

LAGUNA'S MASTERS IN DESIGN 2010

THESE TOP LOCAL ARCHITECTS AND DESIGNERS CREATE ARTISTIC, HISTORIC, ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE PROJECTS THAT ENHANCE THE CITY'S BEAUTY AND PRESERVE ITS UNIQUE CHARACTER.

BY LAUREN SIMON
PHOTOS BY KRI SADO

Concrete and lumber; rebar and drywall. Semi-gloss and slate; glass and granite. These are but a few of the essential elements of style, particularly when it comes to building fine homes. But it's not just materials that take a good structure to great—it's the masterful way it is designed, from the foundation to the furnishings.

Architects and designers influence our perception of Laguna Beach almost as much as Mother Nature. For this reason, we honor their contributions to the look and feel of Laguna Beach. Thirteen individuals or design teams were selected for recognition in this issue of *Laguna Beach Magazine*, representing the most innovative, creative and well-respected architects and designers currently living and working locally.



Horst & Arianna Noppenberger

MODERNISM AND MARRIAGE FUELS THIS DESIGN COUPLE

Never ask architect Horst Noppenberger and his wife and designer Arianna about the Design Review Board or you're liable to cause a professional spat.

"[The] Design Review Board very effectively balances property rights with community character and preservation," says Horst, who served on the board from 1996 to 2000, including one year as chair.

"It is a good idea to have a Design Review Board, but we have to fix it and make it a lot more fair and less complicated," says Arianna.

Truthfully, Horst and Arianna get along famously, especially considering that about half of their projects are done jointly, with he as the architect and she as the interior designer.

"The majority of the time our opinions are complementary, but different opinions are healthy things to have," says Arianna, who is also trained as an attorney. "From the exchange of ideas, sometimes a better result comes out."

Horst also values Arianna's assistance. "The good thing about working together is that I'm a big picture person. I know my limitations and I am not the best finisher. Arianna is a good detail person."

Horst and Arianna met at a Laguna Beach party in 1990 when he had just opened his business and she was here as a tourist on a working vacation after graduating from the interior design program at Instituto Europeo di Design (IED) in Milan. Two years later, they married and she immediately started to work in Horst's studio, where she "learned English, feet and inches," she says. In 2002, Arianna founded Aria Design specializing in high-end custom residential design; however, both she and Horst say that their best work is accomplished together.

"We see our work as a continuity of the rich tapestry of Laguna Beach modernism as established by legendary architects such as Fred Briggs, with whom I worked with early in my career, Lamont Langworthy and Chris Abel," Horst says.

While Horst likes to leave work at the office; Arianna does not. But wherever they end up sharing ideas, if it's in a Noppenberger-designed home, at least they can debate in a beautiful setting.



A portrait of Sheldon Harte, a man with short, light-colored hair and glasses, wearing a dark suit jacket over a white shirt. He is standing outdoors with his arms crossed, in front of a background of tall, green, feathery plants. The text 'SHELDON HARTE' and 'PUTTING HEART INTO DESIGN – AND LIFE' is overlaid on a white rectangular box in the upper right portion of the image.

SHELDON HARTE
PUTTING HEART INTO DESIGN – AND LIFE

Most people would be mortified to have their bathroom featured in a national magazine. Not interior designer Sheldon Harte, whose own bath area graces two pages of April's Kitchen and Bath Ideas.

He's received other national ink: The winter issue of Luxe Interiors + Design showcases a 16,000-square-foot Indian Wells family enclave he designed for a repeat client, and The Robb Report featured the home cinema of that same project.

Sheldon is also garnering attention in the design community. In May, his work will appear in a storefront window as part of an exclusive special event in the La Cienega Design Quarter in Los Angeles.

Since founding Harte Brownlee & Associates Interior Design in 1984 with his late partner John Brownlee, Sheldon has designed more than 200 homes for some of Orange County's wealthiest residents.

Sheldon grew up in a Cliff May-designed home in the San Fernando Valley with a father who was a landscape designer and a mother who worked in the fashion industry. His boyhood home was featured in Sunset Magazine in the 1960s; and, as Sheldon recalls, he spent many weekends "antiquing" with his mother. "It definitely had an influence on my love of interior design and architecture," he says.

