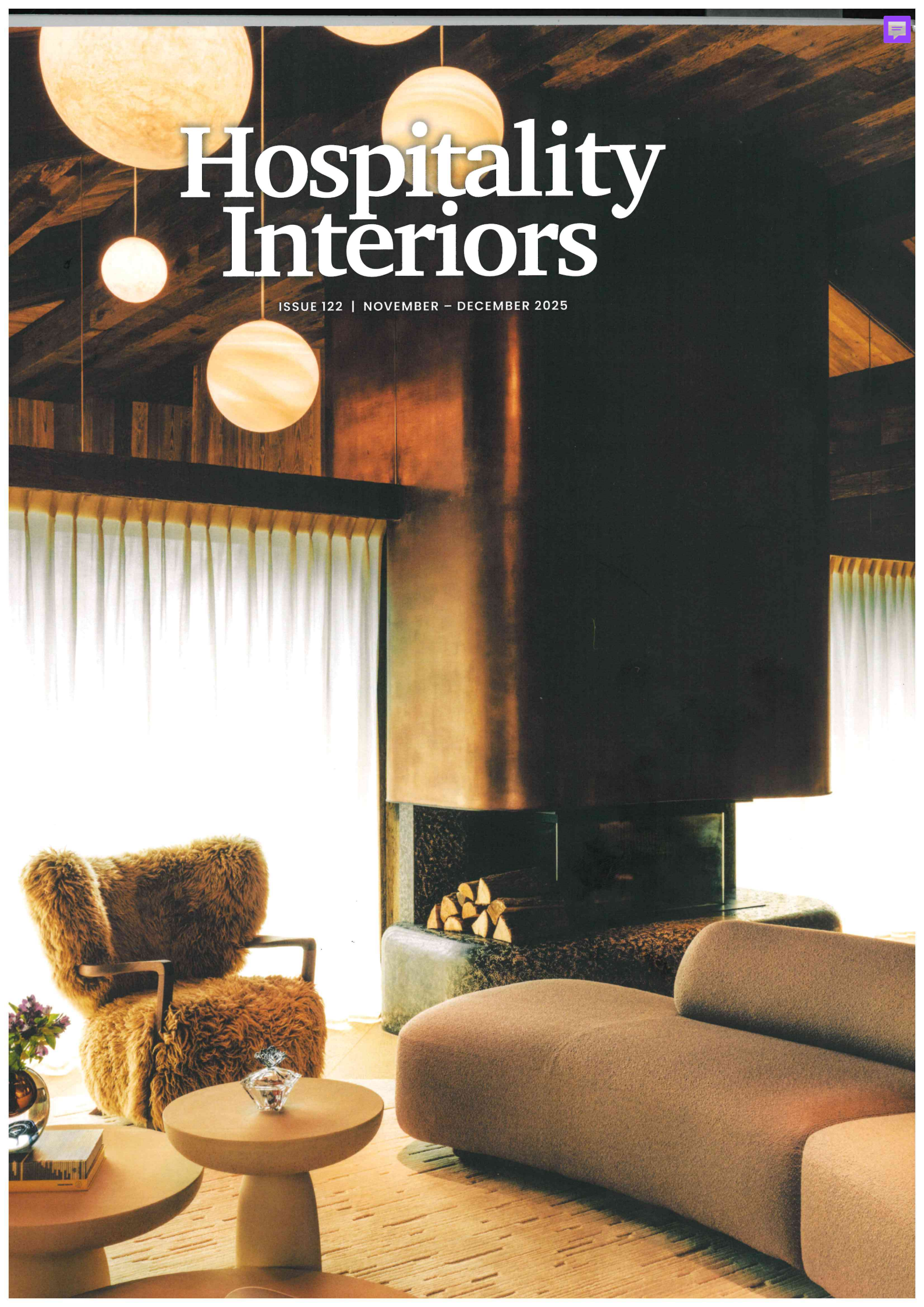




Hospitality Interiors

ISSUE 122 | NOVEMBER – DECEMBER 2025

Interview



For more than two decades, partners in life and design, Alon Baranowitz and Irene Kronenberg have shaped interiors that feel less like static spaces and more like living, breathing entities. Irene spoke to Vicky Doe about narratives, longevity, and the quiet power of spaces that know who they are.

It began, as many good partnerships do, with proximity. Two designers, renting separate offices in the same building, slowly found themselves crossing the corridor more and more often. "He had his own office and I had mine," recalls Irene Baranowitz. "Then we started to collaborate. People always ask how we manage to live and work together, but actually, work is what we do best. We began as partners in projects, not as a couple."

