

THE LEADER:

**THERESE VIRSERIUS**

PRESIDENT, VIRSERIUS STUDIO, NEW YORK



5 Virserius uses design to start conversations in the gathering space environment of projects such as the Hyatt Regency Montreal.

**HER TOOL KIT:**

A bachelor of arts degree in Mandarin from Stockholm University; an associate degree from the New York School of Interior Design; a first job with Ikea in Business and Logistics Management in Shanghai; a stint with Jeffrey Beers International, New York; founded Therese Virserius Design in 2003 and rebranded it as Virserius Studio in 2013 when her sister, Regina Virserius, joined the firm as creative director and head of its Paris office; fluency in Swedish, Mandarin and English; and owner of the Bocca di Bacco restaurant in New York.

**THE HEADLINE DESIGN CHANGE FOR 2016-17:**

Customization. "Guests have started to diversify their choices with different brands and, as a result, designers can be more individualistic in their designs," she says. "There are more options than ever and large hospitality corporations are realizing that and adjusting accordingly."

**WHETHER THERE ARE TOO MANY CHOICES:**

"There are a lot of brands, which brings the possibility of dilution," she says. "But I don't think consolidation will occur; in fact, there will likely be more new brands to keep the machine moving. Too much is never enough."

**WHAT LIMITS DESIGNERS NOW:**

The need for speed. "Full creativity takes time to conceive and achieve. Designers are not machines, so that [the need for fast turnarounds] can be frustrating. Really good design takes time," she adds.

**HOW AIRBNB IS IMPACTING HOTEL DESIGN:**

"Airbnb has made hotels be more creative. Its offerings are very individualistic because they are people's homes, and that's both a good and bad thing. There's a market for both hotels and Airbnb for that reason," she says.

**HOW MUCH PUBLIC SPACES WILL DOMINATE DESIGN CONCEPTS AND BUDGET:**

"Hoteliers spend more money on renovating on public spaces because they have already made money on rooms, but people spend more time in public areas," she says. "So putting the design focus in gathering spaces creates opportunities to make money on amenities such as food and beverage."

**WHICH SECTOR IS HOT:**

The mid-market. "Three-star hotels are looking more like four- and five-star properties. That's gaining traction because travelers feel they're getting more value for the money," she says.

**WHICH BRANDS SHE'S WATCHING:**

Generator. "It is a design-forward hostel brand. People want to have really approachable design, nothing too grand or big, something more intimate and unexpected, that caters to curious whims. That's what Generator delivers," she says. Also, "Marriott Intl. has done a great job repositioning and rebranding."

**WHICH MARKETS ARE ON HER RADAR:**

Berlin, London and Paris. "Berlin is on upswing and it is a comparatively affordable market, compared to London and Paris—a factor that may drive increased travel there," she says.

**HER DO'S AND DON'TS FOR PRESENTATIONS:**

Be fully engaged with your presentation; stand up for your vision; if your client disagrees, be prepared to explain the reasons behind your design decisions; and don't be a "yay-sayer." Your prospective client sent you the RFP because he/she respects your work. "What's important to keep in mind is that everyone involved in a project is there to make it better," Virserius says. "The point is not to ruffle feathers, but to use different points of view as tools for discussion—which is conducive to a good process and, ultimately, the alignment that makes for a great project."

ERIC LAIGNEL (HYATT); COURTESY OF VIRSERIUS STUDIO (VIRSERIUS)