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Shirine Zirak

Born of a French mother and an Iranian father, the architect Shirine Zirak was brought up in two radically different cultures. Two ways of seeing the world, of which she is a synthesis, or perhaps more accurately a bridge, a link between two different worlds. An educational background which has given her an open-minded attitude to the world.

An Interview with Shirine Zirak

By Mario de Castro

Did you always like to draw?

Even when I was very young I didn't play with dolls like other girls of my age. I preferred "Lego", building sets and drawing. In later years, and in the course of my travels this propensity led me to observe how architecture adapts to climate and to culture, and how it responds to the way of life of populations. This curiosity fed my sense of freedom and prevented me from ever becoming too locked in by a particular trend.

How did you come to meet Karl Lagerfeld?

It was during the design stages of the Odyssey project at the Hotel Métropole in Monaco, for which I was the designer-architect. I came to meet Karl Lagerfeld when the owners asked him to redesign the interior and exterior areas of the hotel. I was responsible for translating his vision into reality and for endowing it with all its elegance in an architectural context.

What is your working relationship with Karl Lagerfeld?

Right from our very first meeting, I saw that we were on the same wavelength. He is an extremely charismatic person. We are both perfectionists and are both hyperactive. When we meet up, everything is concise and we get straight to the point. Decisions are taken quickly. Ideas abound and it is a real pleasure to work with him.

What is his architectural vision? Does he give your imagination free rein?

There is no doubt that Karl prefers clean, sober and elegant spaces, and likes noble, rough and raw materials. He is a perfectionist when it comes to fashion, and it's the same in architecture.

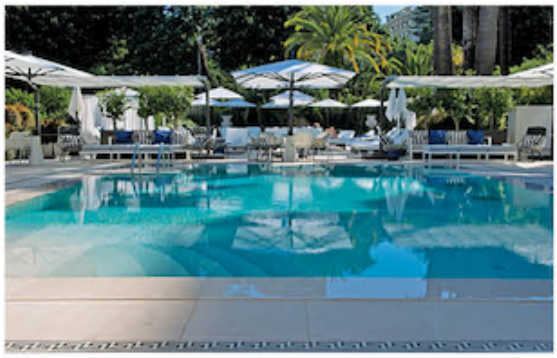
He gives me free rein and he trusts me. I remember a project for which I had suggested we use marble. He said no, saying that it reminded him of a "gravestone". Two days later he called me to tell me that he trusted my judgement and he agreed to use marble. Ever since then, that has been the space he shows to visitors first.

What projects have you worked on with Karl Lagerfeld?

I have worked on one of his design studios and on the huge architectural project of the Odyssey area in the Hotel Métropole Monte-Carlo*. A true work of art which was opened in June 2013, consisting of a pool house, a terrace gardens and a restaurant with, at the helm, the renowned chef Joël Robuchon whose cuisine is among the finest anywhere. A new project is underway in Taichung, a city in the mid-west of the island of Taiwan in the Republic of China, with two luxurious residential towers forty stories high; each is being completed in collaboration with a group of Taiwanese investors, in a style typical of Karl Lagerfeld the guarantor of elegance à la française. I have responsibility for implementing Karl's ideas, and Karl provides me with guidelines to work with.

You recently arranged a presentation of your work last April in Tehran?

Thanks to the recent Geneva agreements, and with the indications of greater openness from Iran, the country where I grew up, there are new possibilities opening up and I wanted to be the first interior designer to participate in this greater openness. For this event I reserved two restaurants in the Sam Center in Tehran, which are owned by the Monsoon Group and are located in a luxury development where there are a host of brand-name shops and boutiques.



To present my previous work and to demonstrate French expertise, I organised an evening with the partners who have supported me: Tai Ping. Serdaneli. Fashion for Floors Atelier Mériguet Carrère... Architect firms and local property investors were also present. The evening was sponsored by Karl Lagerfeld and ended with a dinner for one hundred and thirty guests in a place renowned for new Persian cuisine the Divan restaurant. Michel Faulquier my Director of Development, and my sister, Diane Zirak took responsibility for the logistics and the administrative aspects, thereby allowing me to get this operation done in four months. An achievement which I am very proud of! France is famous for its interior architecture. With the experience and the know-how in our two countries, I am convinced that outstanding projects can come out of Iran. In fact I am also already working on the designs for two new residential projects in Tehran.

Figs: Odyssey. Hotel Métropole Monaco
View of the exterior of the Odyssey concept. Joël Robuchon's restaurant beside the swimming pool of the Hotel Métropole Monte Carlo in Monaco.
In the background a giant fresco inspired by the works of Antiquity.