That early professional connection laid the foundations for what would become Baranowitz and Kronenberg, formally established in 2000, when the pair decided that their collaborative projects were stronger together. "Alon always says that one plus one should make eleven, not two," Irene laughs. It's a fitting equation for a practice that continues to draw strength from the interplay between two creative minds.

Now operating from bases in Tel Aviv and Madrid, Baranowitz and Kronenberg's studio has become known for projects that fuse narrative depth with technical rigour. Whether designing a hotel, restaurant, or even a 45 sqm apartment, Irene insists that their approach has always been about creating spaces with "a

soul of their own". She describes each project as a living entity – something that grows and evolves long after the designers have moved on. "As a designer, you give birth to it," she says. "It's like a child. Then life interacts with it – people, experiences, time – and it keeps changing. When you create something with inner truth, it can live for many years. That's what makes it sustainable."

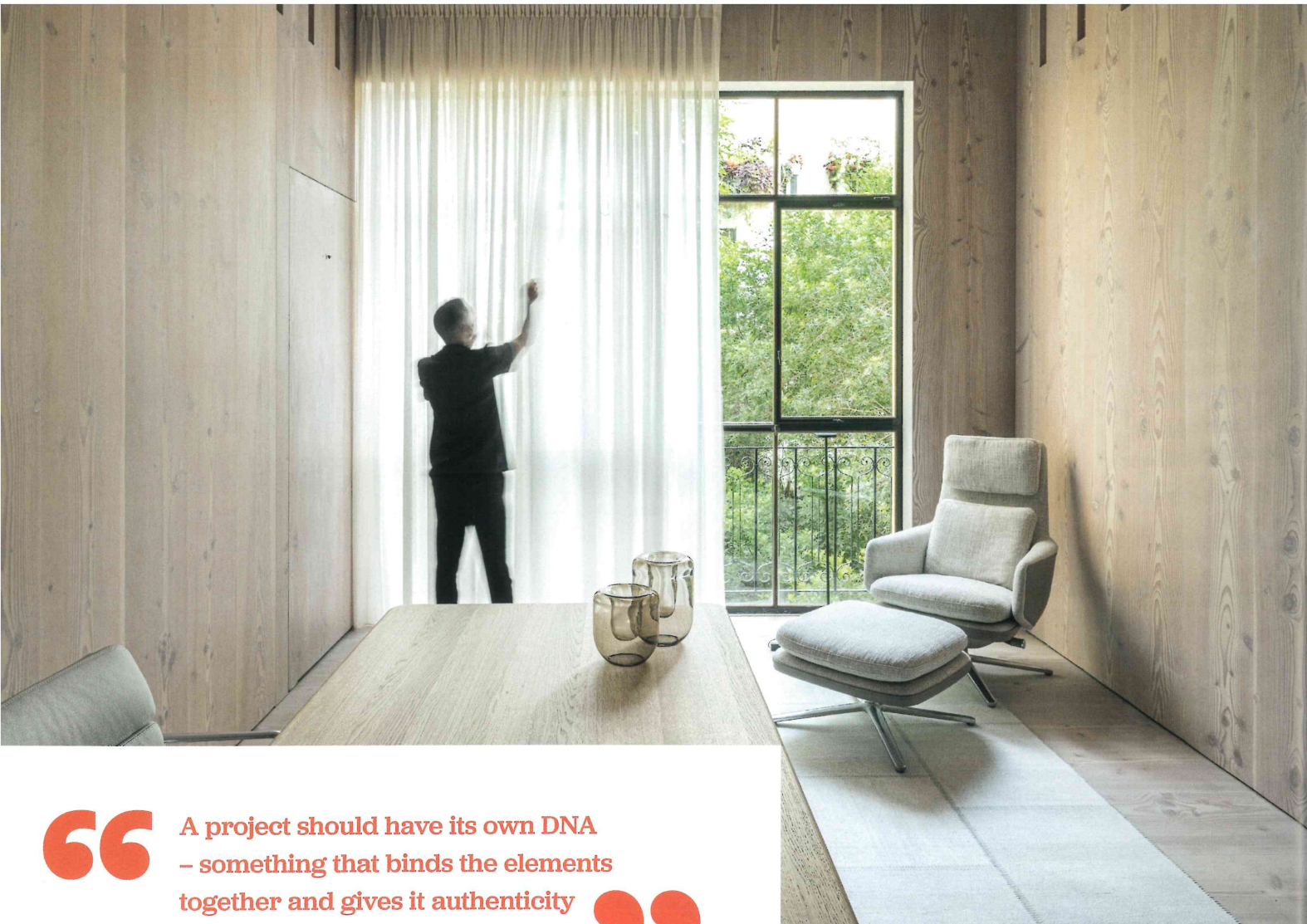
It's an elegant reframing of sustainability that resists buzzwords and greenwashing. "People talk about sustainability as if it's just materials or solar panels," Irene says, waving the idea away. "Of course, you must be responsible and use local materials where you can, respecting legislation. But for me, the greatest impact is creating places that last. Real sustainability is about longevity and meaning. A space that people remember, return to, and still feel connected with years later, that's what matters."

