periods of time, but they always experience a kaleidoscopic glimpse of the other eras.

**How important are public spaces in hotels? Are there ways in which you've used innovative design in these areas to facilitate innovative usage?**

**Peter:** Once guests have a first impression of the public areas, it becomes very difficult for their opinions to change – either the spaces fit their personality and feel welcoming, or it seems they were designed for a different kind of traveller.

Innovation comes into play with the flexible use of space – for

example, reception services located at the bar or a co-working space placed between an easy-going living room lounge, bar and bistro. We even included a full kitchen for individuals to use in the lobby of the new extended-stay brand, Stay Kooook, in Bern, Switzerland. At the me and all hotel in Kiel, Germany, zoned areas and varying floor heights make the open-plan public spaces feel larger, yet at the same time quite intimate.

The more a hotel has to follow rigid brand guidelines and have a conventional, standardised look, the harder it is to introduce innovation, which is why so many conventional properties only have a 'normal' use of space.

**Do designers think about loyalty when they design a hotel or a serviced apartment, or is it just an operator's concern?**

**Corinna:** A successful design is one that helps our clients earn money, and the best way is through repeat guests – so thinking about loyalty is certainly part of our job!

Of course, we are always asked to design for Instagrammable moments because they help sell the hotel, but details noticed upon second glance also reinforce positive memories that guests want to recapture, and humorous touches are what people tell their friends about, so these approaches also encourage repeat business.



Moxy Hamburg City

Photography by Christian Kerschauer for IO-Design



me and all hotel Kiel, Germany

Photography by Christian Kerschauer for IO-Design

“A well-thought-out design sets the stage for optimal service delivery. Good design and a variety of atmospheres make guests stay longer and spend more money, so quality design definitely offers ROI for developers”

**How high on the list is revenue creation for designers?**

**Peter:** A well-thought-out design sets the stage for optimal service delivery. Good design and a variety of atmospheres make guests stay longer and spend more money, so quality design definitely offers ROI for developers.

Sometimes this can be a gamble between proven successful solutions that are not new and are on their way to becoming boring, and innovative new concepts with the potential to be even more successful – but also threaten to be no success at all!

It's not just designers who might be playing with investors' money. New concepts require the whole team to be on board with supporting a fresh idea.

For example: hotels created to feel like a 'club' where people from the neighbourhood hang around the lobby or there's a performance space for bands or comedians; properties where there's a mix of many levels of room types and services; and conference spaces with a wide range of multifunctional uses – all require a high degree of operational co-ordination.

**How do you think the influence of new technology affects the luxury traveller, and could do in the future?**

**Corinna:** For luxury guests, we currently need to provide digital

and analogue systems in parallel, as some of them are just not interested in technology. As a hotelier, you don't want to educate them if they don't want to be educated. But of course, the technology is present and used by some guests, and will be much more so in the future.

When at last luxury travellers use self-check-in, too, digital hotel services can become a greater part of the conversation and will be able to help guests before they even have the chance to ask their questions. Technology must make their lives easier, not harder, so it has to be simple to use.

**Do you believe simple design has become luxurious?**

**Peter:** Yes, 100% – well, at least it's a trend! The majority of luxury hotels have traditionally 'rich' designs, and many new projects go this route, too. But then again, there are also so many luxury concepts where unexpected simplicity is the main feature.

I smiled a bit when three years ago, before Covid, the founder of Design Hotels, Claus Sendlinger, said, "Gardening is the new golf" – but he was right! Covid proved it!

Another aspect of heavenly simplicity and clearness is the relaxation of one's spirit and mental state. Staying in such a hotel is a holiday for body and soul, placing mindfulness before 'bling bling'.

So far, we haven't had the opportunity to design an ultra-luxury hotel in an ultra-minimalist style, but it would be a dream!

What we often do, though, is a conscious reduction of interior patterns and colours in order to celebrate the exterior – as seen, for example, with the Park Inn Sky Suites Berlin, with their breathtaking view of the skyline, as well as with il Salotto Wines & Resort in Tuscany, where a tranquil design lets the surrounding vineyards and sea beyond feel even more magnificent.

