# INSPIREDESIGN®

innovative vision for today's hotel

"I WAS **AWESTRUCK** BY THE **CHRYSLER** BUILDING… SO **ORGANIC** AND **NATURAL**."

—JOSH HELD

# IN HER OWN WORDS

Kay Lang, president/CEO, Kay Lang + Associates

## My Journey…

I enjoyed a charmed youth, growing up in the beautiful hills of Palos Verdes, CA. My sketch pad was always with me when inspired to draw the animals, ocean, landscapes and people. I lived and breathed art, and my father built me my own private artist studio right off my bedroom. I even had an old bathtub filled with pillows that I would lie in and look up at the stars on my ceiling and dream of things to paint, sculpt or create.

But all of that changed rapidly when I turned 15. I am telling this very personal story because in a very strange way, my career was born out of tragedy in my teen years. My young, stunningly beautiful mother—who was also a very talented golfer—unbeknownst to me, was slowly dying of breast cancer. My family suffered several painful years dealing with this awful disease. I had to grow up quickly to care for my father and my sister. That tragedy specifically molded me into the woman and leader I am today.

This was also the time that my entrepreneurial spirit was born. I set out painting and framing miniature oil paintings of animals and flowers. When I had completed about 50 of them, I put them into a little red wagon and knocked on many of my neighbors' doors. To my surprise, the paintings sold like hotcakes! This gave me hope that I could put my artistic talents to good use, and that's how my initial journey into creating things got launched. I am so appreciative and grateful to have had wonderful, supportive parents who recognized my talent at a very young, formative age.

I have been fortunate to have met some gracious people who have encouraged me and guided me to follow my passion. After high school, I received a scholarship to attend the prestigious LA ArtCenter, which allowed me to further develop my skills. I loved that school, and learned about other areas of artistic expression, such as illustration and fashion design. Later, I also enrolled at UCLA and took many more art and interior design courses. By purely fortunate circumstances, I was asked to sketch some facades for a construction project nearby. The connection between architecture and interior design took hold of me, and I knew this was what I wanted to do with my life.

My first great mentor was Tosh Yamashita, a giant in the field of retail interior design. Tosh was truly a wonderful and generous man who taught me how to read interior architectural documents, how to use color, texture and lighting, and how to tell a story that invokes emotion. Tosh passed away much too young, but I always judge all of my work by asking if Tosh would approve. I find myself still relying on the lessons he taught me.

My next great mentors were Howard Hirsch and Michael Bedner of HBA (I really have stood on the shoulders of giants). I remember showing Howard my portfolio when I first went to interview with him. He hired me on the spot, walked me over to a desk and put me to work. Trial by fire. That was the beginning of my hospitality career. We worked on many wonderful and prestigious projects during my time with them, and they provided guidance, challenge and opportunity. I began to develop my own style and approach. My goal with each new project is to create unique, memorable spaces with a sense of place.

After starting my own firm, Kay Lang + Associates, I've always tried to return the favor, encourage others and mentor talented individuals who demonstrate passion. I still draw and sketch, and encourage my staff not to lose these vital skills. Technology has created many advances in the industry, but there is still a special satisfaction and romance that comes from a hand-drawn sketch. I love to support the next generation of talent, both financially and professionally, by providing opportunities to grow and encouraging them to follow their dreams.

I am so blessed to have the good people in my life and the clients who have trusted me and my staff over the years to produce some wonderful five-star hotels and memorable destination resorts. I love the hospitality design business because each project is unique and embraces the time and place in which it is developed. We design for both the aesthetic and the practical. Hospitality involves all aspects of life itself. It provides a location for life's celebrations and adventures.

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My creative energy, coupled with the fact that I am a people person, drove me to my start my first business in interior design. This God-given talent forged part of my character, and drives me to create and visualize in three dimensions. It is definitely my happy place to go.

Time spent sketching at home is my method of relaxation that allows for a mental break—while still running an interior design business in the middle of this crazy pandemic!

You always need mentors in life. Life is a series of ups and downs, achievements and failures. But failures are only detours to a new path. Never quit believing in yourself, and every day is a good day to give thanks and be kind. Always try and find a way of life you love to fulfill your soul. Mine is to create and inspire others with beauty, talent and strength.