Her belief in spaces that stand the test of time is rooted in a deep respect for narrative – not storytelling for its own sake, but as a design methodology. Long before 'narrative design' became a fashionable phrase, Irene and Alon were exploring how ideas, symbols, and heritage could shape spatial experience. "We started

Above: |

Irene Kronenberg

co-founder, Baranowitz
and Kronenberg



“A project should have its own DNA – something that binds the elements together and gives it authenticity”

ABOVE: Urban Refuge, a deeply personal design

RIGHT AND TOP: W Hotel Amsterdam

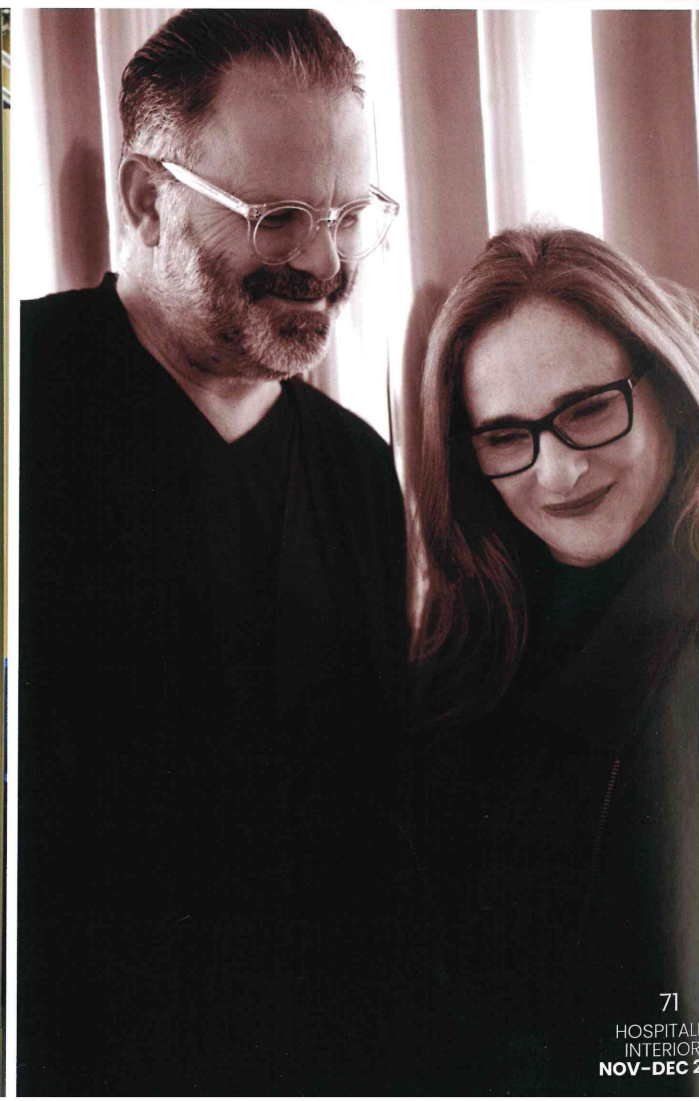
FAR RIGHT: Alon and Irene have been partners in life and design for over 20 years.

to talk about narratives before the word was even fashionable,” she says. “A project should have its own DNA – something that binds the elements together and gives it authenticity.”

One project that proved pivotal in shaping this philosophy was an early commission for a small pan-Asian restaurant outside Tel Aviv. The year was 1994, and the pair had just begun to make a name for themselves in restaurant design. “We decided to think differently,” Irene remembers. “We started to talk about Yin and Yang and about the balance between the mundane and the spiritual. We didn’t even call it a narrative back then. We just knew we wanted to create something that had its own heart.” The resulting space, she says, marked a turning point. “From that moment, we were something else. We understood that the project could tell us what it wanted to be if we listened.”

Three decades later, that intuitive approach has evolved into a structured methodology. Every new commission begins with deep, painstaking research. The studio studies geography, history, art, and the social fabric of a place long before anyone sketches a line. “At that stage, we don’t draw anything,” Irene explains. “We just collect insights. The project must be connected to its place, the people, the heritage, the energy.”

