

## INSPIRING THE FUTURE

The creative flair of the interior architecture of Elizabeth Lowrey, principal of Elkus Manfredi Architects

**T**he innovative creativity of Elizabeth Lowrey reinvents experience design through an aesthetic driven by various artistic expressions: from fashion to theater, art to architecture. An eclectic vision that reimagines the staging of hotels, retail venues, offices, universities and residential buildings for a high-end clientele: Citizens Bank, Walt Disney Imagineering, Boston Consulting Group, New Balance, Equinox.... from custom furniture Made in Italy to an exquisite idea of beauty. Indicated by the magazine Interior Design as one of the “20 inspiring women who make up the new face of the design industry,” and by Boston Magazine as a “designer of the future,” a member of Auburn University’s Interior Architecture Advisory Council, board member of the Design Museum Foundation and Vice Chair of the Young Collectors Night at Park Avenue Armory, Elizabeth Lowrey has been fascinated since childhood by the various expressions of creativity, growing up in a family of artists. She fills every interior design project with this imaginative insight, finding inspiration in her many passions: travel, film, art, fashion, architecture, theater. Eclectic styles narrated in innovative residential buildings, including Ink Block in Boston, or in hospitality facilities like the White Elephant Palm Beach, in that exclusive location in Florida (opening November 4, 2020), featuring an original art collection curated by Lowrey herself. The artists? Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, Jennifer Bartlett, Ghada Amer. A design poetics that narrates the universe of the sublime.

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Andrew Borduin (Charles River Associates)  
Eric Laignel (Siena at Ink Block)  
Evan Joseph (Lantera at Boston Landing)  
courtesy of Elkus Manfredi*



### When did your passion for design start?

I grew up in a family of artists and designers. I was lucky – I knew by the age of six that I wanted to be an architect. I shifted to interior architecture in college when I realized that interior architecture was more involved with the actual end user. I like to design from the inside out, to start with the smallest detail and expand to the urban scale. I’m passionate about working with clients to create a space that enhances their lives and the lives of those who use the spaces we design.

### How did your career at Elkus Manfredi begin and what fascinated you most about the group?

It began with a call from architect Howard Elkus (co-founder of Elkus Manfredi Architects) on a Sunday morning in early summer 1988, inviting me to come interview. It was supposed to be an hour meeting but it evolved into the entire day. The following day, I met with architect David Manfredi, who co-founded Elkus Manfredi Architects with Howard. The day after I turned in my resignation at the firm where I was working and became the first employee at Elkus Manfredi Architects. Howard and David were looking to establish what we now call the “three-legged stool” – as architects and urban planners, they wanted to add interior architecture in order to offer total solutions to their clients. That concept was very attractive to me, especially in the ‘80s, when interior design was considered by some as just decoration. At that time, Howard and David were pioneers in the US to value interior architecture as an equal partner – to see it as an integral piece of the architectural whole, the creation of space around people and programs and communities.

### How is work organized at Elkus Manfredi?

Elkus Manfredi Architects is a full-service design firm of 270 people. We provide architecture, interior architecture, master planning, and urban design, and we’re recognized for our work in hospitality, life sciences, workplace, higher education, multi-unit residential, and retail/entertainment design. Since the first day and continuing today, we all work from

a single location in Boston, Massachusetts, which allows us to bring together the best people across disciplines in a highly creative, collaborative environment. Rather than being siloed into separate departments for different specialties, we are organized around our clients’ work. Each project team is made up of designers who bring experience on an array of project types in different industries, which brings diverse points of view to the table. We know that this cross-pollination makes us more inventive and innovative problem-solvers and keeps our work fresh. For example, blending aspects of hospitality and residential design into our workplace projects brings all sorts of good ideas to the mix, ideas that truly enhance the productivity and innovation that can happen in those workspaces.

