

# SLEEPER

GLOBAL HOTEL DESIGN

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## **Keemala**

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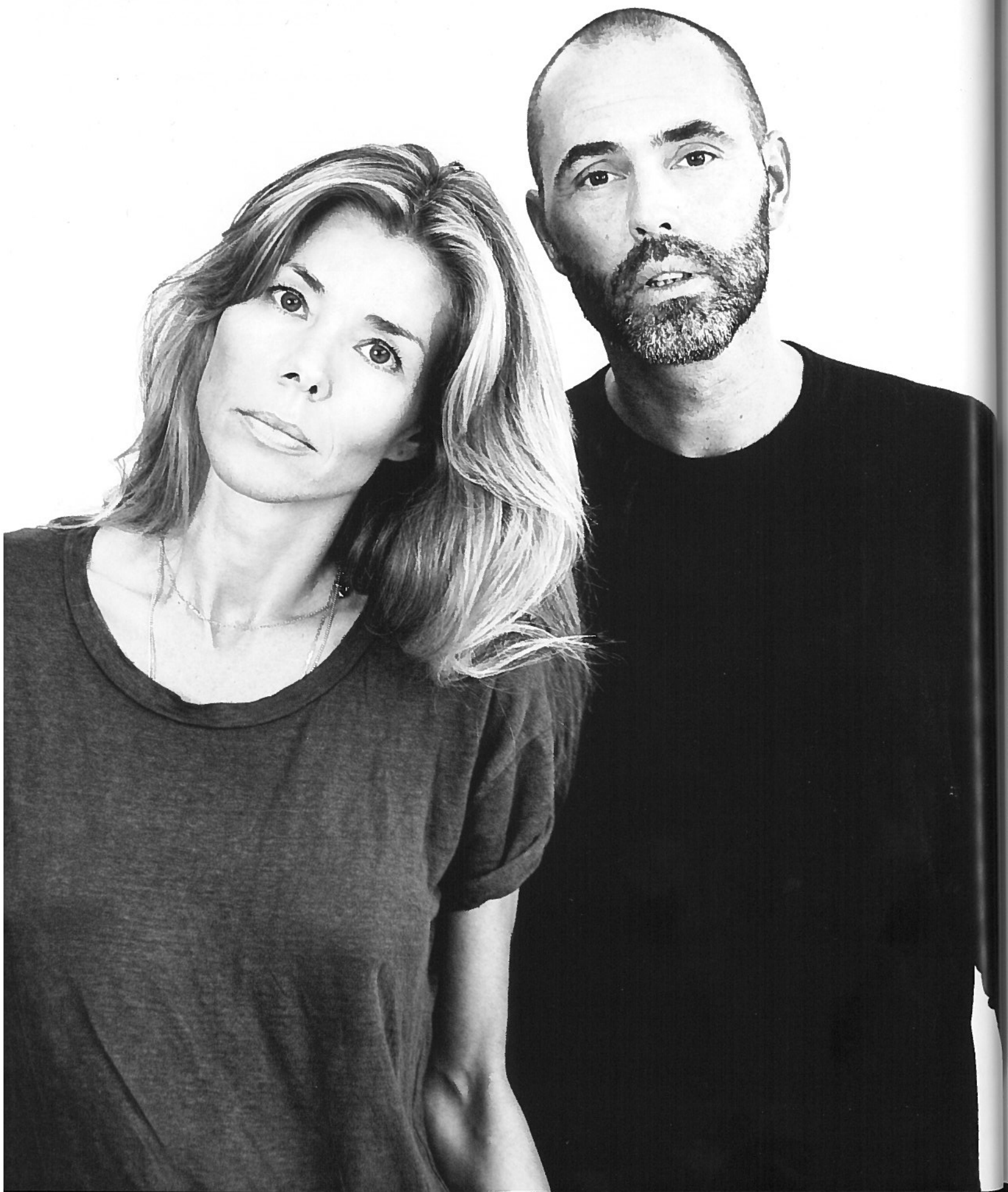
## **Space Copenhagen**

The Danish duo on introducing their Scandinavian design aesthetic to New York

## **Anantara Peace Haven**

Anantara makes its Sri Lanka debut with a colonial inspired resort on the rugged south coast







## MEETING

## Space Copenhagen

Having just completed their first international project in New York, Space Copenhagen talk of the studio's success, their ongoing relationship with Noma, and an upcoming hotel project in London with property mogul Harry Handelsman.

