CREATING WORLDS

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OUR ENVIRONMENT – THE SPACE IN WHICH WE WORK, REST, PARTY, DINE – IS CONSTRUCTED TO MAKE US FEEL A CERTAIN WAY. MARK GACESA HAS BEEN STUDYING THE SCIENCE AND ART OF INTERIOR DESIGN FOR MOST OF HIS LIFE, AND IS PASSIONATE ABOUT HIS WORK. A FATHER, HUSBAND, MUSIC LOVER AND TRAVELLER, HE SITS DOWN WITH CANDICE JAYDE FOX TO TALK ABOUT THE SPACES THAT DEFINE HIM, AND THE SPACES HE DEFINES.

I've spent the last couple of weeks catching up with old friends in Sydney, and much of my time has been spent in new environments. At night we strap on glittering heels and strut through blue-lit corridors into sprawling clubs, four levels high, where dancers twist and writhe and chrome sculptures sparkle in the light of the strobe. At midday the next day we lounge and groan and squint in white-washed outdoor cafes, holding our sunglasses tight to our faces, ordering big breakfasts and black coffee and watching the surf roll in.

Broken-hearted from a recent divorce, these new places soothe and excite me. They allow me to pretend I'm someone new, untouchable, fierce. When I get home, it is the textures, sights and sounds of this familiar place that tell me I'm safe.

Mark Gacesa understands that these environments are places for reinventing and reassuring ourselves, and he has made it his business to design them for people all over the world. Winner of multiple interior design awards, including the Australian Design Awards, the Best Renovation in Queensland, HIA Best Bathroom and the Australian Corian Design Award, Mark says he has come a long way from the schoolboy with a talent for drawing and sketching.

"I wanted to be an architect from age six. I had a natural understanding and appreciation of spaces, colours, how these affect people and their mood. My father was one of the biggest interior designers on the Sunshine Coast, with a showroom in Currimundi and a solid reputation with Coast businesses. I was deeply involved in the business from a young age and he was very encouraging as a mentor."

When a school counsellor suggested Mark should enrol in a new interior design course at Queensland University of Technology (QUT), it was as though the pieces of a puzzle were fitting together.

MARK GACESA

"I was confused about what I should do with myself after school, as most teenagers are. For some stupid reason I was considering law, which absolutely wasn't me. Sometimes it takes a stranger to point out what's right in front of your face. I was made for it [design]."

At university, Mark entered a competition to design a medical centre in Central Plaza, Brisbane. As a result of reaching the national finals, the head of interior design for an architectural practice in Brisbane asked if Mark would work for them while he was still at uni. "I had a window office on the 24th floor. It was all glamour, high-flying executives, travelling the country. I was still a kid, and it seemed like everything I wanted was unfolding right before me."

Mark took his skills to work in Brisbane, the Gold Coast and Sydney. He had a role in redesigning most of the interiors for McDonald's restaurants in New South Wales, and designed and decorated the most expensive apartment in Australia, located in Cremorne.

> "I was the official tour guide for M People when they visited, and I attended Tropfest with Kylie Minogue, among others."

He met his wife, Danae, through mutual friends out one night for drinks.

"We've been married coming on six years. Danae impressed me from the first moment. She was attractive, confident and seemed approachable. She was really interested in what I did, and we began to work on collaborative projects. Today she supports me in the business and keeps her foot in the door of merchandising for different industries, which is her specialty."

The couple has a daughter, Charlie Dee, who is three-and-a-half and "a little bundle of energy and forthrightness".

After his incredible success in interior design, Mark took some time off in Sydney to pursue his other passion – music.

"I got tied up in the entertainment industry working at managing the Rooftop Bar at Kings Cross that hosted celebrity events and dejaying at the exclusive Sugar Reef nightclub. I was the official tour guide for M People when they visited, and I attended Tropfest with Kylie Minogue, among others. The music and entertainment side of things is something I've tried to weave into my home life. If I had the time I'd make my own music, but right now I have to settle for working with the music of others and mixing it to my personal style."

Mark's Sunshine Coast-based design practice, Ultraspace, has taken him around the world and back, meeting clients in LA to discuss projects and working with production firms in New York. He keeps a level head, however, and is passionate about making interior design a unique and inspiring journey for each individual.

"A lot of interior designers sit down with a bunch of books and magazines with a client and get them to point out what they want, without getting to know them or caring about the feel they want. It's cold and characterless. I prefer to get excited by the way people want to feel, by the ideas people express in their conversations as I get to know them. I'm not constrained by what's been done before. I have a knack for conjuring up incredibly creative never-been-seen-before designs that blow clients' minds. At the end of the day if the space I have created for you feels right and excites you, then I've done my job."

Whether it is a moonlit restaurant, a thumping bar or a spacious, beautifully decorated home, our environments define us. They give us strength and can, in turn, dominate and suppress us. Mark makes building these treasured places his work, and loves each and every intricate, glamorous world he creates. ||

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