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COLLECTIVE

ISSUE 18

WHITNEY PORT

... RIGHT ALL ALONG?
#NICEBOSS

MOVING ON
WHEN YOUR
FOUNDER DOES

KERRY
WASHINGTON

poppy
DELEVINGNE

+

Q. ARE YOU
AFRAID OF
SUCCESS?

A. YES, ACTUALLY

The Perfect Match

HOW TO FIND
YOUR START-UP
SOULMATE



NOMAD

ACE HOTEL LOBBY,
PORTLAND – COUCH
AREA WITH FOUND
HOTEL SIGN AND TABLE



ACE'S NEXT HAND

How the creative team behind the ACE HOTEL group has dreamt, led and overcome the loss of its fearless founder to reach NEW HEIGHTS.

WORDS SERENA RENNER

The opening of the Ace Hotel Downtown Los Angeles in early 2014 was the pinnacle of the Broadway Theatre District's reconstruction. Hollywood glamour once oozed from its ornate 1920s movie palaces, but when cars and highways led residents to the suburbs, the historic downtown core was left chipping and peeling until Ace Hotel and other brands invested in its revival.

Today, the area is bursting with art galleries, design boutiques, spirit bars, celebrated restaurants and high-end lofts. Almost immediately, the Ace Hotel's Moroccan-style rooftop lounge acted as a meeting place where creative residents and in-the-know travellers connected over barrel-aged Old Fashioned and Negroni cocktails. This was the neighbourhood's second act, playing out in the spotlight of the adjacent 1927 United Artists Theatre, the Spanish gothic beauty that Ace Hotel restored, and is now operating, alongside the hotel.

Six thousand kilometres south in Panama City, a similar scene unfolded on another lively rooftop, this one overlooking the Panama Canal. Ace Hotel had just starred in another neighbourhood comeback story when it debuted its first luxury property, the American Trade Hotel, in the

UNESCO World Heritage Casco Viejo district. Not long ago, the area was gang-ridden. Now, it's a melting pot of business and culture, with a growing number of opportunities for Panamanians.

But one important person missed both of these parties. Ace Hotel's visionary founder, Alex Calderwood, passed away tragically at the Ace Hotel London, just one month before Panama opened and two months before LA. The brand that had been turning heads and setting trends since converting a Seattle flophouse into the first Ace Hotel in 1999 lost its creative conscience. The question on everyone's mind was: How would Ace Hotel prevail without its curly-haired conductor?

"It was a huge emotional loss," says Kelly Sawdon, executive vice president of recently rebranded Atelier Ace, the umbrella company behind the Ace Hotel group. "Everyone did their grieving but then picked up their toolbox and their pencils and carried on. I think the success of Panama and Los Angeles is really a reflection of the strength of the team that Alex helped build and mentor."

That team has grown to more than 50 employees, with positions ranging from assistant controller to "cultural engineer". These creative thinkers and entrepreneurs, who come from diverse backgrounds but rarely hospitality, work from Portland and New York to manage an expanding



ACE LONDON –
7TH FLOOR TERRACE



portfolio of unique hotels. Properties in Portland, Palm Springs and New York followed Seattle before the company added London, Panama and Los Angeles. And construction is currently underway to recast an old YMCA building in the high-tech East Liberty neighbourhood of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, into a 63-room boutique hotel, the Atelier's eighth. The average occupancy for existing hotels is between 80 and 95 per cent, and the brand raked in US\$110 million in revenue in 2014.

Since the early days, Ace has been known for carefully tailoring the hotel experience to different cities and for coming up with creative designs that often fly in the face of established hotel conventions. Named after Alex Calderwood's childhood nickname, Ace has always represented the merging of disparate influences and cultures.

Kelly, who worked with Alex at an experiential marketing firm, Neverstop, before transitioning over to Ace Hotel, recalls sitting around a table in the old building that would become Ace Hotel Portland. Ideas flew from all directions on how to shape the building's future.

"We really care about things, down to the minute details of what the emergency exit sign looks like, and we're always asking ourselves how we can do something a little bit more clever," says Kelly. "As a group, our mission has been not to standardise things but to be flexible and to really celebrate the uniqueness of the buildings and places we go into."

