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MAY 2007 \$4.95



SWIMMINGLY FABULOUS



The Huntley—A hip boutique hotel

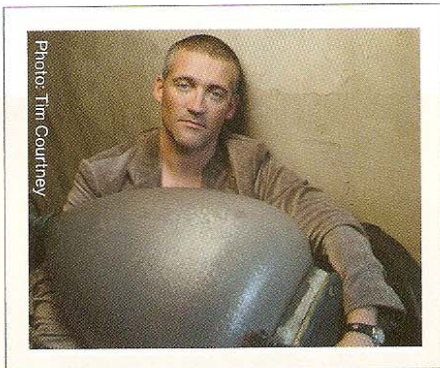
They may be piranhas, but visitors can't resist reaching out to them. "There are 350 piranhas," says Thomas Schoos of the school of Amazonian fish, a sculptural wall mural in the Huntley Hotel lobby. "They are lacquered, and it doesn't matter how sophisticated you are, you want to touch them."

Set on the shore in Santa Monica, the 209-room Huntley and its 18th-floor restaurant, The Penthouse, have recently experienced a Schoos renaissance. He's re-imagined the old hotel with the same originality and personality with which he designed L.A.'s popular O-Bar and Koi eateries and the homes of clients including Sharon Stone, Laurence Fishburne, Ellen DeGeneres, Will Smith and Jada Pinkett-Smith.

"People in every crevice of the world know Santa Monica," says Schoos. "They think of things like palm trees, roller blades, big beaches, whales, dolphins and that it's a fresh, young, playful but rich environment." With that in mind, his design for The Huntley was influenced by the ocean and pieces from around the globe which have found their way, in the form of both furniture and art, into the hotel's lobby and guest rooms.

Schoos, whose eponymous design firm (which he says is really a "lifestyle" firm) is also in Santa Monica, indulged Space in a quick conversation about his entertaining approach to engaging his hotel and restaurant guests. ▸

By Laurie McLaughlin



From shabby to chic, designer Thomas Schoos shares his secrets, including a stingray and fertility symbols . . .

In addition to the lacquered piranhas, you're encouraging visitors to stroke stingrays.

I laid a strip of stingray into the countertop of the front desk so that the first thing guests touch is something from the sea. It looks like glass pebbles out of chocolate-brown glass. It's beautiful. Everybody has five senses, and I try to tickle all five.

You say people don't go to clubs these days. Instead, they go to a place where they can eat and relax at the same time.

I'm turning 40, and you have to think about our dads. When they were 40, they didn't go out anymore, but I go out seven nights a week. However, I go to restaurants, not clubs, that have a lounge to hang out in so that I can have three or four

hours with a good vibe and good music. Everything is under one roof instead of driving around. With the Penthouse, we created different zones, like the bar and the lounge and cabanas for privacy.

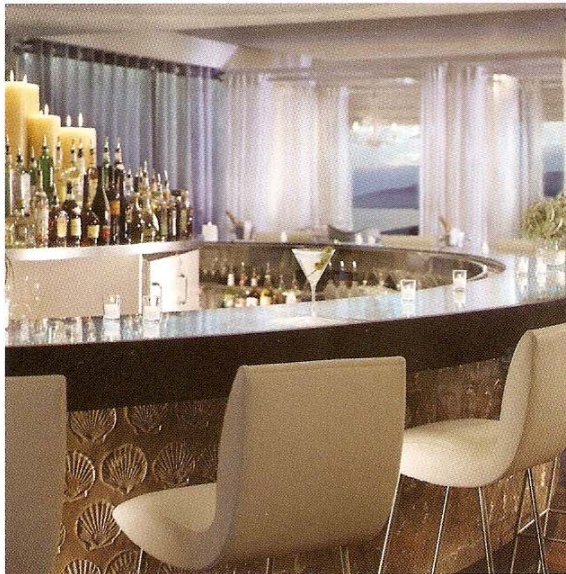
The Penthouse also has a very shiny ceiling.

The reason I have a high-polished ceiling is to reflect the colors from the sea and the sky.

And you've put fertility beds in the lobby.

They're from Tanzania and made of chunks of wood. They have little naked men and women on top of them, which I think is very whimsical. I sometimes sit in the lobby and watch people say, "Have you seen the chair over there?"

The Penthouse restaurant is the hotel's crown jewel with a 360-degree view from the coastline to Hollywood. To bring the outdoors into the dining space, Schoos used natural materials (including wooden floors that invite a patina created by wear) and white chandeliers, tablecloths, hanging sheers and a polished ceiling as well as antique mirrors reflect to the exterior sea and sky. "In designing a hotel, you can always swim against the stream, but I think nature proposes what type of environment is successful," says Schoos. "I want people to come here and breathe, sit down and touch everything. It's playful but sophisticated living." □



Photos by Jonathan Rouse

