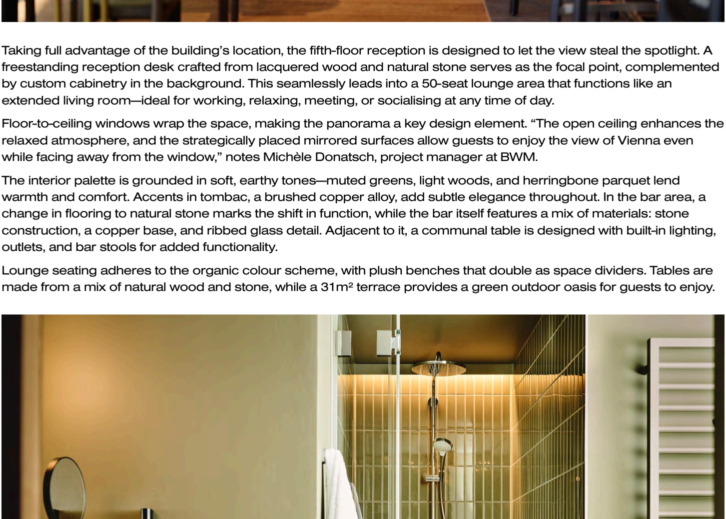
australia meets austria | a by adina's european debut

A by Adina, the premium Australian lifestyle hotel brand, makes its first foray into Europe with a striking location in **Vienna's Danubeflats tower**. For the interior concept of this debut, BWM Designers & Architects were brought on board, tasked with designing both the private and communal spaces. Drawing inspiration from Australia's vast, untouched wilderness, the result is a sophisticated blend of open-plan, light-filled spaces enriched with earthy tones and organic textures. This design approach captures the relaxed essence of Australia while paying homage to the timeless elegance of Vienna.

Situated directly along the Danube, the new Danubeflats tower dedicates its first five floors to A by Adina. The first four floors accommodate 120 studios and apartments, while the fifth serves as a shared communal zone. Following a competitive pitch process, BWM was commissioned to oversee the design of both the private living units and the public areas, including the reception and lounge.

The design's core concept is a harmonious fusion of Australian and Austrian influences—uniting the raw beauty and laid-back charm of Down Under with Vienna's refined architectural character. As Erich Bernard, founder and managing partner at BWM Designers & Architects, explains, "The open, light-filled spaces, warm colour scheme, organic textures and carefully chosen materials that reflect the essence of nature – all these things help create an inviting, cosy atmosphere."

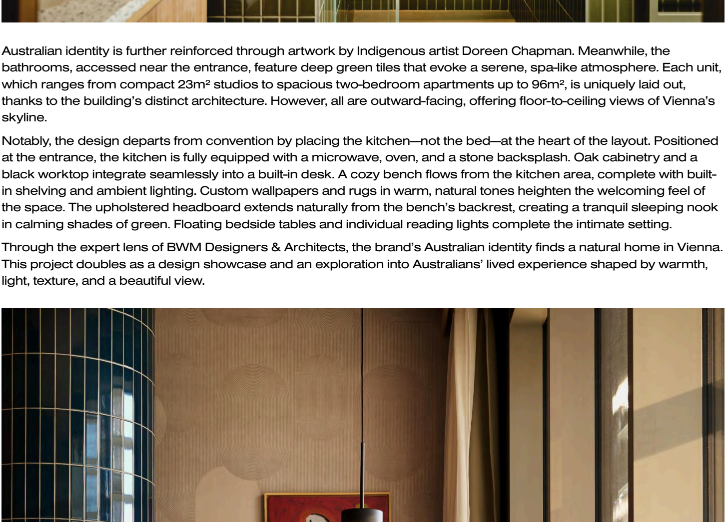


Taking full advantage of the building's location, the fifth-floor reception is designed to let the view steal the spotlight. A freestanding reception desk crafted from lacquered wood and natural stone serves as the focal point, complemented by custom cabinetry in the background. This seamlessly leads into a 50-seat lounge area that functions like an extended living room—ideal for working, relaxing, meeting, or socialising at any time of day.

