

# Space Copenhagen

Through sensitive attention to texture and mood, and careful selection of collaborators, the Danish firm is shaping interiors around the world.

By Giovanna Dunmall

Of all the factors that make a professional partnership successful, chemistry might be the most unsung. Just ask Space Copenhagen. Signe Bindslev Henriksen and Peter Bundgaard Rützou, who founded the practice in 2005, never take on commissions without first sitting down in the same room as their prospective client. “This initial conversation doesn’t necessarily have anything to do with the project,” says Rützou. “It’s more a general conversation about life.”

This relationship-centered approach is clearly working, as the firm’s growing portfolio attests. In recent years the studio has become a go-to for elegant, finely crafted furniture and interiors, often with a pleasing desaturated color palette, natural materials, and an aesthetic that manages to be both cozy and pared back, timeless but of the moment. Aside from designing accolade-garnering hospitality interiors for the likes of 11 Howard in New York City and the re-vamp of the Radisson Blu Royal Hotel in Copenhagen, the 20-strong practice has collaborated with Michelin-starred chefs René Redzepi and Bo Bech, and produced collections for brands such as &Tradition,



Manhattan Loft Gardens (left) is a new London skyscraper with architecture by SOM. Included in its program is a 145-room hotel, The Stratford, which opens this month. The Danish studio Space Copenhagen designed the hotel's interiors, including its guest rooms (opposite). Harry Handelsman, the CEO of Manhattan Loft Corporation, the hotel's developer, shares that Space Copenhagen carefully considers its partners before signing on to projects. “They aren’t out to get all the business they can; they really choose the clients they work with,” he says.

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Mater, Gubi, Stellar Works, and HBF.

“Their approach is about reducing, not adding,” says Yuichiro Hori, CEO and founder of Shanghai-based furniture brand Stellar Works. Space Copenhagen doesn’t closely follow trends, Hori adds, which makes its designs “sustainable” in every sense.

Rützou attributes Space Copenhagen’s elemental style to its Scandinavian roots. It isn’t that he and Henriksen eschew ornament; they just want it to “be there for a reason.” The same goes for color: Clients occasionally request that the designers “go wild,” explains Henriksen, but, “it’s not our first preference.” Embracing a moderated palette not only obviates the need to reupholster with changing trends but lends itself to a more layered and textured approach. “We love the idea of the materials being the ‘colors’ and the ‘patterns,’” Henriksen says.

According to Hori, the office’s intimate size is exactly right for the “long conversations” necessary at the outset of a project. It also plays well during the all-important product development

process. “Big studios handle so many things and lose focus,” he says.

SOM, which has more than 1,000 employees in 11 offices around the world, recently teamed up with Space Copenhagen on The Stratford, a hotel housed within the 42-story Manhattan Loft Gardens in London. (SOM was the base-build architect and structural engineer for the building.) “The fact that we focused on the logistics and technical aspects of the project allowed Space Copenhagen to bring a personal touch and high level of quality to our design,” says Kent Jackson, a design partner at SOM’s London office. He points to Space Copenhagen’s knack for breaking down scale and introducing texture, and praises the firm’s skills in “balancing our architectural composition with their clean aesthetics, natural timbers, warm metals, and stone-clad bathrooms.”

And chemistry, of course, is important to a dynamic within a team as well. For Rützou and Henriksen, getting any bigger would mean altering the way they work. “We love being this size because

it allows us to be engaged in all aspects of the creative output,” says Henriksen. And though Space Copenhagen may be “small but effective,” as Harry Handelsman, who developed The Stratford with his firm Manhattan Loft Corporation, puts it, it is increasingly in a position to offer significant contract work to the furniture companies it collaborates with. Henrik Marstrand, the founder and CEO of the furniture manufacturer Mater, backs up this sentiment. Space Copenhagen’s involvement with hospitality projects provides “the opportunity to have a sizable impact by allowing us to implement ethical solutions on a larger scale,” he says.

Whether a firm is large or small is ultimately irrelevant, argues Handelsman. “It’s not that if you combine the two you get a happy medium,” he says. “It’s a question of attitude, of commitment.” Henriksen agrees: “If you embark on a project that takes four, five, or even more years, you need to love it somehow. It’s your life and what you will get up to every morning, so you need to feel fueled by every aspect of the project.” ■



Space Copenhagen also has a significant product portfolio. Shanghai-based furniture manufacturer Stellar Works is a longtime collaborator with the Danish firm. The Slow collection (left) is one of several lines they’ve created together.

For its first project in the United States, 11 Howard (opposite) in New York, Space Copenhagen outfitted interiors with warm metallic finishes, soft textiles, and furniture with a Danish flourish.

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