

WRJ DESIGN – BACKGROUNDER

“Inspired by the natural world, informed by the rest of it”: WRJ Design’s Uniquely Jackson Hole Aesthetic

Ringed by dramatic mountain ranges and wildlands, including the iconic Tetons, Jackson Hole has earned its status as one of the most spectacular natural landscapes in the U.S., if not the world. It was that over-the-top and ever-changing beauty that drew WRJ Design CEO Rush Jenkins and his partner and WRJ COO Klaus Baer to relocate their interior and exhibition design business from Manhattan, where Jenkins had founded it in 2003, to the mountain resort town of Jackson, Wyoming, in 2010.

"We both have a deep love of the West and the mountains," says Jenkins. "After reevaluating where we wanted to be, we knew Jackson was a community that would appreciate and understand fine contemporary design. People here are cultured, well-traveled, smart and down to earth." At the same time the pair speaks often of the creative inspiration they draw from the area's wild beauty – including a natural harmony, balance and serenity that can be reflected in their work.

"We live at the intersection of nature and culture," says Jenkins. "We find inspiration in the natural world in concert with the world of international design. We made the choice to live inspired, to orient our hopes and dreams in this rare landscape. We refine our eye by immersion ... in the textures and beauty of nature."

Both Jenkins and Baer share cosmopolitan backgrounds and an expertise in antiques and fine arts, including, for Jenkins, a former position as Director of Design for Sotheby's New York, that also inform their work in innumerable ways. As WRJ, the team continues that tradition, regularly designing exhibitions for Sotheby's and other auction houses, museums, nonprofits and galleries, working with titans of philanthropy, fashion, music and politics.

Some of the popularity of WRJ's exhibition designs comes from the way the installations unfold with a sense of discovery – a new surprise or focus just around the corner – a concept that is integral to the firm's interior designs as well. "I think that a house should unfold like a story, with some mystery," says Jenkins, "and in that there should be discovery and there should be beauty." Jenkins also finds those qualities in the team's beloved mountain setting. "The sense of discovery in Jackson Hole and the Tetons is endless. You could live here your entire life and never discover it all."

At the same time, WRJ's interior designs blend styles and periods from contemporary to antiquities in a way that creates a depth and quality that is "classic and timeless," says Jenkins. "A well-designed home has to have a keen balance of space, color, volume, light and a sensitivity to all the different elements that must come together to achieve harmony."

While for WRJ those elements reflect the natural beauty of Jackson Hole, they also are influenced by "the artistic marvels of the world," says Jenkins. He and Baer travel extensively, sourcing the highest quality products for their showroom from individual one-of-a-kind pieces that express a particular country's culture and history to entire product lines, bringing exquisite workmanship back to Jackson to incorporate in client interiors. The firm holds exclusive relationships with a number of vendors on display in the WRJ Design Showroom in Jackson: Sempre furnishings, expressing Belgian style through the finest

European materials; luxurious textiles from the 200-year-old Arpin woolen mill in the French Alps and cashmeres from Italy's Loro Piana; Poltrona Frau's chic Italian leather furniture and the signature look of Ralph Lauren Home, the U.S. pioneer of Alpine elegance.

"We layer, very skillfully, texture and the monochromatic, with varying levels of color along with beautiful wood and stone," says Jenkins. And it's that nuanced aesthetic, a blend of alpine elegance, casual contemporary classic sophistication and natural luxury, that create interest and harmony in WRJ's interiors – and a restful home to return to for their clients – whether in the heart of New York City or in Jackson with windows looking onto the jagged peaks of the Tetons.

WRJ DESIGN – FACT SHEET

ESTABLISHED: 2003

LOCATION: Jackson Hole, Wyoming

KEY PERSONNEL: Rush Jenkins, Chief Executive Officer; Klaus Baer, Chief Operations Officer

OVERVIEW: Begun out of a passion for great design by Rush Jenkins and Klaus Baer, WRJ creates experiences and environments through their designs, whether for residential and commercial interiors or exhibitions, that combine a sense of discovery with timeless reflections of the owners or collectors.

WHY JACKSON HOLE: In 2010, Baer and Jenkins decided to relocate WRJ Design from Manhattan to Jackson Hole, WY. "We both have a deep love of the West and the mountains," says Jenkins. "We knew Jackson was a community that would appreciate and understand fine contemporary design. People here are cultured, well-traveled, smart and down to earth."

INTERIOR DESIGN: Inspired by the natural beauty that surrounds its Jackson, WY, headquarters, WRJ Design imparts the special harmony and serenity of its Teton setting to [interior designs](#) in Jackson Hole and across the country. "We don't have a stereotypical style," Jenkins says. "Our process begins by understanding and listening to what the client's needs are. We delve into the way our clients live and then we consider their paintings, objects and furnishings. Every client is unique and each project is different."

EXHIBITION DESIGN: WRJ's [exhibition designs](#) for titans of philanthropy, fashion, music and politics provide insight into the lives of these luminaries as they showcase the objects they loved. "An exhibition should unfold like a story, with a sense of discovery present at every turn," says Jenkins, who, before founding WRJ with Baer, was Director of Design for Sotheby's New York. The firm has designed more than 40 auction exhibitions for Sotheby's including for the collections of Brooke Astor, Bill Blass, Mrs. Paul Mellon, Laurance Rockefeller and Katharine Hepburn. WRJ has also designed exhibitions for Nancy Reagan, Bette Midler, Cher, Vera Wang and Michael Jackson.

SHOWROOM: Opened in Jackson, WY. in 2012, the 2,000-square-foot WRJ showroom manifests the firm's nuanced aesthetic, a blend of alpine elegance, casual contemporary, classic sophistication and natural luxury. "We designed the showroom so that the experience of walking through it is like progressing through a home's interior," says Baer. "The space is constantly changing, and we're able to bring in works of art and incredible pieces from all over the world." An additional showroom, WRJ Rustic, opened in December 2015 and is available by appointment.

ORGANIZATIONS: Design Leadership Network, Leaders of Design Council, Institute of Classical Architecture

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