That philosophy was tested on a grand scale with the W Amsterdam, a project that demanded both creative daring and forensic research. The hotel spans two historic buildings: one is a former post office and called for a design that respected the city’s spirit while reimagining the brand’s typically glamorous identity. “The Dutch are sophisticated but also very grounded,” Irene says. “We knew that the usual ‘bling-bling’ W aesthetic wouldn’t resonate. We needed to find the roots of the place, the building and the people.”



The team immersed themselves in the city's archives and uncovered forgotten photographs of the post office's original communication systems: thousands of meticulously arranged tubes that carried telegrams and letters. "It was extraordinary," Irene says. "We realised that these tubes were a language of connection. That became our concept."

The finished hotel weaves this idea through five kilometres of tube motifs, transforming them into lighting features, seating elements, and architectural rhythms. "It was about finding facts and letting them lead us to the concept," she adds. "That's how the project gains integrity."

Integrity, for Irene, is inseparable from empathy. Whether it's a grand hotel or a compact workspace, she approaches design with an awareness of human emotion and ritual. When asked if she has a favourite project, she hesitates. "It's like choosing a favourite child," she says with a smile. Yet one small project holds a special place in her heart: a 45 sqm apartment the studio transformed into what they call Urban Refuge. Commissioned by a long-time client as a peaceful workspace, it became a meditation on intimacy and play. "When we first visited, his two little girls were playing there and they had made a tent, a kind of cave. And suddenly we saw it – the idea of a cave, a wooden cocoon. We created a world within a world. It's one material, one language. It feels safe."

That project went on to receive international recognition, winning the FRAME Awards 2024 in the Small Apartments category – a testament to the studio's ability to craft meaning and warmth even within the most compact of spaces.

Baranowitz and Kronenberg's current work continues to expand into new territories, both literally and conceptually. Alongside hotels and restaurants, the studio has recently moved into entertainment design, creating immersive venues like The Cube, with new projects planned for Chicago, Birmingham, and New York. "It's fun," Irene admits. "But even there, we think deeply about experience, about energy and flow."

Their work in hospitality continues to gain acclaim, most recently with Mr. Porter London, which was awarded Europe Standalone Restaurant of the Year at the 2025 Bar & Restaurant Awards. The recognition underscores their enduring influence on how people dine, gather, and connect through design.

Her emphasis on flow brings her to a favourite topic: spatial design. "Eighty per cent of success in interior design is the spatial design," she insists. "It's about how you move through a space and what you see and feel. The distance between objects is as important as the objects themselves." Quoting a Japanese principle, she speaks about the rhythm of movement and stillness, of openness and intimacy. "You must feel that it works. A good

space helps you to be yourself."

That human-centred sensitivity extends to how the studio collaborates with clients. Irene describes a process that is as educational as it is creative.

"We never start with renders," she says firmly. "First, we present our research which incorporates the history, the art and the stories that we have found. Clients are amazed by what they discover. They become part of the journey." The dialogue continues through every stage, from abstract imagery to material samples and eventually to detailed design.

"We want the client to feel that they are one of the creators too," she says. "When that happens, the project belongs to them. It becomes their story as well."

Even the most conceptual work remains grounded in practicality. "Design is a business," Irene says. "A restaurant, for example, has to work as an operation. Elements such as how long guests sit, how food is served, how people move. It's not enough to make it beautiful, it must function perfectly."

When asked what advice she would give to young designers, her answer is succinct. "Think deep. Think abstract. Think people. And be brave." The bravery she speaks of isn't about risk for its own sake but about resisting superficiality – the courage to explore, to research, to listen to what a place or a project wants to be.

“A restaurant, for example, has to work as an operation. Elements such as how long guests sit, how food is served, how people move. It's not enough to make it beautiful, it must function perfectly”

Today, the studio remains deliberately small, with around 10 people in-house and a wider circle of collaborators across Europe and Israel. "Many of them worked with us in the past and are now independent," Irene explains. "They understand our way of thinking, and that creates a wonderful synergy."

After more than three decades, both she and Alon remain, as she puts it, "still excited like children about every new project". That enduring enthusiasm perhaps explains why their work continues to resonate as designs with a quiet strength, crafted not just for the moment, but for a lifetime. "We want to enjoy what we do," she says simply. "That's the reason we keep doing it and the reason, I think, it still feels alive."

www.baranowitzkronenberg.com

BELOW: 'Amsterdam reflects people of the sophisticated group'