**What particular trends have you noticed in interior design?**

**Corinna:** Hospitality design is everywhere! We get requests to design office projects, senior living communities and cruise ships, that all want to have the hospitality touch. And then on a bit more of an abstract level, many trends are happening in parallel:

- The enduring trend towards green, natural and organic materials with raw, unrefined textures
- Minimalism continues, now fine-tuned with biophilic forms and natural materials
- A playful approach that embraces a colourful mixture of all styles
- Preference for outdoor spaces and for hotels, using them in ways not originally intended
- Increasingly flexible layouts, especially as, thanks to remote working, unused office buildings are retrofitted into hotels. One solution is the mobile wall in each guest room at Stay Kooook Bern. 'The Slide' glides back and forth to add an extra two square metres of living space when using the wardrobe, sofa, bed and kitchen

**Where do you see hotel design going in the future?**

**Peter:** For a hotel, the greatest luxury is having an authentic legacy with a location in an existing landmark such as a monastery or even a bank – buildings that are icons themselves in their location.

Luxury is also local, handmade craftsmanship with valuable materials and meticulous detailing, all reflecting the location, the city, the country. And, in the Western world, simplicity and sustainability will be the new guidelines for luxury.

At the same time, there's a drive for hotels designed with a young-spirited party vibe – but these are lower priced, and most likely won't transfer to the luxury market.

**Is there anything exciting you're working on that you can tell us about?**

**Corinna:** A-Rosa Cruises commissioned us to reposition their brand as a provider of "city-hopping" river cruise experiences for families and cultured travellers in their 40s to 60s. The new prototype we've designed will be rolled out across its entire fleet, and is aimed at attracting people who want to experience 'slow travel' as an antidote to the stress of daily life. The maiden voyage is slated to take place May 2022.

We're also working on the interior design of the public spaces in a new landmark on Hamburg's skyline. It's very exciting, yet still confidential – so stay tuned!

**What's next for you both, and the future plans of the studio?**

**Peter:** We have hundreds of ideas, both as a company and as individuals, and we are always developing and learning to keep up with the times and move forward.

For almost five years we've had three partners who have each worked with JOI-Design for more than a decade. They all have different talents and strengths, and we believe that the combination of Sabrina Voecks, Heinrich Boehm and Thomas Scholz creates a perfect package to look positively at the future and that, one day, they can even do better than Corinna and me as they take JOI-Design into the next chapter.

We're already taking steps to develop a broader base of projects



A-Rosa Sena river cruise ship

Photography by A-ROSA Fluschart GmbH

Photography by Christian Kerschmar for JOI-Design



Fraser Suites Hamburg



Moxy Hamburg City

Photography by Christian Kerschmar for JOI-Design

beyond hotels by introducing hospitality approaches into other sectors – serviced apartments, senior living communities, offices and cruise ships.

We're also broadening the geographic areas where we work. Although we've always designed projects around the world from our office in Hamburg, four years ago we opened a physical office in India with our local partner Gaurav Premchandani, who is a great, reliable and experienced hotel designer. We're already working with several brands in India, but it all started with IHCL (Taj Hotels), because Puneet Chhatwal, CEO and MD of IHCL, wanted more international design in the country. Our Indian office is growing despite Covid-19, and we now have many hospitality industry clients, including local investors and international operators.

One of our best senior designers moved to Zurich last year for personal reasons, and as we have projects in Switzerland, we realised his move offered us the possibility of having an office there.

Our team's 35 years of experience in the hospitality industry allows us to consult with clients about FF+E, budgets, project co-ordination and takeovers/handovers through a separate department within JOI-Design.

And with our dedication to providing massive amounts of research for concepts and storytelling, we also have a different stream from our design studio that offers marketing, concept development and graphics as an additional service.

Although Corinna and I still dedicate our lives only to JOI-Design, we still have fun with this life, as we do most things together, so there is no gap between business and private life. But of course, we

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are also looking for more free time and holidays, and retirement is somewhere on the horizon.

The good thing with JOI-Design is that the next generation is already in charge and can take over more and more responsibilities so that, in the future, Corinna and I will get to work only for fun!

**What would be your dream hotel project?**

**Peter:** As dreams don't need to be realistic, I would really like the challenge of building luxury hotels underwater, in space and/or on the moon, in the Arctic, in the Forbidden City of Beijing, in the Kremlin, a swimming island hotel, a hotel inside a world monument or one with a monument integrated inside the property. Also a cave hotel in a stone quarry, a treehouse hotel, or in a minimalist monastery (as mentioned above – this might be the most realistic possibility) – any new challenge that the world hasn't seen yet would give me a special kick!

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