### How is “Made in Italy” an integral part of your interiors work? Which are your reference Italian design companies?

Almost all of our interiors projects include Italian furniture, simply because the Italians lead the way in industrial design and furniture design in terms of sophistication and quality. We work with lots of Italian manufacturers. B&B Italia, Giorgetti, Poltrona Frau, Flexform, Minotti, Zanotta, Glas Italia, and Gallotti & Radice are some that come immediately to mind, but there are many more – every year we discover new companies to work with. Some of our recent workplace projects featuring Italian furniture include the offices we’ve designed for Charles River Associates, the headquarters office of Draper, law firms Mintz and Foley Hoag, and AEW. In the last few years we’ve completed multi-unit residential buildings at Meriel Marina Bay, VIA, and Lantera, plus six multi-unit residential buildings at Ink Block, all of which include Italian furnishings. And we’re just completing White Elephant Palm Beach, a reimagined historic landmark hotel in Palm Beach scheduled to open this November. We attend Salone del Mobile with a team of designers each year. As a firm, we invest in that trip because Salone is so influential, so consolidated, and so immediate.





*Left: Joan & Edgar Booth Theatre and the College of Fine Arts Production Center, Boston University*

*Center: Charles River Associates, Chicago*



*Atrium of Draper Headquarters, Cambridge*

To be immersed in that experience is invaluable for our designers. We also travel to factories while we’re in Italy – textile manufacturers, tile manufacturers, furniture makers, stone fabricators. I remember a fascinating tour of Rubelli’s Cucciago Mill followed by dinner overlooking Lake Como. We missed going to Salone this year, and very much look forward to returning in 2021.

**Regarding custom made furnishings, which are the craftsmen or the companies that make the furnishings?**

We design a lot of custom furnishings for projects ranging from hospitality to office spaces. We work with different custom furniture manufacturers all over the world – from Giorgetti, Emmemobili, Estel, Giopatocoombes, and Boffi in Italy, Piet Hein Eek in the Netherlands, and Bulthaup in Germany, to Andreu World in Spain. For recent custom carpeting we’ve worked with Brintons in England and Taiping in Thailand. For White Elephant Palm Beach, we visited custom furniture fabricators in Shanghai. We also work extensively with craftspeople in the

US – for example, a custom wood furniture maker in Rhode Island – and we collaborated with Studio Other in Los Angeles to develop our patented Harbor Stone™ System desking system.

**How are the commissions started?**

Through our work we have built long-term relationships with leading institutions, corporate entities, and the nation’s most successful developers. Many of our commissions come to us from existing clients who re-engage us, as well as clients who know of our experience designing some of the country’s premier mixed-use projects, like The Grove and The Americana in Los Angeles, and Miami Worldcenter. Our clients range from large international mixed-use developers to corporate clients, law firms, life science research companies, universities, hospitality entities, multi-unit residential clients, and smaller boutique companies. Our clients who are real estate developer are some of the most prominent in the world, including Related, Disney Imagineering, Caruso Affiliated, and Alexandria. Life sciences clients, for whom it’s all about the speed of innovation, include

Pfizer, Novartis, The Broad Institute, and several others in Kendall Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which is called “the most innovative square mile on the planet.” Right now, several of these clients are deeply involved in COVID-19 research. Hospitality projects include the Omni Boston Hotel at the Seaport, which is currently underway, The Peninsula Chicago, Caesar’s Korea Integrated Resort in Incheon near Seoul, plus the Four Seasons, the Intercontinental, and The Verb Hotel, plus Marriott Bonvoy’s Aloft and Element, all in Boston. Universities we’ve worked with include MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Harvard, Duke, University of Southern California, University of Chicago, and Rutgers. Institutional clients include Children’s National Hospital and Boston Children’s Hospital.

**What do you think will be the most important changes in hospitality?**

Now, as the world slowly emerges from the pandemic, new concerns about health and safety are top of mind. We believe that people’s hyper-sensitivities to cleanliness and proximity will endure at some level long after the threat of COVID-19 has passed. That means that hospitality spaces must not only be safe, healthy places – they must feel safe to the guest. It’s all about safety and giving people a sense of control. Stringent cleaning protocols; easily cleanable materials and finishes; touch-free technologies for elevators, doors, restrooms, etc.; upgraded HVAC; natural daylight and fresh air – all these factors will come into play. While our designs will need to accommodate people’s heightened sensitivities, we must also increase our efforts to create even more compelling, more inviting, more gracious hospitality destinations than ever before to overcome residual fears about sharing physical space. Calling for less decoration and more architecture-based solutions, the challenges presented by the pandemic give designers the opportunity to create venues offering the benefits of community manifested as safe and healthful places for people to be.