Floor-to-ceiling windows wrap the space, making the panorama a key design element. "The open ceiling enhances the relaxed atmosphere, and the strategically placed mirrored surfaces allow guests to enjoy the view of Vienna even while facing away from the window," notes Michèle Donatsch, project manager at BWM.

The interior palette is grounded in soft, earthy tones—muted greens, light woods, and herringbone parquet lend warmth and comfort. Accents in tombac, a brushed copper alloy, add subtle elegance throughout. In the bar area, a change in flooring to natural stone marks the shift in function, while the bar itself features a mix of materials: stone construction, a copper base, and ribbed glass detail. Adjacent to it, a communal table is designed with built-in lighting, outlets, and bar stools for added functionality.

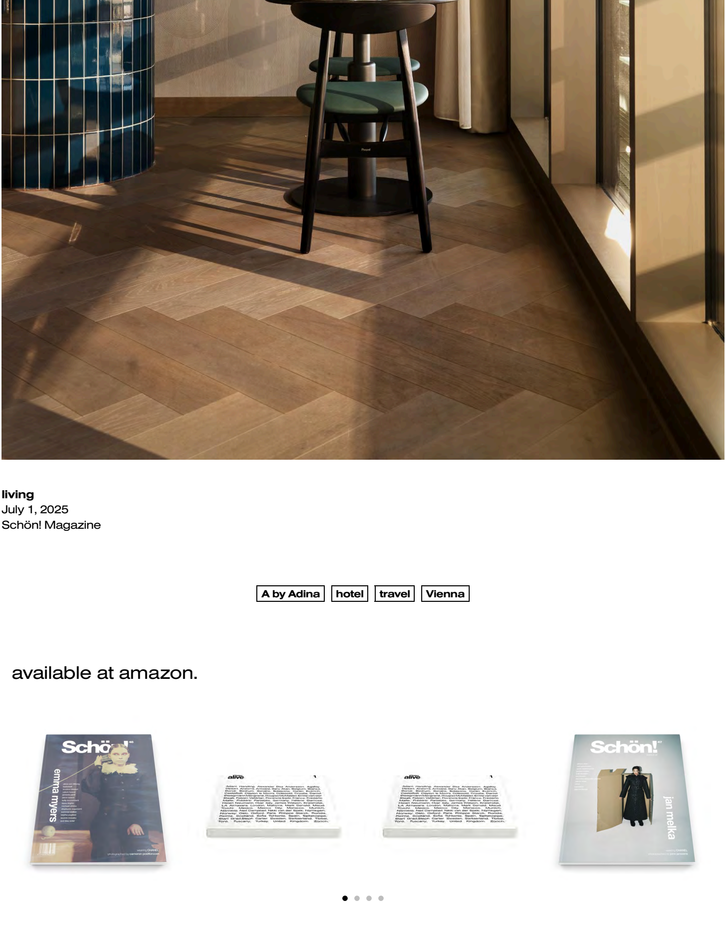
Lounge seating adheres to the organic colour scheme, with plush benches that double as space dividers. Tables are made from a mix of natural wood and stone, while a 31m² terrace provides a green outdoor oasis for guests to enjoy.



Australian identity is further reinforced through artwork by Indigenous artist Doreen Chapman. Meanwhile, the bathrooms, accessed near the entrance, feature deep green tiles that evoke a serene, spa-like atmosphere. Each unit, which ranges from compact 23m² studios to spacious two-bedroom apartments up to 96m², is uniquely laid out, thanks to the building's distinct architecture. However, all are outward-facing, offering floor-to-ceiling views of Vienna's skyline.

Notably, the design departs from convention by placing the kitchen—not the bed—at the heart of the layout. Positioned at the entrance, the kitchen is fully equipped with a microwave, oven, and a stone backsplash. Oak cabinetry and a black worktop integrate seamlessly into a built-in desk. A cozy bench flows from the kitchen area, complete with built-in shelving and ambient lighting. Custom wallpapers and rugs in warm, natural tones heighten the welcoming feel of the space. The upholstered headboard extends naturally from the bench's backrest, creating a tranquil sleeping nook in calming shades of green. Floating bedside tables and individual reading lights complete the intimate setting.

Through the expert lens of BWM Designers & Architects, the brand's Australian identity finds a natural home in Vienna. This project doubles as a design showcase and an exploration into Australians' lived experience shaped by warmth, light, texture, and a beautiful view.



