

The legendary decorator and set designer Renzo Mongiardino was famous for creating elegant, opulent and theatrical spaces. A favourite of the Milanese bourgeoisie, the Italian designer harmonized style with intelligence. From his work on such films as *The Taming of the Shrew* to his stage design for many of Franco Zeffirelli's operas, he intimately understood how a spectacular setting could heighten any experience. He brought that same remarkable sensibility to his private work in the homes of style mavens such as Jacqueline Kennedy, Marie-Helene de Rothschild, and Donatella Versace.

In our own work with clients, we follow a similar philosophy: a belief that great design elevates and enriches the interior landscapes that shape our lives. That enrichment begins the moment we walk into any space, whether it is a palatial lobby in a grand hotel or the foyer of a home. In both settings, the colours, textures, mood and style of the room should seduce our senses.

The Hotel Gritti Palace in Venice, once the private palazzo of a noble Venetian family and later the official residence of the Vatican's ambassadors to Venice, is now frequented by royals, celebrities and well-heeled clientele. From the moment you walk through their elegant doors, you are immersed in an aristocratic setting. Bathed in rich golden and walnut hues, the room is warm and welcoming. If you settle into one of the satin-covered settees, you can appreciate the period paintings, exquisite wood panelling and ornate Venetian wall mirrors. The room's design reveals not only its Byzantine, Romanesque and Gothic past but also its present-day narrative.

An unforgettable first impression

By Wallace Shaw and Nick Pezzo



We strive for a similar architectural eloquence when we are designing foyers—or private lobbies—in clients' homes. It is often said that a home is like an autobiography and that each room reveals a chapter in its owners' lives. As the foyer is the area where a homeowner begins to tell his or her story, it is important the aesthetic matches that history. While a grand

vision is required, experience has taught us that it is the hundreds of intimate details—the things people will see and touch—that give a foyer a storied texture and mood.

Inviting and captivating

Harkening back to its original French meaning—that of a hearth—the foyer should be inviting and captivating. Remember, you are creating the stage for the rest of your home. The opening

act should be truly unforgettable. A sophisticated mix of antiques and art plus a flair for the dramatic will heighten the anticipation of what is to follow. Like a great play, plans for a well-designed foyer should be based on a dramatic theme that reveals something about the characters and creates an environment for rising action, a climax and a final denouement.

So what does a foyer reveal about someone's character or design sensibility? Plenty—and it happens within seconds. Your guests will notice the colours, materials, furniture and decorative flourishes. They will also respond emotionally to the setting. Is it welcoming? Awe-inspiring? They may start by noticing the colours in the room. Subtle cream hues will create entirely different assumptions than scarlet reds.

Next, your guests may glance down to the flooring. Marble, granite or exotic woods such as walnut, mahogany, or ebony speak to an owner's élan. Patterns in traditional Versailles, herringbone or guilloche styles reveal a love of classical grandeur. Limestone, travertine or basalt in brushed, honed or matte finishes lend a more contemporary flair.

While they may not have immediately noticed your furnishings, after the initial look your visitors may spot your 18th-century-style mahogany console, your circular walnut-and-gilt mirror and your Rococo-inspired table lamp. Their curiosity piqued, they will take a closer look at the trompe l'oeil painted panel with its Tuscan countryside tableaux as well as your collection of agate figurines. Other details, like your Hepplewhite-inspired pelmets and mahogany salon chairs, all contribute to the room's elegant ambiance. The final denouement or

piece de resistance may be the grand piano, the 16-light crystal chandelier or the classic pine and gesso mantel for the fireplace.

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Now step back. Glance around the room. By using layered opulence—sumptuous materials, luxurious patterning and eclectic furnishings—you will have created a stunning three-dimensional painting or visual fantasy.



Photo: Ritiz Carlton.

placed great importance on the design of their lobbies, which speaks to the power of this space to create a positive first impression. In fact, the lobbies of many hotels, such as the Hotel Concorde Saint-Lazare in Paris, have become worthy sites to be seen. Designed by Gustave Eiffel, this cathedral-like setting with its gold-leaf-trimmed columns is considered a masterpiece of the 19th century. A more recent nod to the importance and attention given to lobby design is Philippe Starck's work at The Delano in Miami. Using 40-foot sheer white billowing curtains, highly-stylized chairs and faux-fur covered beds, this Paris-based designer launched a distinct South Beach minimalist aesthetic.

But whether it is a famous hotel or your own foyer, if you strive to capture the architectural and aesthetic spirit of your home, your guests will feel like they have entered an exclusive setting: a place where life is to be savoured and stylishly celebrated. As designer Dorothy Draper, herself an icon of stylish living, said, "There's nothing so important as first impressions. They leave an indelible mark, which nothing that happens later ever quite wipes out. The stage director knows this and tries to arrange a setting for the first act that will bring an exclamation of delight from the audience the minute the curtain goes up. If he has done that, he has captured their attention." ■

Wallace Shaw, ARIDO, IDC, and Nick Pezzo are the principals of Shaw-Pezzo and Associates, an interna-

tional resource of exquisitely crafted home furnishings, artwork, lighting, and accessories. Shaw and Pezzo also offer world-class interior design services. www.shaw-pezzo.com

A worthy masterpiece

While it is easy to become involved in other design projects in your home, do not underestimate the significance of the foyer. Luxury hotels have always