Despite his national reputation, Sheldon is devoted to Laguna Beach. "I truly love Laguna. It fills my spirit every day," he says.

Harte Brownlee also has many clients here. "I've done some of the major houses in Laguna Beach," Sheldon says. "We just finished a modern house in town that has an amazing view, for a gentleman in the garment industry. It's a beautiful, soft, contemporary house. We used a lot of textures in it that reflected the sand and the hills."

Sheldon has invested himself in Laguna in other ways, too. He serves on the board of trustees of the Laguna Art Museum, has sung in the local men's chorus, and last year, performed in drag in the Big Splash fundraiser for the AIDS Services Foundation of Orange County. John Brownlee died of AIDS in 1996. Harte Brownlee also designed the family room of the 2009 House of Design, Casa California, which benefits the Youth Music Programs of the Philharmonic Society of Orange County.

"I truly love Laguna. It fills my spirit every day"
—SHELDON HARTE

Once called the heir to Laguna's legendary architect Fred Briggs, architect Mark Singer says he "probably could design and build furniture full time and do OK." Except that he loves architecture, and after some 30 years in Laguna Beach, he is as grounded here as any of his signature concrete walls.

Mark's reputation for designing some of the most eye-catching homes in the city comes from his willingness to take calculated risks, even when it was unpopular to do so. "Initially, there was resistance," he recalls, "a council that was afraid this [contemporary style] was going to overwhelm Laguna and its character."

Before Mark, Laguna's homes were made primarily of wood, inside and out. Cottage style evolved thanks to Fred Briggs, Lamont Langworthy and Chris Abel, but wood construction remained. "They failed to recognize where they were building on a chaparral-covered crest of a hill," Mark says. "It doesn't take too much imagination to know there was going to be fire. I started using a different palette of materials, minimizing roof overhangs. I started to apply my own code. Now, if you go to the current Laguna building codes, what I did 20 years ago would meet that code."

Mark's work is defined not only by the materials he prefers—concrete, stone, steel—but also by his ability to use those materials to create a new and interesting architectural language. "I wanted my houses to be aesthetic, poetic places that you want to come home to and relax, with a play of light and a connection of interior and exterior spaces to be strong elements in the design."

Mark's peers have long recognized his artistry, and his record of architectural awards is unsurpassed for a residential architect in Orange County. For 11 consecutive years, the American Institute of Architects (AIA) has recognized Singer's designs as outstanding and has awarded his projects the prestigious AIA Honor Award, the highest level of recognition.

Mark has invested himself in other aspects of the city. He opened 230 Forest 16 years ago and remains the general partner, as well two Opah restaurants and the new Watermarc. He is also president-elect of the Orange County chapter of AIA.

MARK SINGER

FINDING SOUL IN WOOD, CONCRETE AND STONE



A photograph of Christine Hallen-Berg, an interior designer, standing in a bohemian-style interior. She is wearing a dark blue long-sleeved top, dark blue wide-leg pants, and a light grey scarf. She is smiling and leaning against a dark wicker chair. The room features a blue wall, a large wooden cabinet with intricate carvings, and a mirror reflecting the room. The ceiling is decorated with fringed fabric and hanging lights.

CHRISTINE HALLEN-BERG

BRINGING AUTHENTICITY TO INTERIOR DESIGN

“If I had to do the same design style every day, I would be bored,” interior designer Christine Hallen-Berg says when asked about her design aesthetic.

Her recent projects bear out her interest in varied, bold, international design. The lush Tahitian tropical feel of Tabu Grill, which Christine co-owns with her husband, Chuck Bixler, Julie and Keith Gallo and managing partner Nancy Wilhelm. A contemporary Balinese home in Irvine Cove, a country French home in Emerald Bay, a contemporary Asian home in Emerald Bay.

“I have had the opportunity to work with clients that are really into the authenticity of the design,” Christine says. “I went to Paris with one client to do country French. I went to Bali to do the house in Irvine Cove. I went to Italy with another client. It really makes a house special when you can bring authenticity into your design by going to the country.”