**Your design idea is revealed in some of the most important projects in Boston and the US, including hotels like Verb and Element, residential buildings such as Ink Block and Meriel Marina Bay. How would you define your style and your design vision?**

My design responses are an amalgamation of my experiences and travel. We spend so much time travelling the world, and we bring that global perspective and experience to our clients. What keeps me inspired comes from being open to the





world around me, whether it's film, art, architecture, fashion, theater, travel – all these things wrapped together become a cultural map that I use as a resource for inspiration. A project always starts with the context, the physical place. No matter the project, we begin with the character of each place. Our style is not so much about how a space looks, but how it feels. What is the story we're trying to tell? How do we incorporate an authentic sense of place? From there, it's about building trust among the project stakeholders and constituents, and making places that are magnets to bring people together.

**In relation to the materials, colors, furnishings and lighting, how is the choice made?**

These elements are chosen – or more often designed – based on the story, the aesthetic, and the experience of a space that we want the user to have. Each element must contribute to the story, the experience. An example of the process is our renovation and reimagining of White Elephant Palm Beach. We created a design that embraces the unique history of Palm Beach and the 100-year-old hotel's architectural significance as a Historic Landmark,



while also introducing an unpretentious, casual elegance that is a departure from the more formal aesthetic of Palm Beach. We designed custom furnishings that are upscale but more modern and relaxed than classic Palm Beach, more attuned to the lifestyle of today's sophisticated global guest. The design captures the spirit of a fresh and breezy Palm Beach residence – the classic Palm Beach design vernacular reworked in a casual, contemporary style that is layered, textural and easy, with a color palette of soft warm and cool neutrals that together capture the quality of Palm Beach light. All furniture in the guestrooms is custom-designed, as is millwork in the public spaces – our designers and the client, New England Development, flew to Shanghai to oversee production of custom pieces. Sprinkled throughout the hotel, other one-of-a-kind furniture pieces add a sense of playfulness, a bit of light-hearted quirkiness. And then there is the art. Working closely with New England Development, our team selected and curated a collection of contemporary original art exclusively for White Elephant Palm Beach. A prestigious international group of established artists is represented in a range of mediums, including Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, Jennifer Bartlett, and Ghada Amer, among others.

**You grew up in an artist family. How much is art an inspirational element for you? And how is it translated into the world of design?**

Integration of art in our work brings enormous cultural value, and can be the glue that holds it all together. We attend a lot of art fairs including miart in Milan, and Art Basel in Miami. I regularly visit galleries and museums in New York, London, Paris, Los Angeles, and recently Tokyo. And of course, Nilufar is my world favorite! I attend Clerkenwell Design Week in London, Frieze Los Angeles, and The Winter Show at the Armory in New York City for the collection of art and decorative items.

**What projects are you working on right now?**

At this moment in our interiors studio, we're just finishing our fifth office for Charles River Associates in Oakland, California, following our designs for CRA offices in Boston, New York City, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. We are also completing work on White Elephant Palm Beach, plus new headquarters offices for both Mass Mutual and MullenLowe, which is an IPG

agency, and 7INK by Ollie, an innovative multi-residential building of micro-apartments that is the seventh and final building at Ink Block.

**What is your dream design project?**

In recent months, as COVID-19 has upended the world as we knew it, I am seeing design as more important than ever. The first responders were the health care workers. The next responders should be the design industry to create resilient spaces that bring people back together, build trust, exude safety, and heal the environment and cultural wounds. It's our responsibility and our challenge to meet – our time to rise to the moment and the opportunity. I think of our hometown, Boston, and how its public parks have been a palliative refuge for generations, creating environments for physical, mental, and societal well-being and health. Frederick Law Olmstead described his objectives in the planning of Boston's beloved Emerald Necklace: the power of green space to restore and support physical and mental well-being, as well as the power of a ring of parks to bring together urban neighborhoods of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

*Left: Siena at Ink Block, Boston*

*Center: The Verb Hotel, Boston*

*Right: Lantera at Boston Landing*