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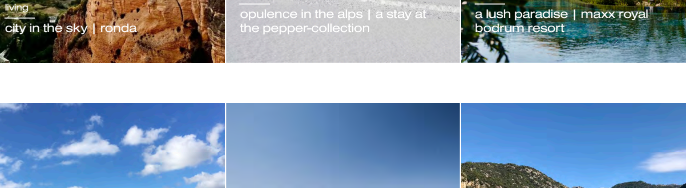

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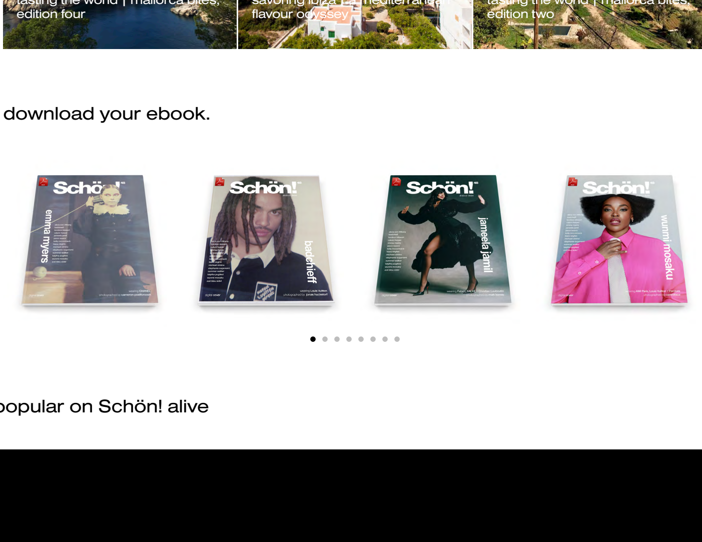

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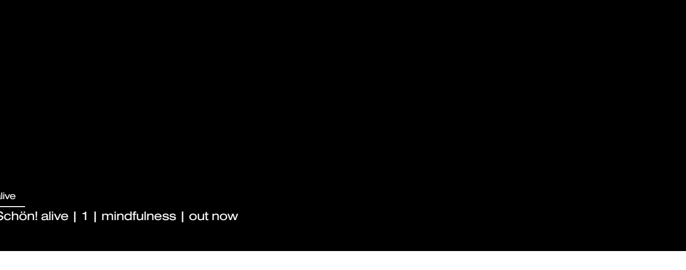

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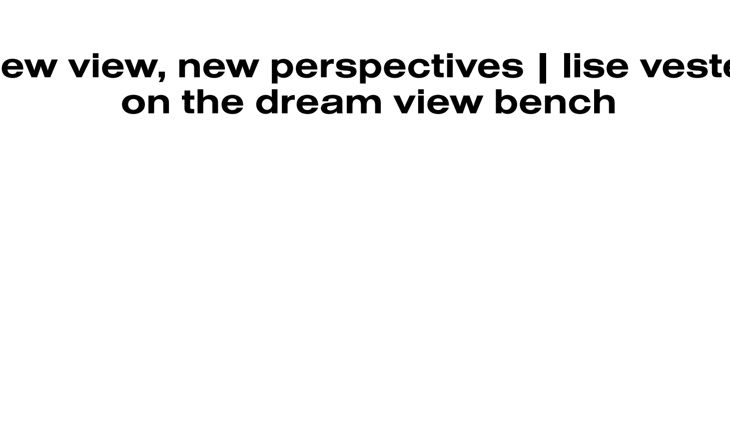

new view, new perspectives | lise vester on the dream view bench

It's hard to remember to pause and reflect in a world that's inundated with distractions. But learning how to pause is exactly what encouraged Danish designer **Lise Vester** to create something quietly radical: a bench that invites us to stop, look up, and reconnect. Crafted in Denmark for Danish brand **Muuto** and inspired by the natural curve of the body, the Dream View Bench's smooth, sky-facing form is designed to support both solitude and shared presence, encouraging new perspectives through the simple yet powerful act of gazing at the sky.