For Portland, that meant preserving the historic bones of the old hotel and fashioning the lobby's coffee table out of its old fire door. The team played on the hotel cliché of putting a headboard in the middle of the room by adorning its 78 rooms with "soft boards" made from green army fatigues that were cut up and sewn back together.

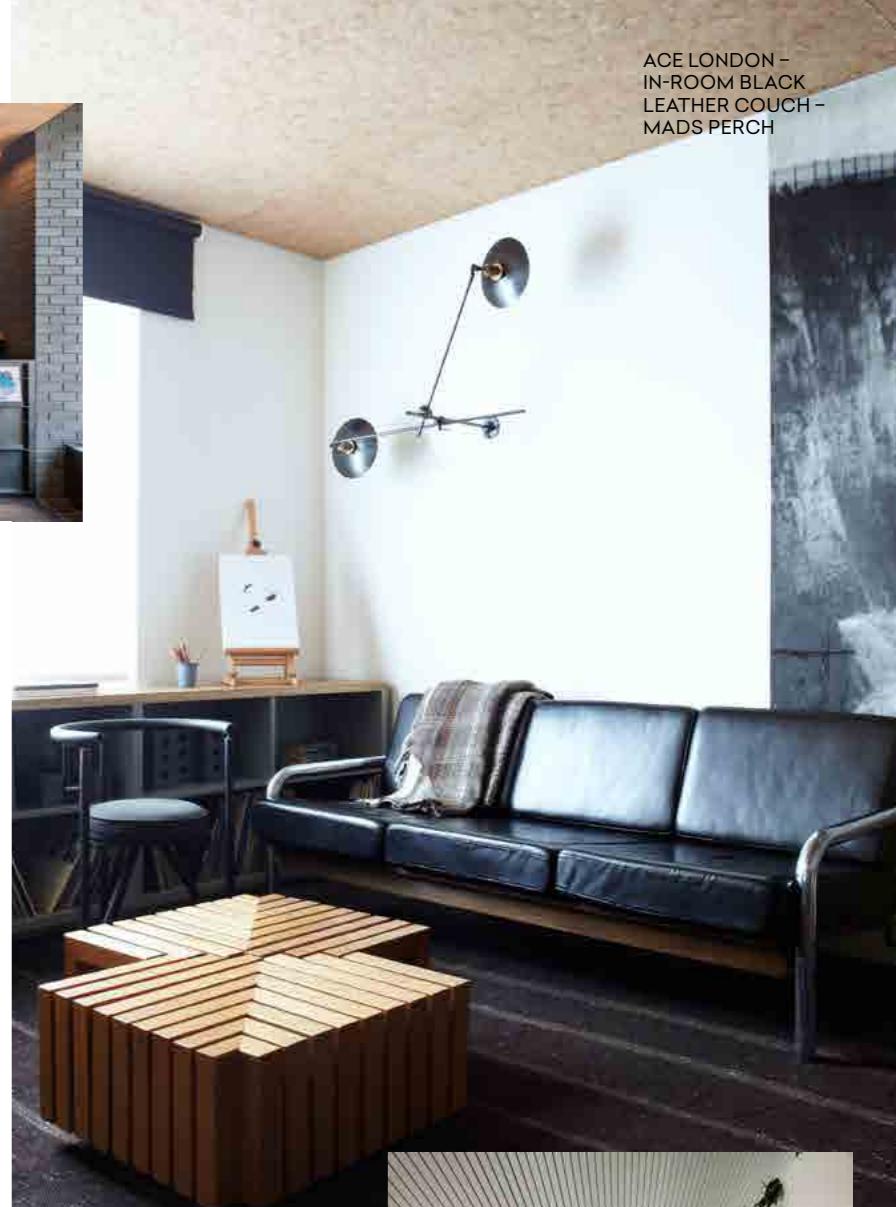
Ace took the army theme one step further by tracking down the embossed metal specialists responsible for an emergency exit sign the group liked. The business, Irwin-Hodson Co., made dog tags for the U.S. Army during World War II, and Ace Hotel hired them to craft the door numbers and key cards. >



