

Hospitality Interiors

HOTEL, RESTAURANT, BAR & CLUB INTERIORS

FEATURES

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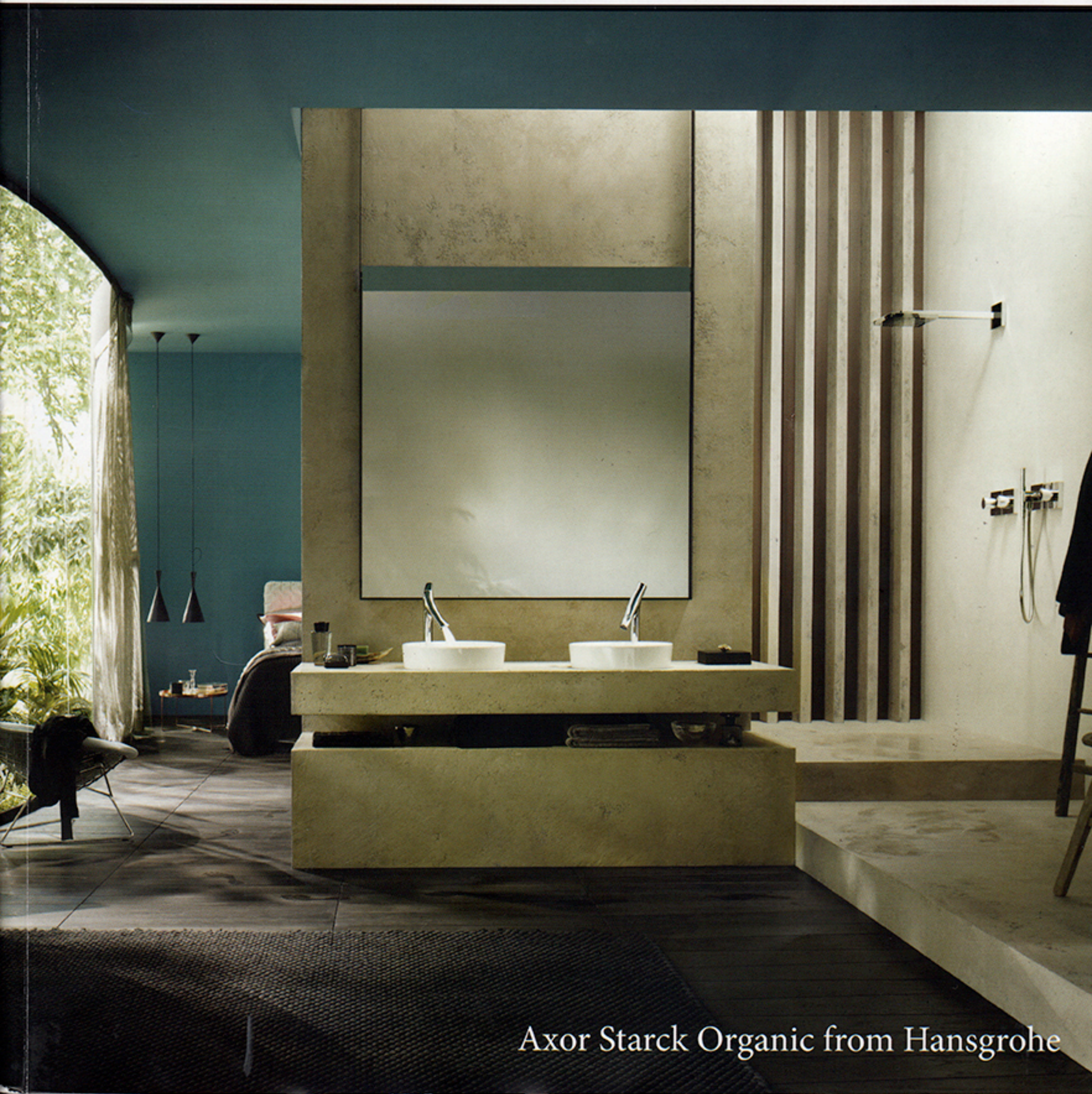
PROJECTS

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INTERVIEWS

Concrete | Nick Humphrey

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Axor Starck Organic from Hansgrohe



Concrete's Amsterdam base, House of Concrete

Rethinking design

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Changing the world of hospitality one project at a time, Amsterdam-based Concrete has implemented some of the sector's most progressive and influential design concepts of recent years. Hospitality Interiors' Katie Sherry speaks to Concrete's founder and head designer, Rob Wagemans, to find out more about the company's contemporary focus and the impact this has on the industry as a whole ...