Christine owns the Laguna Beach firm of Robinson Hallen-Berg, which has served clients locally and internationally for close to 20 years. Recently, Christine collaborated with Lost as part of the Casa Surf Project, for which she chose a black, white and vibrant green color scheme based on pillows she made from Lost board shorts. “I loved interacting with Joel Cooper, the owner of Lost,” Christine says. “I especially like the way the suite feels: intimate but with an international feel.”

Travel provides inspiration and real-world experience, but Christine loves to come home to Laguna Beach, where she has lived since 1979, because it provides an ever-changing palette for her artistry. “I’ve benefited by living in this area because everybody is so different,” she says. “That’s what’s so wonderful about Southern California and why I don’t do the same style every day.

“I love the diversity of the people who live here, the arts, the charm, the diversity of architecture, the views. I feel like I’m in Europe,” Christine says. “I think that Laguna Beach should be preserved to keep the intrinsic value of what it has always represented—a beautiful, charming, picturesque small town. I personally would not want to change it.”

With a long family history in local architecture and design, Gregg Abel plays a unique role in Laguna Beach affairs.

That role—as both an advocate for development and a keeper of the flame of integrity in the town’s architecture—has led Gregg to the helm of Pro Laguna, a recently formed advocacy group of local architects, designers and builders concerned about excessive city oversight of local development.

“Gregg is a talented designer and a true gentleman, as well as a bit of an icon in this town,” says fellow architect Anders Lasater. “Because he’s so well respected, he’s a good go-between with downtown [leadership].”

Having grown up at the sleeve of his well-known architect father, Chris Abel, Gregg cares deeply about the future of development in Laguna Beach. For that reason, he serves on the board of the Chamber of Commerce and participates in Open for Business, a monthly workshop that encourages businesses to invest in Laguna Beach.

Gregg is also one of the few people in Laguna who offers design-build services, in which his firm takes projects from the concept stage to full construction, using the skills of his wife, Kathleen, as the interior designer, and those of his son, Tristan, to do specialty work, such as custom windows.

“I really love carpentry, and I used to do the building myself,” Gregg explains. “As we grew larger, I branched out to architectural training with my father and then branched out again to be a general contractor. That way, I can watch over the details of my projects.”

From Gregg’s grandfather, Carl, and brother, who were woodcarvers, to his father, Chris, who designed many Laguna Beach homes and commercial buildings, the family legacy continues. In 2008, Gregg also worked on the renovation of the Lumberyard building, which his father had also done years before. Like father, like son—making Laguna the longtime beneficiary of Abel artistry.

GREGG ABEL

HAMMERING OUT GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE CITY





BEN SIMON AND LINDA MORGENLANDER

DESIGN, ARCHITECTURE AND A LOT OF LAUGHTER

Many architects develop and become known for a particular design style. Ben Simon and Linda Morgenlander, partners in Acme Architecture/Interior Design, prefer to be chameleons, changing their design aesthetic to suit their clients' needs.

"That's one of the reasons we picked a company name that did not have our names in it," Ben says. "Acme is almost generic. When people ask about our style, we always say appropriate, contextual, site specific and client driven. We never tell a person what to do."

Business partners since 1998 when they met as members of the Design Review Board, Linda and Ben offer both architecture and interior design services. "We believe there is a very strong connection between architecture and interiors," Ben says. "When we do schematics, we show where the furniture is. When we think about window placement, we think about furniture placement. We don't think you can separate the two. Architecture and interiors have to mesh."

As interiors reflect exteriors, houses should reflect landscapes and preserve tradition, says Linda, who for the last four years has been an active member of the city's Heritage Committee, which advises the Design Review Board on the preservation and restoration of historic properties. In keeping with that philosophy, Linda and Ben strive to capitalize on existing architecture, minimize floor space and preserve open space. "What we really try to emphasize more than anything in the world is context," Linda says. "We look at the land, the trees and the orientation to figure out how to capture what's appropriate."

Linda's partner and architect, Bob Teubner, also works with Acme, primarily on computer models. "We're both extremely detail oriented and obsess, obsess and obsess about our work seven days a week," Ben says.

"Clients really enjoy when we get into one of our debates," Linda says. "It's an added point-of-view that enriches the decision-making process, and it's funny. Having a little humor and fun is not a bad thing."