Vester's approach to design is deeply rooted in sensory experience, empathy, and care. Influenced by principles of neuroaesthetics and healing architecture, her work explores how objects and spaces can nurture mental and emotional well-being. The Dream View Bench, made of brushed stainless steel that reflects the shifting light of the sky, is a manifestation of this ethos: grounded in function, yet poetic in expression.

Funnily enough, this piece was not initially born in a studio. It began by the sea, where Vester traced her body's natural posture into the sand and began shaping the first contours of a design that would take months of refinement, testing, and research. From inviting people to share personal reflections on the sky to prototyping with diverse body types, Vester embedded inclusivity and human insight into every curve.

In this conversation with Schön!, Lise Vester shares the story behind the bench, her path into design, and why she believes beauty, empathy, and emotion must be central to how we shape the world around us.

What drew you to pursue a career in design, and how has your journey shaped your approach to creating sensory-focused pieces?

I've always been curious and creative – playing music, trying different sports, and exploring ideas through making. But I didn't set out with a clear plan to become a designer. After taking one and a half gap years, I chose to spend six months at Krabbesholm Højskole in 2014, studying design. It was a gut decision – a place where I could explore both my creative drive and my fascination with people.

What I didn't expect was to find something that felt truly meaningful: an intersection between design and healthcare. Discovering neuroaesthetics and Healing Architecture opened my eyes to how environments affect our emotions, our recovery, and even our sense of dignity. I became fascinated by how design could be a tool for care – beyond functionality – a way to show empathy through form, light, and material. That realisation has shaped everything I've done since.

Can you tell us about a key moment or project in your career that significantly influenced your design philosophy?

A pivotal project came early, during my bachelor's degree, when I worked on a design brief focused on dignified care. It explored how people with disabilities or terminal illnesses often encounter environments filled with medical aid products that are cold, impersonal, and stigmatising. This challenged me: why shouldn't design for care be beautiful? Why should aesthetics stop at the hospital door?

That led me to revisit the hospice where my aunt spent her final days. I had been there as a high school student when she passed, and four years later, I returned as a design student, full of questions. I interviewed staff, family members, and therapists connected to the hospice to understand what made that space feel so different – so warm and human, even in the face of grief. It was my first real exploration of sensory and emotional design, and it showed me how empathy, research, and beauty can coexist. It has shaped the values I bring into every project since.

How has growing up and working in Denmark influenced your view on the relationship between design, nature, and well-being?

I grew up in western Denmark, right by the Limfjord, not far from the North Sea. Nature was always part of my every day – long walks by the water with my mother, watching the horizon, collecting fossils, watching my parents hunt and fish. It taught me to slow down, observe, and appreciate silence and space.

Later, moving to Copenhagen, and then to London for my master's, brought contrast – urban rhythms, endless possibilities, and, during COVID, isolation. That time in lockdown, when the city shrunk to the size of my apartment, really shifted my perspective. I remember how people, especially children, began drawing rainbows and taping them in their windows for others to see – simple, colourful gestures meant to spread hope and solidarity. They were signs of compassion, both for one another and for frontline healthcare workers.

At the same time, public health data in the UK showed that walking in nature became one of the most important ways people coped with lockdown. Many reported feeling more grounded, connected, and appreciative of their natural surroundings. This return to nature wasn't just physical – it became an emotional and psychological anchor.

I began asking: how can design offer a sense of connection and comfort when everything feels uncertain? How can it help people reconnect to their own inner landscape? That's where nature reentered my work. I started looking at the sky not just as a view, but as a universal surface – accessible to everyone, everywhere, as long as we remember to look up. The Dream View Bench grew from that: an invitation to pause, look up, and reconnect, even in the middle of a busy city.

Before creating the Dream View Bench, were there particular designers, movements, or experiences that inspired your focus on form, function, and emotion?

Definitely. I'm deeply inspired by the Light and Space movement from 1970s California – artists like James Turrell and Helen Pashgian – and of course Olafur Eliasson – who work with perception, light, and sensory immersion. Their work doesn't just show you something – it makes you feel it and paves the way to new worlds.

At the same time, I'd been working with healing design principles for some years, drawing from neuroaesthetics and evidence-based design. But when I started therapy myself during the pandemic, I was introduced to cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). That experience stayed with me. I learned how small, intentional interventions – like pausing to reflect, doing something new, or shifting your focus – can disrupt negative thought spirals and open up new perspectives.

