

# Forbes

## Secrets of Luxury Hotel Design with BraytonHughes

By Amber Gibson

November 11, 2018



Inn at the Presidio Lobby

Things at BraytonHughes have changed a lot in the last 30 years. When Richard Brayton and Stanford Hughes established their namesake design firm in San Francisco in 1989 their focus was on high-end corporate work and for many years it was a bit of a boys' club. Today, two-thirds of their work is in hospitality and the principals are mostly minorities and women.

BraytonHughes is best known for storytelling through design. They'll figure out what sets the location and property apart, then come up with a concept and theme that's carried out to the smallest details, like the cowboy boot stitching on the leather at the Four Seasons Jackson Hole bar. The firm's meticulous attention to detail and laid-back office environment reflect the kind of relaxed, comfortable luxury that hotel owners want to create. Living rooms are replacing lobbies and the formal flower table entry has become passé. Similarly, at BraytonHughes' new office in San Francisco's Financial District, the vibe is focused but fun. The young associates snipping fabrics are all smiles and there are chocolate covered alfajores that some magnanimous person brought in for colleagues laying out under the world map pinned with everyone's travels.

“We're very family-oriented and we all get along,” Rachel Fischbach tells me. She's been with BraytonHughes for 18 years and became a principal in 2016. “It's very collaborative as an office. A lot of us really like to travel and we encourage our younger associates to travel as well.” This passion for travel and her colleagues' multicultural and multilingual backgrounds allow BraytonHughes to put together impressive teams tailored to each new project.

“We only did corporate work when I first joined in 1992,” Principal Joel Villalon says. “We did corporate work for almost 10 years, then got a commission from Disney to do the Grand Californian down in Southern California. Somebody at the Four Seasons saw that project and we've now designed and/or renovated more than 10 Four Seasons hotels.” Along with their close relationship with Four Seasons, BraytonHughes has worked with Fairmont, The Ritz-Carlton, Hyatt and boutique luxury projects like [Cavallo Point](#) in Sausalito, [Ventana Big Sur](#) and [The Clement Hotel](#) in Palo Alto.

Three BraytonHughes principals – Fischbach, Villalon and Kiko Singh – share their thoughts on trends and hot topics in luxury hotel design.

### **Diversity**

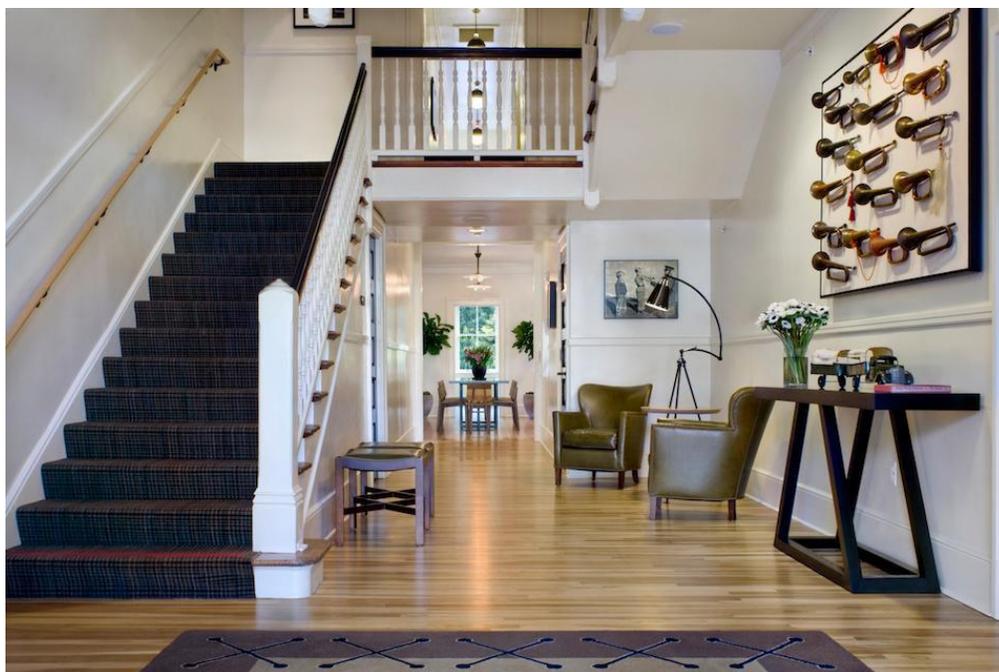
Singh: We all have very different points of view and that makes us better as a team. The best idea can come from the intern, from anyone in the room. Diversity in leadership allows us to be role models for the rest of the office and show that camaraderie. There are times Rachel or I might be the only women in the room with developers, architects, contractors and finance guys, but we speak up. We're never quiet.

Fischbach: We were allowed the opportunity to buy into this company, which isn't something I ever initially realized was possible. We were instrumental in its growth and now we're able to take it in the direction we want to. If you're young and motivated there's no reason you can't be a partner.

### **Sustainability**

Villalon: [Inn at the Presidio](#) was one of our first LEED projects, certified LEED Gold when it opened in 2012. It's the architectural elements, the lighting and mechanical side, where the big points come into play. It is all very technical when it comes to rehabbing an old building. [Inn at the Presidio uses ground up denim for insulation, for example.] Some clients are very interested in LEED but it's much more expensive and for some owners it's not so important. The LEED standards have become even costlier in recent years, so you're paying to be a part of the club.

Singh: Sustainability is something that I've always been super passionate about. I'm putting together a panel on the lifecycle of a guest room for the [NEWH](#) sustainability summit in April. In California, water conservation is the number one concern but we have to make sure the guest shower experience isn't negatively impacted when we can only use 1.5 gallons of water per minute.



Inn at the Presidio