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# Interior Designer Courtney Brannan Crafts the Lap of Luxury



**Luxury hotel interior designer Courtney Brannan '11 combines culture and comfort at some of the world's most prestigious properties.**

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Interior designer Courtney Brannan '11 uses a rather unexpected tool when working on luxury properties. It's not a hammer, nor a drill—it's a script.

The world of interior design can be a daunting one, especially when working from scratch. For Brannan, the name of the game is to weave a story within her work.

“The research, and then having these design pillars, or a narrative, helps steer me in the design and makes sure that I'm keeping to a story or keeping to a script,” Brannan said.

Her design work for the bungalows of The Beverly Hills Hotel included seven different specialty suites, each themed after a Hollywood star that stayed at the hotel. Brannan recalls sitting in her office the day she got that project, thinking, “I just need to go home and watch documentaries.”

Brannan went home and burned the midnight oil, reading articles and watching documentaries about stars such as Marilyn Monroe, Howard Hughes and Charlie Chaplin. She imagined how each would design their own homes, channeling her research into inspired specialty suites.

Brannan's talent for transforming blank canvases—or, rather, empty rooms—into luxury hotel designs has contributed to her

impressive portfolio. Public spaces and guest rooms at the Hotel Bel-Air, Beverly Hills Hotel, Grand Cayman's Ritz-Carlton, St. Regis Jakarta and St. Regis New York have all been revamped by Brannan's one-of-a-kind style and design process.



*A living room in the Beverly Hills Hotel's Elizabeth Taylor bungalow.*

Brannan's research process is also informed by the communities surrounding her projects. She builds a foundation on the location's culture, while incorporating aspects that are unique to each property.

"I dive into the location, the arts, the history," said Brannan. "[I read] any article I can about different aspects of the culture."

As such, one of her favorite things to do when researching is "hotel hop"—visiting other hotels and establishments near her project's location to get a sense of the culture.

"That inspires me because I'm seeing what other designers are doing, what other people have been doing and what other guests are enjoying."

While working on the Four Seasons Anguilla's Café Nai, Brannan found inspiration in a giant conch shell wall located nearby on

Scilly Cay, Anguilla. She channeled this conch shell concept into the cafe's entirely pink interior by adding a cabinetry collection of local curiosities and souvenirs—creating a sense of discovery reminiscent of a walk down the beach.





*Two of Brannen's interiors for the Four Seasons Anguilla's Café Nai, including the conch shell wall (left).*

Brannen's recent work has often been referred to as warm and cozy. Creating places that people are comfortable in—and want to live in—is her specialty.

Her work with the St. Regis New York, from the hotel's drawing room to the King Cole Bar, places an emphasis on warm color choices and seating options with soft fabric. Pairing comfort with convenience, and paying mind to seemingly small details like outlet locations and inclusion of dining spaces, plays a vital role in Brannen's designs.

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**“There's nothing greater than the feeling of seeing your product done—seeing people using it, seeing people loving the space, enjoying it and living in it,” said Brannen. “It's the best feeling.”**

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### *The King Cole Bar at the St. Regis New York.*

The Auburn alumnae was welcomed into the world of buildings and design from a very young age. Brannan's parents own a construction company specializing in the "lost art" of drywall and historical plaster restoration. She grew up surrounded by drawing sets and plans, and she often helped her dad color-code them so he could price jobs.

"It's like I've been around this my whole life," said Brannan. "That definitely influenced me to be interested in a career path in design and working in buildings, especially older buildings and renovations."

During her college search, Brannan visited the University of Alabama and met with the Director of Interior Design in her office. Midconversation, Brannan's dad noticed the director's Auburn University degree hanging on the wall.

"That was kind of like the nail in the coffin for that," said Brannan. "It was like Auburn seemed like the much wiser choice."

Following her 2011 graduation from **Auburn University's interior design program**, Brannan secured a position with Champalimaud Design in New York City, where she has now worked for 13 years. In 2022, Brannan was promoted to principal at the firm.

"I think my favorite memories are of coming in and helping colleagues with their projects," said Brannan. "[Champalimaud Design] is here with one mission, which is to design something really great and beautiful that people will enjoy."





*Brannan working in the studio with her team.*

Brannan's connection to Auburn University continued when she moved to New York. In fact, she and one of her former professors, **Melanie Duffey '07**, stay in contact so that Duffey's students can reference relevant material from Brannan's work. Auburn's interior design program, **ranked #11 in the U.S. in 2024 by Architectural Digest**, provides opportunities for students to observe work from the "real world."

To those currently studying interior design, Brannan emphasizes the importance of passion for the craft, even in mundane moments. She recalls recently working in Grand Cayman while

the hurricane came through, thinking that there was still no place she would rather be.

“[Grand Cayman] makes me so happy, like any project that I’ve done,” said Brannan. “It’s like I’ve put so much of me into it.”



*The Silver Palm Bar at the Ritz-Carlton Grand Cayman.*

To look at Courtney Brannan’s portfolio is to see her passion for interior design, a true testament to believing in hard work.

“Passion is so important in this. Be excited about every moment, even if it’s mundane paperwork, typing emails or construction admin. See it through the eyes of ‘this is getting me to the end point where this thing will be done, and it’s going to be so awesome.’”

**By Ella Walton**

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