That idea of giving people gentle tools – subtle nudges that help them reconnect with themselves – really influenced the Dream View Bench. It's not just a piece of furniture. It's an invitation to pause, to breathe, to realign.

The Dream View Bench encourages people to pause and look at the sky. Why do you think it's important for design to inspire moments of reflection and daydreaming?

We live in a world that constantly demands our attention. Screens, schedules, noise – and so many pressing crises – it's rare that we're invited to simply do nothing. But daydreaming is essential. It's a mental reset where the Default Mode Network in the brain lights up. It helps us process emotions, spark new ideas, and build emotional resilience.

Design can help create those moments. A certain posture, a material, a colour, a change in perspective or light – these elements can gently guide our behaviour and state of mind. With the Dream View Bench, I wanted to design a mental tool, not just a physical object. A way for people to stop, lean back, and let their thoughts drift – using the sky as a canvas for imagination, memories, or simply stillness.

Can you share more about the initial inspiration you felt while sitting by the sea and how that environment shaped the bench's final form?

The concept really crystallised through a quote by neuroscientist David Eagleman in my research:

"Everything the brain interprets, it interprets in context. (...) When we are looking directly up at the sky and we are missing our normal frame of the horizon and the cityscape, we are just seeing the light itself. What that causes is an out-of-context experience where we feel like we are now part of that atmosphere. We are tied right into that."

Looking up at the open sky gives a profound sense of calm – a mix of gravity and weightlessness. That bodily sensation, of being grounded yet mentally floating, became the core of the bench's form.

As part of my research, I invited people to take a photo of the sky and then write down a feeling, a thought, and an action. I also asked them to sketch their own imaginary "Dream View" and respond to questions like: "What does it make you feel, think, and want to do?" and "What does it bring you closer to?"

What emerged was deeply personal. The drawings revealed reflections on happiness, values, and life priorities. For many, connection to nature was central – it made them feel free and relaxed, and also more connected to themselves. Even the drawings expressing frustration or negative emotions often held constructive energy – desires for self-care and visions for societal change.

I also asked participants about their relationship with the sky. Through questions like "What does the sky make you think and feel? What does it give us?" I received profound statements, thoughtful reflections, and personal insights. These contributions felt like gifts – powerful, hopeful, and full of emotional resonance. They helped shape the soul of the Dream View Bench.

You tested the bench with people of different heights during development. What were some surprising insights or adjustments that came from this inclusive testing?

Inclusivity was key. I tested the Dream View Bench with men and women of different heights and body types. What surprised me was how even small variations in back completely changed the experience of the backrest comfort and gaze direction.

That led me to carefully refine the posture so the sky-viewing gesture felt natural for as many people as possible. We also considered how the curvature supports the spine and where pressure points hit. These micro-adjustments helped make the design more universally inviting – still poetic, but physically grounded. The only straight parts are where the body doesn't touch the bench. This makes it look like a lifted wave or a cloud floating in the sky.

The Dream View Bench has a sculptural, almost playful aesthetic. How do you balance artistic expression with functionality in your designs?

For me, function and emotion are never separate – they support each other. I'm most inspired when asking questions not just about function, but about how the object relates to us and touches us emotionally – through our senses and mind, or even socially or spiritually. A bench can be beautiful, but if it doesn't feel good to sit on, it won't be used. And a highly functional object can fall flat if it doesn't speak to us emotionally.

With the Dream View Bench, I approached it like a piece of public art or a sling that people can physically inhabit. It has a sculptural presence, but every curve is intentional – responding to the body, the sky, and the surrounding space. I always try to design with care: for the user, the context, and the atmosphere the object creates.