To describe Concrete as fast-paced is something of an understatement. Since its first opening in Amsterdam in 2008, the design firm's new hotel brand for the urban traveller, citizenM, has launched in Glasgow and London, with two more London properties set to open in the next two years.

citizenM is also working its way across Europe, with more hotels being constructed in Rotterdam and Paris. Furthermore, the brand will soon launch across the pond with two new sites in New York, and other locations are on the horizon.

One of the main reasons for citizenM's success can be attributed to Concrete's re-evaluation of what a modern, urban traveller needs and wants from a hotel stay – and how the space behaves in

order to accommodate that. All tradition has been stripped away to reveal a new type of hospitality space, where public spaces take centre stage and convenience is paramount.

"We have received positive feedback for citizenM Bankside in London, mainly because it has not become just another hotel brand," says Rob. "It is constantly in evolution and does not reach a standstill."

Concrete prides itself on creating any design project with the complete concept in mind, which is known as its 'one concept' philosophy. By taking this approach, Concrete has implemented a wide range of prominent international brands, including W Hotels and Supperclub, alongside a range of independent projects, such as Mazzo in



Club room bar at societyM, Glasgow



Contemporary art plays a big part in the interior of citizenM Bankside, London. Image © Richard Powers for Concrete

Amsterdam and The Döner Company in Leiden, The Netherlands.

Concrete views hotel brands as distinctive identities that evolve depending on where each property is situated. Rob explains: "Every brand is an identity – almost like a person. A brand is a DNA, which is the part of the identity that stays, but it is personalised depending on the location."

When citizenM moves to the US, for example, the varying climate will impact on the design concept – creating a different hotel experience to that in Amsterdam or the UK. "In New York, people do not drink water from the tap and they have different breakfasts than we're used to," Rob says. "These small things will set a new standard, but the story is the same."

As well as proving popular with the public, citizenM has received recognition on the international hospitality stage, having recently won the award for Best Hotel Interior Design at the FX International Interior Design Awards in London. In addition, the business club at societyM in Glasgow was a finalist in the European Hotel Design Awards, and the firm has been nominated for the Dutch Architect of the Year Award 2012.

Rob attributes this success to Concrete's ability to think outside the box and act fast in a sector that he describes as "a very slow vehicle". He says: "We have reinvented a traditional business centre in a hotel to suit how it should behave. This was a different entry to just another beautifully-designed hotel space – it behaves like a club, leading to >>

more business opportunities.”

Despite Concrete's aptitude in designing brand concepts, the firm chooses to keep its own branding to a minimum. “We create brands for other people, we are not a Concrete hotel,” Rob emphasises. “Our logo is as simple and minimal as possible to keep it subtle. Concrete is not a high-street brand – we are known by a few people in the same category, and that is enough. We are not looking for stardom.”

Concrete's pragmatic approach is reflected in the style of its book, *The World According to Concrete*, which illustrates some of the firm's most prominent projects. A second book, *Concrete Jungle*, is currently being written, and features the same self-critical undertones of the first – which

Rob attributes to the company's Holland roots and the Dutch sense of humour.

“We don't take anything very seriously,” he says. “We are very down to earth, and there is no pretension there. We try to make complex things simple, and to play a part in making the world a more beautiful place – but we know that it's only a small part.”

“Being down to earth is crucial for a creative person to survive. Some of the best art has been produced by artists who are not famous.”

Concrete's passion for all things creative is evident in the emphasis it places on contemporary art in its designs. “Art is a reflection of society,” Rob explains. “You can read society if you look at contemporary art.”

citizenM Bankside's exterior, for



W Lounge bar at W London, Leicester Square



Spice Market restaurant at W London, Leicester Square

example, is blazened with the words *Another World is Possible* in a text piece from Turner Prize-nominated artist, Mark Titchner. The interior features artwork from Gavin Turk, Mario Testino and Hans Op de Beeck, alongside a custom-designed floor-to-ceiling mural from artist collective, Assume Vivid Astro Focus.

Furthermore, Concrete has launched a service in partnership with leading Amsterdam-based book store, MENDO, to offer a range of books focused on art, architecture, photography, fashion and travel at its citizenM hotels. This further encapsulates the design firm's ability to

connect with, and satisfy the needs of, contemporary target audience.

As for future projects, Concrete shows no sign of slowing down. The firm is currently implementing the development of a W Hotel in Mumbai – one of the largest in the Maharashtra's capital city. This, alongside new citizenM properties and a restaurant in Hong Kong, promises to follow through on Concrete's innovative and dynamic approach. What the company comes up with next will undoubtedly add an unexpected and exciting twist to the hospitality sector.

W concreteamsterdam.nl

"Being down to earth is crucial for a creative person to survive. Some of the best art has been produced by artists who are not famous"

Rob Wagemans, founder and head designer at Concrete

Branching out

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