Architect Monica Fuerst committed herself to green design long before it became trendy. For her senior thesis project at Cal Poly Pomona in 1990, Monica designed an environmental awareness center for Laguna Canyon that was made of recycled materials such as tires and discarded concrete from demolition sites.

She holds certifications in two traditions of Feng Shui—Western Form (1998) and Classical Compass (2000)—in which an enhanced consciousness of the environment helps practitioners redistribute and enhance energy flow. In 2008, Monica also was named a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Accredited Professional by the U.S. Green Building Council.

Monica incorporates her Western training with Feng Shui and an acute sensitivity to environment into her architectural work, both in terms of design and practicalities. “I just finished a design on a 4,639-square-foot custom home with a 1,078-square-foot garage in a soft contemporary Hawaiian style,” Monica says. “The use and placement of windows to create cross ventilation minimizes mechanical ventilation, and maximum natural daylight with deep overhangs helps with the summer sun and allows light in during the winter while minimizing the use of artificial lighting. Interior spaces open to the outside to capture views while exiting onto covered lanai spaces, which provides the indoor-outdoor experience, which is a key element in California living.”

Her design also includes a catchment system to collect rainwater for irrigation, and the use of permeable surfaces to maximize the absorption of rainwater and limit offsite drainage and storm water pollution. “Those are just some of the eco-friendly ideas which are very basic that anyone can incorporate into their homes that make a difference,” she says.

Monica and her family are involved in Zero Trash Laguna and in Transition Laguna, which organizes projects to improve local sustainability. Monica also has been active at her children’s school in promoting clean canteen water bottles instead of disposable plastic and organic cotton lunch sacks to reduce landfill waste.

MONICA FUERST

ENVISIONING HOMES IN HARMONY WITH NATURE



MORRIS SKENDERIAN

BUILDING HOMES MEANS BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS



Architect Morris Skenderian has made his mark by designing projects such as the Inn at Laguna Beach, the Shoals Condominiums and the recently renovated Old Pottery Place. But locals know Morris for more than his architectural legacy. He is The Go-To Guy to get things done in Laguna Beach development.

“I lived here since 1969, and I’ve developed a good understanding of the character and sensibility of this town,” he says.

Morris’ reputation is built on a long history of personal integrity, constructing relationships with businesspeople and city officials, and dancing the delicate two-step between development and preservation.

“When we do projects,” Morris says, “I keep both the city and the client in mind as we move toward developing solutions to whatever the project might be, knowing that in order to get the city, commissions and board to approve the project, you have to appeal to their sensitivities to what the issues are.”

Morris is personally committed to maintaining Laguna’s European charm, which attracted him here more than 40 years ago. “My vision for the town is to preserve this unique beauty, respect and complement the efforts of those who came before us, and honor their memories by continuing to protect the town from adverse influences,” Morris says. “This town did not become what it is by accident. It was created and developed over many years by creative individuals who were not motivated by profit but rather to honor, preserve and enhance this beautiful setting for all to enjoy.”

Morris acknowledges that while he respects both sides in the development debate, he does his best to straddle the middle ground. “I’m drawn to enhance the beauty and character of the town while preserving the feel of what’s here,” he says. “If you don’t change and leave it alone, it’s going to deteriorate. I’m of the camp to enhance and make it better. You have to support individuals who want to renovate, rehabilitate and bring new business to town, but also respect what’s here.

“I love my work, and whether I am home designing, directing or building,” Morris adds. “My work is my hobby.”

If architect Tim Nicol's design aesthetic could be summed up with one project, it would be the 1942 cottage remodel at Carmelita and Cress. Tim has completely opened up the interior, exposing roof joists and ceiling beams and knocking down walls to create unimpeded flow between living spaces.

"I've focused on cottage and beach style, for whatever reason, and I got a name for it, but it's not necessarily what I want to be known for," Tim says. "I live in a mid-century contemporary house, and my design sense is more contemporary, clean and minimal than most people think of as cottage. The house on Carmelita and Cress is a cottage that is very contemporary inside and much more sophisticated in feeling than your average beach cottage."