*Learn more about Muuto at **muuto.com**.*

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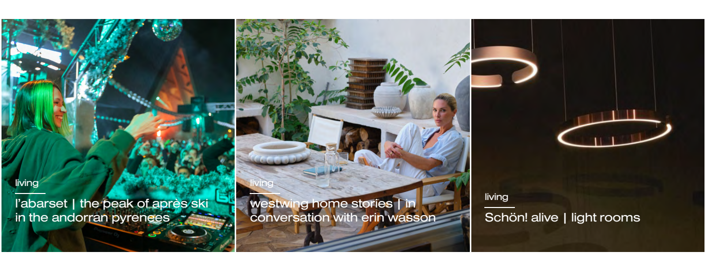

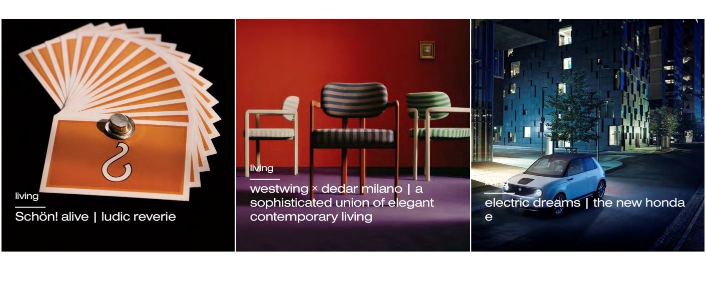

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Credits

Light is so much more than something you can turn on with a flip of a switch, or something that cascades into a room from a window. The quality and quantity of light we experience play a major role in our overall well-being, with profound effects on our health, mood and productivity.

This is something that **Occhio** understands well. The award-winning light makers have been creating a 'new culture of light' since 1999, thanks to their cutting-edge designs and commitment to innovation. When it comes to creating atmospheres in spaces with light, Helen Neumann, the company's Chief Lighting Designer, is at the forefront.

"Few people truly understand the impact and influence light has on aesthetics – interior design, architecture – as well as on our bodies, well-being, and even health," says Neumann. "It's a fascinating element, because our evolution is based on sunlight and the atmosphere around our planet. That's the formula by which human beings evolved, and I find it beautiful to work with." Neumann studied Interior Architecture and, later, earned her Master of Arts in Architectural Lighting Design. Passionate about the transformative power of light, she has long championed its vital role in enhancing quality of life.

Schön! alive sits down with her to find out more about the impact light has on our well-being, the importance of designing a room with lighting in mind, and more.

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What inspired you to choose a career in lighting design?

When I started my diploma classes for interior design, I didn't know that lighting design was a profession. I thought I was going to be a furniture designer, but I quickly realized that I was more interested in how people interact with spaces and so on. Back in university, I realized that lighting design is a profession, and ever since, I have specialized in it.

Why?

I did a Master's in Architectural Lighting Design in Wismar, in the northern part of Germany. The class attracts students from around the world because few universities offer lighting design studies. I have been working as a lighting designer ever since. The reason I'm so interested in light is because its relevance is obvious yet not at the forefront of people's minds.

When we go into a hotel, we think about the ambiance and sounds and how they impact us. We don't often think about the lighting.

Exactly. It is very important because we are so accustomed to sunlight that we appreciate the different atmospheres and moods it creates. We can describe our emotions that arise with natural light quite well. However, when it comes to artificial light, there's generally no appreciation for it. It's just about turning the light on or off, without recognizing how it affects our emotions. Lighting can create a mood, it can make you feel comfortable, but only when people realize that poor lighting might be why they feel uncomfortable. We can easily detect if something smells good or bad, or if a sound is pleasant or unpleasant, but with artificial light, it's not so obvious.

text

It's like we almost don't have the vocabulary to describe why the lighting is impacting us. We can say it's either too harsh or too dark. There's so much grey area.

Exactly. Lighting is very subjective. Although there is a science behind something is glaring, they understand it's uncomfortable, but in terms of light quality, it's more complex. For instance, the Colour Rendering Index (CRI) is a measure of the quality of light. It measures how naturally the light source reveals colours in comparison to natural light, which has a CRI of 100. Most LED lamps have a CRI between 80 and 90 and are considered good enough for most uses. However, in the last weeks, Artificial light sources are compared to the standard. If an artificial light has a CRI of more than 90%, it's very good. If it's more than 95%, it's still quite good.

Colours are important because our eyes have evolved to perceive all the colours in our surroundings accurately. For example, plants should look vibrant green, but if the light lacks certain colours, everything might look like. Our skin is also a good indicator of light quality. We're very sensitive to how our skin looks, and our brain can detect if it appears healthy or unhealthy, even if we don't consciously realize it.

