

A TALE OF TWO DESIGNERS

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Within moments of meeting Sai Leung and Alessandro Munge, principals of the Toronto-based design firm Munge Leung; it becomes apparent how these two managed to forge such an illustrious, globally successful path. Having been introduced while colleagues at another firm, established designer Leung met the then bright-eyed protégé, Munge. That serendipitous pairing led not only to a friendship but also to an admirable creative force that ultimately drove the designers to leave their comfortable corporate nest in order to form their own firm. The risky move proved wildly successful, the studio now in its second decade of creating award-winning spaces around the globe.

With an impressive team of forty based out of the Canadian headquarters and ten more in the new Beijing office, business is booming. The international success and escalating growth Munge Leung has experienced undoubtedly fired by the harmony of the principals. In addition to their delicately balanced design sensibilities, the pair also enjoys what seems to be a perfectly balanced friendship – Leung the ideal introspective, cerebral foil to Munge's effervescent charisma - a combination that creates an interpersonal dynamic as enticing and exciting as the work itself.

Over lunch at Manhattan's Lambs Club, the art deco surroundings of the posh eatery spurred the duo into a deluge of conversation on the topics of art and design. Whether immersed in their own projects or enveloped within the well-designed spaces of others, there is a deeply rooted appreciation, an intrinsic and primal



awareness of all things aesthetic that is unique to the pair.

“We are very good listeners” Alessandro Munge says, crediting the firm’s success to its ability to deliver spaces that reflect the style, needs and wants of the individuals and corporations that retain their services. “We listen to the clues our clients give us, we study them and we use our passion and our experience to make it happen.” Leung agrees, adding “There’s an emotional connection we’re trying to create with our clients and their spaces. We want them to experience an emotional reaction to their environment. To do that, you have to take the concepts all the way to reality”.

Taking concepts to reality is something Munge Leung does often. And well. Recent projects include a private residence in the heart of Toronto’s St. Lawrence Market neighborhood. There, the team used the 360-degree views and 4500sf of living space afforded by their client’s penthouse as the backdrop for a design featuring luxurious elements against a neutral color palette. Sculptural details like venetian plaster walls, a leather finished, two-way marble fireplace and a magnificent spiral staircase were used in tandem with bespoke furnishings and a curated art collection to create a home that is nothing short of show stopping.

Perhaps best known for their work within the hospitality industry; Munge Leung were behind the recent renovations at the Ritz-Carlton Toronto where they created four new suites for the iconic, luxury hotel. Charged by the brand to “create suites where guest would wake up



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and instantly know they were in Toronto”, the spaces were designed with the hallmark luxe finishes and well-chosen accessories the firm is known for - all intended to convey the opulent aura synonymous with Ritz-Carlton and the romance of her Toronto location in one indulgent, signature experience.

Notable as well, their work with Hawksworth - an upscale Vancouver restaurant recently named as a finalist in the 2014 James Beard Foundation Restaurant Design Awards and the Mirage in Las Vegas where they created a one of kind design experience in the hotels uber chic 1 Oak nightclub.

Combining being preeminent designers with being attentive husbands and dad - both men are married with school age children - isn't easy. “We need more than 24 hours a day to all that we want to do,” says Leung, a sentiment echoed by Munge. Yet do it they do, and oh so very elegantly. ➔

