

FRAMES

THE GREAT INDOORS

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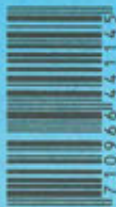
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Triple *Jump*



Distance makes the design grow stronger for **DELORDINAIRE**, whose projects reflect its no-fixed-office philosophy.

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JEAN-PHILIPPE, ADRIAN & ERWAN

AN AUSTRALIAN, a Frenchman and a Canadian walk into a bar. It might sound like the beginning of a bad joke, but in this case it describes the origins of design practice Delordinaire. The story goes that three architects – Adrian Hunfalvai, Erwan Lèveque and Jean-Philippe Parent – were working together on a series of projects in Chicago. One evening they went out to discuss their work over a beer. Talk of the project turned to broader topics, and upon realizing that they shared crucial ideas on design philosophy, the seed for Delordinaire was planted. In 2015 Canadian architect Parent joined Australian-

born Hunfalvai and Frenchman Lèveque, who had already worked together as founding partners of Paris-based studio Ciguë. With daily rituals underpinning Delordinaire's work – 'the motor for how spaces develop', according to Hunfalvai – it seems fitting that a typical night out became the launch pad for their multicultural collaboration.

Meaning 'of the ordinary' in French, Delordinaire is somewhat of a play on words. Although their designs focus on what they call 'ordinary subject matter' – quotidian activities such as eating, sleeping and conversing – the architects work these



For The Hollander, a hotel in Chicago, Delordinaire designed custom furniture and lighting that complement the building's utilitarian aesthetic.



High House rests on stilts – an architectural solution typically found in warm climates and flood zones – that protect occupants from the snow below.

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mundane realities into highly customized, nonindustrial responses that are anything but banal. The studio challenges normative perceptions of how spaces are used. ‘We look at how spaces fit together,’ says Hunfalvay, ‘and at how we can develop programmes and spatial organizations that respond to specific situations.’

The constant questioning that is intrinsic to their designs also enables them to rise to the challenge of their geographically disparate team, nominally based in Paris, although Hunfalvay spends a significant amount of time in London and Parent in a Montreal outpost. Delordinaire eschews the conventional workspace, relying on a more flexible schedule of daily phone hook-ups and regular in-person meetings. As Hunfalvay puts it, ‘We don’t really believe in a fixed office any more.’ He feels that the team should be out and about, ‘looking at masterworks

of other architects, at different cultures and different spaces. Movement and exposure to a diversity of cultures are essential to us; they’re kind of a lifeblood, the inspirational part of our work.’

As forward-thinking as the virtual office sounds, other aspects of Delordinaire’s work embrace more traditional methodologies firmly rooted in the physical. Prototyping, for instance, is pivotal to the design process. Recalling the Stuttgart workspace for lighting studio PSLAB, Hunfalvay says that ‘prototyping led the drawing rather than the other way around’. An emphasis on tactility requires the team to build relationships with artisans and tradespeople, a fruitful exchange of expertise that means, says Lèveque, ‘a project can become more than any of us would have even imagined’.

You talk about concocting atmospheres and working with rituals. How do physical environments facilitate intangible experiences?

ADRIAN HUNFALVAY: For us, the physical environment has to be something that responds to a certain need – something driven by people, rituals, everyday practices. Today, a lot of architecture and design centres on aesthetics. It’s not that looks aren’t important. We’ve done a lot of work with materials, but when we talk about using a space and a programme, we’re also talking about achieving a certain balance that greatly influences the architecture at a very early stage. We’re not just cladding things, adding finishes – the process is driven by the programme and by how it fits together.

The lobby of The Hollander, a hotel in Chicago, combines various programmatic elements within a 400-m² space: these include café, bar, reception, laundry and seasonal bike shop. Seen from a programmatic perspective, the lobby is an extreme example of how we consider spaces in an alternative way. It’s a way of thinking that leads to something dynamic and energetic. Surfaces and finishes flow from that point of departure and tie it all together. The lobby was a difficult area to manage, because it’s located towards the back of the building and doesn’t get a lot of traffic. To help it radiate towards the street, we had to pump an enormous amount of energy into the space. Our solution was to put as much programmatic activity into the lobby as we could and to base the design on those elements. »



Delordinaire was founded by Frenchman Erwan Lèveque, Australian Adrian Hunfalvay and Canadian Jean-Philippe Parent.



At lighting studio PSLAB's Stuttgart workspace, a 20-m-long bench unites various programmatic functions: design atelier, office, kitchen, dining area and library.

What gets you excited about a project brief?

ERWAN LÉVEQUE: What interests me are the different layers of the programme. I'm drawn to the heritage – the history – of a place, because that's what gives vision to our architecture.

JEAN-PHILIPPE PARENT: We start with the place and the building. From there we look at the history and begin thinking about the programme. And while we're digging into the programme, we think about how it can *interact* with the history of the place. After that, you hope for a client with an open mind.

AH: An open-minded client is extremely important. We've had the opportunity to work with some really great people who are ready and willing to experiment, an attitude that means freedom for us. So far we've had clients with very clear ideas of who they are building for, but in terms of the architecture and the aesthetic, they've given us *carte blanche*.

Where does prototyping come in?

EL: Prototypes are a bridge between conception and realization. They're a big part of our process, and we try to include one in each of our projects. When creating bedrooms for The Hollander, we made a prototype of the whole room, from furniture to wall covering

'The process is driven by the programme'

to flooring. It's a way to ensure a sense of coherence among the materials, the design and the work itself.

AH: Everyone knows what a piece of Ikea furniture, or even something more high-end, looks like. But when we're trying to make spaces that are distinctive, the only way to show a client that what we're drawing is out of the box but *can* still work is to use a mock-up in our presentation.

Your team brings together a range of cultures. Does this influence the way you conceptualize projects? **JP:** It's funny, because when we work on a project, we think about the normal rituals of everyday life, which are so different for an Australian, a Canadian and a French person. In a way, those contrasts teach us to persevere. We never give up on the concept of a project; it's an ongoing endeavour. Each of us is used to working in a way that relates to one country but not to others. You can see the outcome of our approach in High House. Questioning the concept allowed us to break away from the traditional Canadian winter chalet. The cold Canadian climate calls for the design of homes that resemble big cocoons: austere boxes with tiny windows, for example. But in the end we mixed that image with a more open exterior, like something you'd find in Australia or even France. ●

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