



Lia DiLeonardo & Giana DiLeonardo

DiLeonardo International

Inspiration is ultimately critical to the success of any interior architectural design firm and it's not always easy to find, but second generation partners Lia DiLeonardo and Giana DiLeonardo acknowledge they had a bit of an advantage.

After all, they got a firsthand look at the business from their father Robert DiLeonardo, who founded the company some 40 years ago and remains chairman. "Being a family business, we traveled frequently with our father and were exposed at a very young age to great examples and emissaries of hospitality and sense of place. Many of our father's dearest friends were general managers of hotels or restaurateurs and their passion for the art of hospitality was infectious. This is always an inspiration," said Giana, who is a principal designer on both domestic and international projects with more than a decade of industry experience.

She further referred to her father as one of the true pioneers of hospitality design. "His exposure in the industry, as well as his passion for great design that could also maximize return on investment for hotels and resorts, was a new focus," she said.

That focus still remains central to the success of the company, which has been involved in more than 1,500 projects globally since its inception, and averages roughly 70 a year. Lia—who oversees design initiatives, client development, global marketing and branding and social initiatives—described some of the Providence, RI-based family company's core design principles.

"Research and understanding of context are the foundation of our work. There must be a strong understanding of place and the architecture we are working with for the work to have merit. All team members are contributors. An ego should not get in the way of the best solution, and process is of equal importance to end product. This ensures professional fulfillment and development beyond just jumping from one project to the next," she said.

Of course, the pace of those projects has been slowed for many firms during the past few years as a result of the economic downturn. However, Giana noted, "We are seeing things move along more quickly," and she added that having a strong presence in the Middle East and Asia has helped.

In fact, one of the company's projects in Asia, the Sheraton Bangalore at Brigade Gateway, opened in 2011 and recently won Best Hotel Of the Year Southeast Asia—and holds particular meaning for Lia. "What was so rewarding about this project was the fact that the strong concept and level of service that our firm provided was equally matched by the owner's commitment to produce something unique in the region. Through an expanded construction period, our core team remained intact and focused on producing a great design."

Meanwhile, Giana detailed some of the elements of China's St. Regis Sanya Yalong Bay Resort, a more recent project. "The resort is elegant, yet relaxed and responds to the surroundings, which include crystal-clear water, white sand beaches and lush, green mountains. The interiors are timeless—residential with bespoke detailing," she said.

Regardless of how many projects are underway, Giana and Lia maintain a hands-on approach. "We participate in all major pin-ups on projects in the office. It's the best way to help guide concept and be rigorous about the ideas we generate. It's also important to interact with colleagues that are working around the world," Giana said.

Lia further noted that the company has looked into expanding some of its regional offices and design teams and is well-positioned for the future. "We have excellent projects on the boards and are continuing to build great relationships with clients for ongoing collaborations. We hope to be the firm that is the choice for creative, diverse and high-quality design and service for our industry," she said.

—Dennis Nessler



The St. Regis Sanya Yalong Bay Resort is a timeless classic, nestled among the lush landscape of Hainan Island, China.