Words: Lauren Ho | Photography: Courtesy of Space Copenhagen (unless otherwise stated)

Chic and understated, wearing head-to-toe black, her with long, elegant limbs and sharply refined features and him sporting precisely manicured stubble, Signe Bindslev Henriksen and Peter Bundgaard Rützou of multidisciplinary design studio Space Copenhagen make for an impressive pair. But then again, you'd expect nothing less from the duo who – already behind a number of notable projects in Denmark – are currently turning heads within the international hospitality scene.

As a result, they are not easy to pin down, but Sleeper manage to catch up with them during one of their fleeting London pit-stops, just before the official announcement of their collaboration with influential property magnate Harry Handelsman, CEO of the Manhattan Loft Corporation and the man behind such developments as the St. Pancras Renaissance Hotel and celebrity hotspot Chiltern Firehouse. Handelsman's latest effort focuses on the gentrification of the city's east end, with plans in the works for an ambitious double-cantilevered SOM-designed residential tower and hotel, for which Space is designing the interiors.

While they are undoubtedly composed and confident, Bindslev Henriksen and Bundgaard Rützou are in high spirits, clearly thrilled about the new chapter in their careers. "We feel extremely lucky to be working with two amazing clients at the moment," they enthuse. A typically modest comment from the pair, whose tenacity and commitment to their work is transparent.

Both from Denmark, Bindslev Henriksen grew up in a creative family in Humlebaek, a small region close to the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, just outside of Copenhagen, while Bundgaard Rützou credits his creative voracity to being an expat child who moved around a lot. "I had an appetite for the multicultural aspect of things, curious of different cityscapes and looking at different parts of the world," he says.

It was at The Royal Academy of Fine Arts where, as students, the pair first met. After graduating, they initially went their separate ways before, realising their potential as a double act, they decided to join forces and initiated Space Copenhagen in 2005. "We were educated as building construction architects," explains Bindslev Henriksen. "Coincidentally we both started working within the grey zone between

architecture and interiors, which was quite uncommon in Denmark at that time," she continues.

Of course, navigating the fine line between friendship and business compatibility is a tricky affair, so to test the waters, the pair wisely decided on a tentative project to kick things off. "When we teamed up, we were aware of the danger of being friends and working together," says Bundgaard Rützou. "So before we formalised it, we did a project for Dinesen, the flooring company, who needed a new showroom," he continues. "Even though they have moved to a different location now, it really fulfilled its mission, so I think we did quite well on our very first project together!"

"We feel extremely lucky to be working with two amazing clients at the moment."



Above & Opposite: Designed in collaboration with Anda Andrei, 11 Howard takes on Space Copenhagen's signature appetite for natural, tactile materials

The next few years were busy with a constant flow of local commissions from showroom creations for companies such as Republic of Fritz Hansen to retail concepts for the likes of Georg Jensen and the transformation of private residences for discerning clients. The pair also started to dabble in furniture design, collaborating with like-minded brands such as &Tradition and Stellar Works, for which they created the timeless Ren and Lunar collections.

It is however, their ongoing partnership with chef René Redzepi – who was in contact with Bindslev Henriksen the year before Space was established – that has cemented their path in hospitality design. Founder of Noma, the two-Michelin starred restaurant that has been ranked the world's best on many occasions, Redzepi's foresight, has evidently made an impression on the designers. "René was very clear about his vision from the beginning," says Bindslev Henriksen. "The most important thing he said was that he didn't want any kind of layering between the food and the actual experience," she continues. "The whole language of Noma started from that sentence, which was very clever of him to see, as he hadn't actually created any of the food yet." Their decade-long relationship with Redzepi is confirmation of

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the duo's timeless aesthetic and their insight into the industry. "The wondrous thing with Noma is that it keeps going," says Bundgaard Rützou. "As they evolve, they keep inviting us to take part in the journey."