ACE LONDON –
MADS PERCH



PORTRAIT: JUYEON LEE, PHOTOGRAPHY: ACE HOTEL LONDON – ANDREW MEREDITH



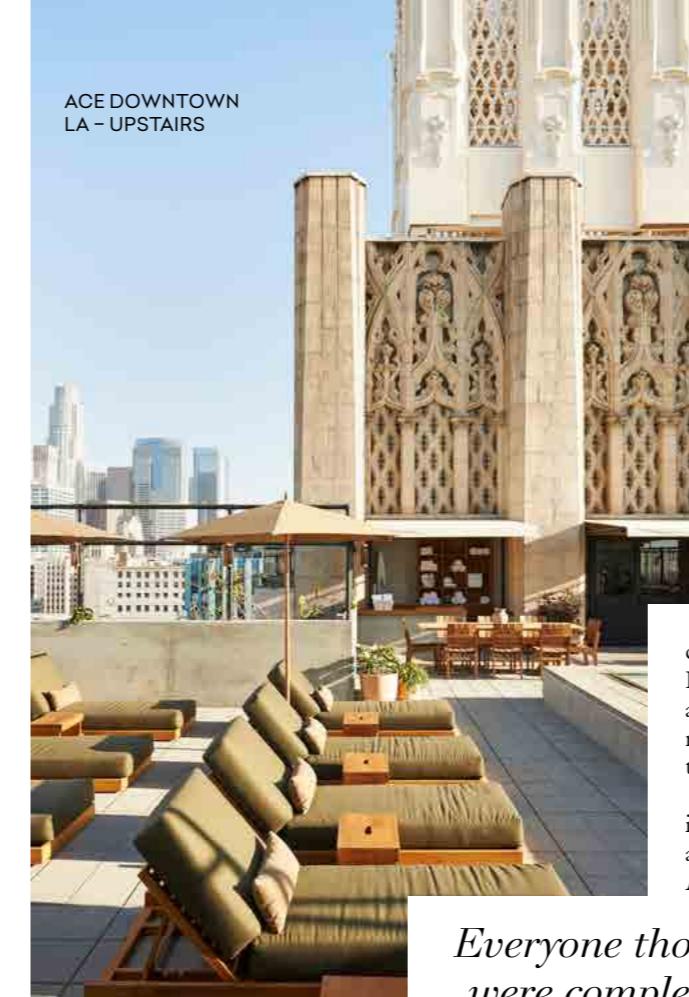
We REALLY CARE about things, down to the minute DETAILS of what the emergency exit sign looks like, and we're always asking ourselves how we can do something a little bit more CLEVER.



ACE DOWNTOWN
LA - FRONT DESK



ACE DOWNTOWN
LA - UPSTAIRS



ACE DOWNTOWN
LA - LA CHAPTER
RESTAURANT



company's next two properties, the 173-room Ace Hotel and Swim Club in Palm Springs, California, and the 272-room Ace Hotel New York, would really stretch the creative limits of the friends turned hoteliers.

While other hotel chains were sourcing durable, industry-approved fabrics, the Ace Hotel managers and designers were running around the Brimfield Antique Show in Boston, sending scratchy

messages to one another with walkie talkies, to pick out vintage furniture for the behemoth New York property.

"Everyone thought we were completely out of our minds," recalls Kelly. "But we wanted something with SOUL and BEAUTY, to give every room its own character."

Some of those same naysayers have come around. "I don't think we were the first by any means [to emphasise vintage furniture]," adds Kelly, "but the

scale that we did it was much larger than I think most people would typically feel comfortable. You know, 272 rooms in New York is not like buying a few interesting pieces. That was a pretty big task. I think it's something that people don't shy away from any longer, and some other brands have embraced it."

If there is one anchor in the Ace apparatus, it's the choice of building and neighbourhood. The staff are always on the lookout for buildings with stories in places they can have a real impact.

Take their development in New York, for example. The team went into a neglected area north of the Flatiron District, which housed aristocrats, bordellos and songwriters at various points in its storied history. What was once a grimy, single-room-occupancy hotel called the Breslin soon became a neighbourhood fixture complete with a café, restaurant, oyster bar, sandwich shop, travel and design store and Opening Ceremony boutique for an emerging area, now known as NoMad. >

PHOTOGRAPH: ACE HOTEL DOWNTOWN LA - SPENCER LOWELL

To pay homage to Portland's skateboarding, music and graffiti culture, the group commissioned local and international artists to paint murals on room walls, and the 14 suites were equipped with turntables so guests could play records that they were bound to find in the music stores around town.