Do people respond differently to light depending on their age, and is that something you take into consideration?

Certainly. When designing for clients, we try to understand their specific needs and preferences to develop the perfect lighting solution. It's well-known that, as we age, we need more light. I've noticed it myself. I need much more light than I used to when I was younger. It's not a matter of "is, with the last year or so, and I still haven't fully adjusted the lighting in my environment to match my new needs.

I often resort to wearing glasses instead. Perceptions are very individual. What seems bright and strong to one person may be too dim for another. It's crucial to consider the client's perspective when designing a lighting system. The perception of light when we start a project. This helps us tailor the lighting to meet their requirements and ensure comfort and satisfaction.

Do you have a lighting design? and why is this such a focus for Occhio?

We can be minded of artificial lighting design is – and the differentiator to them other manufacturers – not just making spaces bright, but also creating atmospheres. An important aspect is the control of lighting. Daylight is never static, it changes throughout the day and influences our moods and behaviors. We want to replicate this effect in different times of the day, seasons and personal moods, so we can make lighting more emotional and responsive to individual needs.

This approach aligns with the concept of humancentric lighting, which is based on the understanding that light affects our wellbeing and health, not just our ability to see. Emotional lighting design takes the further by personalizing it to individual needs, ensuring it not only supports health but also enhances mood and comfort. This approach goes beyond adjust the lighting to their personal needs and preferences. We aim to help users identify what they need at any given moment. Do they need bright, cool light for concentration or more relaxed, warm light for a restful phase?

text

Do you feel like you need to teach clients to recognise what they need? Is that something you're aware of when approaching a new design?

We start by talking to the clients and asking questions. By doing this, we guide them to better understand their needs. Many people don't know what they need, so we try to educate them on the benefits of different lighting solutions. Having good conversations helps clients learn. We don't aim to teach them outright, as that might be difficult. It's more about discovering together the different interpretations of their preferences. This approach can be inspiring and educational for both the client and the designer.

Some countries, like Iceland for example, might only get a few hours of daylight. How does this affect one's day and when one mentally starts the day?

Lighting profoundly impacts our mood and daily routines. In regions with significant seasonal variations in daylight, like Iceland or Scandinavian countries, people often struggle with the lack of sunlight during the winter months. This can lead to Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), commonly referred to as the "winter blues" or "winter depression." This condition disrupts circadian rhythms and hormone levels.

text

How do you see the future of lighting technology evolving over the next ten years?

I envision lighting becoming more integrated into our daily lives, much like our smartphones or smart home devices. Rather than being just a part of the architecture, lighting will evolve to interact with us in more personal ways.

Imagine lighting that adapts to our moods and activities, creating an environment that supports our well-being from waking to sleep cycles. The next step in lighting systems will be when we wake up and they sense our needs without manual input. For instance, wearable technology could monitor our pulse and other vital signs to adjust the lighting accordingly: dim and warm light for relaxation, or brighter, cooler light to boost alertness.

Voice control will likely continue to be an integral part of the evolution, though it's important it will remain as prominent as it is now. The goal is to make lighting adjustments seamless and intuitive, enhancing our interactions with our surroundings in ways that are more integrated and less intrusive than today's solutions. Apart from the technology, we are the future in lighting at Lighting Occhio. Our customers buy atmosphere, mood and wellbeing. They will experience the culture of light at Occhio.

text

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interviewer: **Kelsey Barron**
special thanks: **the team** at **Occhio**

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palm heights paradise | h&m home release summer collection

What if you could bottle that first-day-of-holiday feeling — the sunshine, the sluts, the sense that anything is possible — and bring it home? **H&M HOME**'s latest collection does just that, teaming up with Palm Heights, the cult-favorite Canadian lifestyle brand, for a summer collection inspired by Palm Heights' Spanish Paradise.

Set against the backdrop of Costa Blanca's Spanish Mediterranean Sea, Palm Heights is a dreamy time capsule of 1970s island glam — all antique umbrellas, vintage silhouettes, and sun-faded tones. It's a place where terry robes and beach towels double as design statements, and where the line between indoor and outdoor living gently blurs. Now, that effortless charm is coming to living rooms, bathrooms, and beach gardens everywhere.