Tim has lent his design vision to Laguna Beach for 25 years since he first came to live here with his partner, John Secretan, owner of Zinc Café and Market. Tim and John met when they were both architecture students at University of California Berkeley (John in landscape architecture and Tim in architecture).

As Zinc Café has become a staple of Laguna living, so Tim hopes that his contributions to the town's architecture are also valued for their quality, "regardless of what the style is," he says.

"I try to blend an authentic Southern California beach charm with a casual yet urbane quality," Tim says. "In general, the quality [of the town's architecture] continues to get better. I love that there is such a variety of styles in town. It's a reflection of the community and how diverse it is."

An avid bicycle rider and swimmer who appreciates the natural beauty of the city's canyons and beaches, Tim likens Laguna Beach to Mediterranean towns "like Cassis in France and Positano in Italy that have dense development and still maintain an amazing charm and character."

With more remote parking, a loosening of parking restrictions to encourage new businesses and the creation of a more commercially vibrant downtown that will serve both residents and tourists, Tim says, "We should be able to do that here."

Another wish? "I'd love to see the Hotel Laguna restored and brought to a new level," he says.

TIM NICOL

COMBINING CONTEMPORARY WITH CALIFORNIA CASUAL





ANGELA TESSELAAR
CREATING THOROUGHLY MODERN DESIGN
WITH AN AGELESS SENSIBILITY

A Tesselaar Luxury Lifestyle & Design may be a new name to Laguna Beach residents, but the sophisticated, spare aesthetic that interior designer Angela Tesselaar brings to her clients is rooted in artifacts, antiques and materials that improve with age.

“My signature style fuses both traditional and contemporary elements into timeless European environments,” Angela says. “I use a lot of tonal palettes—creams, grays and beiges—leather, linen and hand-forged iron materials that age well.”

Angela made a name for herself as the most recent proprietor of Artisan on Beach Street, where she sold high-end, hand-crafted housewares and small furniture pieces of her own design. This spring, Angela is re-branding her business as A. Tesselaar Luxury Lifestyle & Design to focus more of her efforts on personalized design services.

Angela recently brought her vision to the Quiksilver room at La Casa del Camino hotel where bleached-out engineered oak covers the floors, antique reclaimed wood enhances the ceiling, and a faux-leather headboard is recessed into a frame constructed of reclaimed barn wood. Angela custom designed the hand-forged iron and glass double pendant light fixtures above each nightstand. “I love being able to tell an artisan made it and it is not mass-produced,” Angela says of the pieces that she incorporates into her interiors.

Despite her penchant for antiques, Angela hopes the aging downtown will get a facelift. “I would love to close Forest Avenue and make it a walking promenade akin to Santa Monica,” Angela says. “I would like to see major developers come in with big money to create a mix of authentic Spanish/Mediterranean Revival and classic Americana beach bungalow vibe.

“I would love to see Hotel Laguna brought back to full glory as an approachable, authentic and charming boutique hotel,” she adds.

Even as she dreams of a more chic Laguna, Angela likes what’s already here. “We travel all over the world,” she says, “and one of my top five favorite restaurants (Javier’s) is a hop, skip and a jump from my house!”

Anders Lasater grew up wanting to be an architect or a drummer in a rock band. After obtaining a bachelor's and a master's degree in architecture, the architect part came pretty easily. Now, with the formation of Thunderhose, both of Anders' boyhood dreams have come true.

Music, cooking and family help Anders get through "the dry times" in architecture, he says, when projects move from the creative, inspirational stage to the often drawn out approval and vetting process. "You have to have a level of patience as an architect," Anders says. "Music and cooking have immediacy to them."

Involved in residential and commercial architecture, Anders is well versed in the ups and downs of living and working as an architect in a city that is very concerned with preserving its historic ambiance. He has designed dozens of new homes and some 70 remodels locally, as well as in other parts of California and in Hawaii. His commercial work can be seen in Laguna's Peter Blake Gallery and Fetneh Blake clothing store, and Wohrle Dental Clinic and Tek Salon in Newport Beach. Last year, Anders joined forces with Peter Blake to design the Riviera Suite at La Casa del Camino Hotel, and in 2007 he was instrumental in keeping the Casa rooftop open to the public.