The spaces were designed to attract people like Alex and his friends: designers, creative directors and touring musicians who wanted a crash pad that felt a little more like home.

Among the many exciting collaborations Portland inspired, the hotel brand linked up with Pendleton – the Oregon wool millers in operation since the late 1800s – to bring back the custom logo blankets that Pendleton wove for hotels between the 1930s and 1950s.

"Collaborations are part of our DNA," says Kelly. "That's where it all started. It allows us the opportunity to work with people who we admire and we think are best in class. We're basically trying to be back-up dancers to someone who does it better, and we're able to give people a stage or a platform that they might not otherwise have."

Such outside-the-manual thinking was uncommon in the hotel industry in 2007, when the Ace Hotel Portland opened its doors. But the



IN-ROOM GUIDE



ACE NEW YORK, SUPER DELUXE KING ROOM WITH ARTWORK BY RYDER E. ROBISON



OPENING CEREMONY, ACE NEW YORK

The giant slate table in the retro lobby is a magnet for impromptu meetings and meals.

"I'd go out with friends in Brooklyn and tell people we were doing a hotel at 29th and Broadway and they would be like, 'What? That's crazy! There's nothing out there,'" remembers Kelly. "But because there wasn't a lot in the neighbourhood, it allowed us the chance to dust off what had been forgotten and to help bring the place back to life."

Ditto for the LA hotel, which longtime friends and partners at Commune Design helped imagine. Ace and Commune engaged the local arts community, listened to what residents wanted and made the decision to make everything in California and Mexico. The designers did extensive research on the United Artists building and constructed an elegant art deco lobby as well as a bunker-style bar upstairs where light fixtures were crafted from originals found in the theatre. Both spaces recall the golden age of cinema.

"We believe everything from the architecture to the fork you use at the restaurant to the song you are listening to while you eat with that fork has an effect on the guest experience."

The decision to restore the stunning 1600-seat United Artists Theatre was a natural, albeit ambitious, extension to the project.

"If Ace has taught me anything, it's never say never because unique experiences and opportunities have come out of the woodwork that have been surprisingly great for us," says Kelly.

*We believe
EVERYTHING from
the architecture to
the FORK you use
at the restaurant to
the SONG you are
listening to while you
eat with that fork has
an EFFECT on the
guest experience.*



ACE NEW YORK EXTERIOR

PHOTOGRAPH: ACE HOTEL NEW YORK - DOUGLAS LYLE THOMPSON (EXTERIOR), ERIC LAIGNEL (KING ROOM), ACE HOTEL PORTLAND - JEREMY T. PELLEY ('DRIPPY KITTY', LARRY MURAL), LAUREN COLEMAN (EXTERIOR)



ACE PORTLAND ROOM
YOU COULD ALREADY BE A WINNER.



ACE PORTLAND EXTERIOR

ACE PORTLAND - ROOM 415 COUCH - MURAL 'LARRY' BY BRENT WICK



ACE PORTLAND - 'DRIPPY KITTY' ART BY BRENT WICK

The upcoming Pittsburgh hotel will program sporting events in the original YMCA gym and honour the tech culture of Google and Carnegie Mellon, which both have campuses nearby. Sports and technology are new territory for the bohemian hotel brand. They will require new ways of thinking and an even stronger exchange of ideas, qualities the company's head curator Alex Calderwood promoted above all.

"What was really important to Alex was to be humble," says Kelly. "And to know that great ideas can come from any place. That the more we can collaborate, share ideas and push each other, the more interesting things can be."

Those skills were challenged perhaps more than ever during the construction of the Ace Hotel London Shoreditch, which opened in 2013. Unlike most of the previous properties, the London hotel was built from a concrete tower that lacked the historic charms off which the company loves to riff. Plus, it was the first international hotel and the brand's second largest. But London also marked one of the biggest hotel collaborations in the company's