Created with Palm Heights Creative Director Gabriella Wall and Evelina Knowen-Strömberg, Head of Design & Merchandising at H&M Home, the collection brings the brand's signature Scandinavian design DNA to the Palm Heights aesthetic and indeed is sun-washed yellow and earthy browns, complete with checkered trim — a direct nod to the brand's signature palette. Ceramics in fresh sensations echo the tones of the shorelines, while handcrafted baskets and lana add texture and a grounded, global feel.

Schönt speaks with Wall and Knowen-Strömberg to chat about the collection, the inspiration, and more.

What was the starting point for your creative vision in this collaboration with H&M Home? Was there a specific moment, memory, or design element from Palm Heights that sparked the collection?

Gabriella: The visual and design elements of the hotel design and my inspiration behind that guided the concept. Also, I was trying to translate the feeling of Palm Heights I wanted to create for guests. While it's luxurious, there's a feeling of warmth and casual playfulness that resonates with many people. I think people go there, and they appreciate being able to relax and be themselves.

Palm Heights is known for its nostalgic yet contemporary aesthetic. How did you translate that unique spirit into homeware pieces?

Gabriella: It was about creating a balance between the bright colours and stripes and something more understated and elegant, like the glassware and ceramics. This collection exudes both elegance and playfulness.

This collection exudes both elegance and playfulness. How did you strike that balance while designing for such a wide audience through H&M Home?

Evelina: We wanted to bring the holiday feeling on the home, and I think this elegance and playfulness are universally desirable. You want something that is designed beautifully, but there is also the playful aspect, with the games and the stripes, for example.

Can you talk about the importance of materials in this collection – like the teak, sandstone ceramics and handwoven baskets – and what they represent for you personally or culturally?

Evelina: We wanted to create an authentic feeling with these natural materials, a connection to place and a tactile, pared-back feeling that is associated with summer or beachside decor.

Gabriella: For the ceramics, I was looking at a lot of my previous projects and referencing the forms and shapes of objects that I have found inspiring over the years. We decided to go with the sandstone because it was just the stunning, simple colours of the beach. The punchy yellow is iconic to Palm Heights, and we also wanted to incorporate this happy pop of colour.

The yellow and white stripe motif is iconic to Palm Heights. Why was it essential to include that visual language in this collection?

Evelina: It is a big part of the design language of the hotel, but it also captures an idea. We talked about sunset hues — yellow as a key colour in the assortment, along with the stripes. These are significant because it is a beach resort. The Cayman Islands are very much about the sun and the sea.

How do you hope people feel when they bring these pieces into their home? What kind of experience or emotion were you aiming to evoke?

Gabriella: I hope people feel the beginning of summer: the joyfulness, the sunshine and an elegant simplicity. It's not overdone.

Palm Heights has a strong community focus. Did that sense of connection and collaboration influence how you approached this project with H&M Home?

Evelina: Yes, very much so. We wanted to include elements that bring people together, such as the glassware, which is so perfect for summer entertaining. And of course, the games.

The inclusion of items like the backgammon set and beach tennis kit is quite unexpected for a home collection – what was the thought behind adding these lifestyle elements?

Evelina: These are entirely new product types for us. We wanted to instill some energy in a luxurious, stylish way. What is a holiday all about? It is about moving, gathering, and playing something – thus, the beach tennis and the backgammon (which came from the hotel, as they have backgammon there).

You mention the idea of "bringing the holiday feeling into your home." What does that mean to you personally, and how do you achieve that in your own spaces?

Gabriella: For me holiday is a feeling of relaxation, slow, meaningful meals and joyful moments together. Through the collection, we choose products that embody this. Items like the towels and robes for quiet, cozy downtime or the amber glassware to create a beautiful tablescp at home for meals with friends and family. The sandstone objects bring an elegant natural simplicity to the homeve while the games encourage playful moments this summer.

The Palm Heights x H&M Home collection will be available on 12th June 2025 in selected stores and online at hm.com/home

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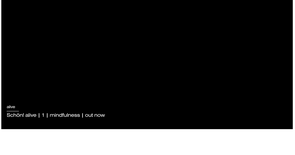
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