"I went into the archives and researched articles written when the building was built by William Riddle as an ode of love to his Laguna Beach," Anders says. "I put together a short history of the hotel with newspaper cutouts and used it to explain to folks downtown that [La Casa del Camino] has great width and breadth of history and to remove access to [its rooftop] would be counter to what William Riddle was doing when he built this building."

Anders' confronts history again with one of his new projects—an addition to the old Peace Barn, an iconic hillside home designed by respected Laguna architect and Anders' mentor Fred Briggs.

As he explains, "The more people who are open to the arts and understand art comes in many forms—art in galleries, sculpture in public places and architecture—the more people are open to art, the more they value what architects can do."

Anders Lasater

MASTER ARCHITECT—AND ROCK STAR



JIM HENRY AND JAMES HENRY

FATHER AND SON COTTAGE PRESERVATIONISTS

When architects James Henry, Sr. (called Jim) and James Henry, Jr. (called James) work on projects together, they always agree on one thing: That the house should blend seamlessly into the neighborhood.

"I am happiest when a building that I've worked on looks like it's always been there," James says.

James learned to respect history from Jim, who has lived and worked as an architect in Laguna Beach since 1977 and who serves on the city's Heritage Committee. Together and separately, Jim and James have designed numerous homes and remodels and are known for their excellence in cottage and Craftsman styling. But a respect for old houses doesn't make the Henrys old fuddy-duddies.

"I don't necessarily feel limited to working in one architectural style," James says. "I try and design based on the scale of how people really live, while keeping the integrity of the design intact. I always enjoy working on old Laguna cottages, but I have been doing a fair amount of work that has a more contemporary flair."

Working in close proximity has allowed the family to remain intact in a city that both father and son love. "Laguna Beach suits me because of the casual, inclusive and tolerant attitudes of the people that live here," Jim says. "I love the beaches and the fact that it has a real downtown. I have always thought it was a good place to raise a family and to make a living doing something I really enjoy."

"I really like the old-school parts of Laguna, probably because it takes me back to my childhood here," says James. "There is a great core of people who bring to light all of the funky, quirky elements that make this town what it is. I am happy that I am able to raise my family here; it's a very comfortable place to be."

When not in their shared office, James volunteers at his children's school and coaches their sports teams. "I also tinker on an old Datsun with the few leftover hours I have," he says.

And Jim? He bought his 1926 Oak Street house in 1972. "We have been working on that old house ever since," he says.



Nick Sheridan, Daniel Wacholder and Bret Englander bought their first sailboat together when they were 16 years old and still underclassmen at Laguna Beach High School. It's not surprising then that the trio finds it easy to work together as the principals of the Cerno Group, a new company based in Laguna Canyon that specializes in contemporary furniture and high-end LED lighting fixtures.

"Our company's focus is 'Art Resolved with Science,' which sums up the company's approach and philosophy well," Bret says. "With an engineer (Daniel), architect (Nick) and designer working side-by-side, our goal is to deliver one-of-kind products with uncompromised aesthetic attributes, while utilizing the latest technologies available for engineering and manufacturing."

The Cerno product line currently includes three contemporary styles of low, Baltic birch glasstop tables, one all-wood table, and two styles of matching arm-chairs and ottoman, handcrafted using the same process of stacking hundreds of layers of milled and hand-finished birch wood. The furniture may be natural or stained and is covered with a clear lacquer finish. Cerno also makes a similarly constructed bowl.

On the lighting side, Cerno currently offers one style of desk lamp fabricated from concrete and aluminum with a high-brightness LED lamp; but they are completing a second generation desk lamp with greater functionality that they hope to make available this summer.

Bret sees Cerno's greatest potential in the lighting market, particularly in hotels and restaurants. "LED technology has come a long way in the last five years," he says. "Now we can make intelligent table lamps with any color light that can be controlled wirelessly with software and hardware."

While Cerno's new lighting products are in development, the group is making ends meet by designing and fabricating custom stand-up paddleboard racks for the new SUP Company store opening this spring in downtown Laguna. And if they have any spare time, they'll get back to work on their Ericson 29.

CERNO GROUP

TRIO LIGHTS THE WAY FOR CONTEMPORARY DESIGN