Riding on the success of Noma, Space started to carve out a reputation within the hospitality world, conceiving the interiors for a few more local restaurants including chef Rasmus Kofoed's Geranium, and Geist by chef Bo Bech. But it was a call

from the office of New York-based property tycoon Aby Rosen in 2014 that propelled the studio into the international stratosphere. "We got a phone call from Anda Andrei, a very interesting woman who functions as art director for this project," explains Bundgaard Rützou. "We took a jump to New York to meet with Aby and two weeks later we were working on 11 Howard," continues Bindslev Henriksen. "It was very direct, very precise."

A prolific art collector, known for his partnerships with notable industry bigwigs from Ian Schrager to architect John Pawson, Rosen is a man with vision, who wisely gave the duo the creative freedom and flexibility required for the best outcome. "He's originally from Frankfurt, so has that northern European sense of understanding





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This Page (clockwise from left): Space Copenhagen's projects include Balthazar, the champagne bar of Hotel D'Angleterre in the centre of Copenhagen; Fiskebaren, a restaurant in the old meatpacking district of the city; Noma, the two-Michelin starred restaurant that has led to an ongoing relationship with chef René Redzepi; and a showroom for flooring manufacturer Dinesen



about aesthetic," says Bundgaard Rützou. "He is super open. He is just trying to do something that hasn't been done for a while in New York."

As a result, the hotel, which is located on Howard Street – a forgotten but re-emerging road in Soho – is undeniably New York in its attitude, but flecked with a fresh Scandinavian spirit. "The idea was not to do a Scandinavian hotel, but to take the essence of that design aesthetic and bring it into a New York context," affirms Bundgaard Rützou. Occupying a building that was formerly a Holiday Inn and before that a post office, the 221-room property takes on the studio's signature appetite for natural, tactile materials in an earthy palette inspired by the choices of materials. "The colour of the rooms are all from the materials within,"





Above: Space Copenhagen is currently designing the interiors of Manhattan Loft Gardens, a mixed-use development from Harry Handelsman

says Bundgaard Rützou. "So the tones are that of the wood or the metal." The furnishings meanwhile, are bespoke pieces created by the duo in partnership with a host of Danish design brands from Gubi to Fredericia, while large scale installations such as the prominent burnt steel staircase, were made by local craftsmen. Of course, this being a Rosen project, art also takes precedence starting with an Alexander Calder mobile taking centre stage in the lobby, followed by photographic offerings from Hiroshi Sugimoto and a neon light piece by Dan Attoe, among others.

With the 11 Howard project coming to an end, the focus is now on Handelsman's hotel, due to open in 2018. As a newbuild in a somewhat unhistoric area of London, the project produces a set of challenges that the duo are more than willing to tackle. "It's a completely different approach," says Bindslev Henriksen. "It's interesting to see how you need to think in a different way, working in an almost non-neighbourhood and with a very modern and structurally empty building." Indeed, with expansive living spaces, three sky gardens and the hotel, when complete the building will be quite extraordinary, further underlining Handelsman's influence and remarkable vision as a developer.

And with two of the property world's biggest names gracing their portfolio, surely, working together for years while maintaining a professional relationship must be challenging. "They are very big

characters," agrees Bindslev Henriksen. "Everyone needs to be careful and nurse the momentum," she continues. "If the energy gets into a bad rhythm it's really bad for the project, so it's important that you are very honest and trust each other."

The Manhattan Loft Gardens hotel, along with new projects for both Redzepi and Bo Bech, are just a few of the many undertakings that Space currently has on its plate. 'Lucky' is a word the pair use a lot. Certainly good fortune seems to be shining down on them, but it's their sense of purpose and enthusiasm, along with their understated style and keen appreciation for timeless design – or 'slow aesthetics' as they like to call it – that is keeping them in demand. And while they are insistent they'd like to remain a small studio of 14, so as to keep their involvement in all projects, this has not hindered their ambition to continue growing internationally, while at the same time pursuing their passion for furniture design. "Sometimes when we get too busy, our furniture design suffers a bit," says Bindslev Henriksen. "But of course, we also hope to be able to continue working with amazing clients like we have at the moment."

With so much going on, you can't help but wonder how the pair appear so unruffled. "It's very much about priorities," says Bindslev Henriksen, earnestly. "Because the business is very organic, we agreed not to be stressed, right?" she asks, looking at Bundgaard Rützou reproachfully. "Yep. That and pharmaceuticals," he jokes.