

INA RINDERKNECHT INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE AG

INTERVIEW WITH INA RINDERKNECHT



In the beautiful town of Erlenbach bordering Lake Zurich, we visited Ina Rinderknecht and her team. We were welcomed warmly in a bright office, elegantly designed and equipped with material samples of numerous projects. You can see how Ina Rinderknecht's mission is realized even in her own office quarters – a space filled with harmony and warmth. A room for people to feel comfortable.

SCOR: Can you tell us something about you?

I was very fortunate to have parents who used to live in many countries such as Africa, Japan and Korea. My first years I was very lucky as I could spend them in Korea. This influenced my life quite a lot. I came to Switzerland when I was just about to start school. During the secondary school in Küsnacht, I got the urge to travel. So, I decided to do an exchange year to Indonesia when I was 17 or 18 years old. That was fantastic because I really had the freedom to explore new cultures. After that I did my studies in interior architecture and design in Milan - a basic interior design programme plus a master degree in design. In my last year we learned everything that had to do with design: design in fashion, jewellery, architecture etc. That made me a well rounded designer. Thereafter, I still had that urge to travel and the dream of designing

resorts. This wish probably stems from my experiences as an expat child in South Korea. In the seventies there were no other places than hotel lobbies to hang out or meet friends. You could even say that I grew up at the Hyatt Hotel Lobby. Consequently, a hotel lobby is for me a place to feel like home. I then travelled to Hawaii and worked as an interior architect on hotel projects. After that I was asked by the Blackstone Group to join their team on their private equity hotel projects, designing luxury properties across the US and Caribbean. For many years I was able to work with the best teams on new hotel designs and learned quite a bit about it. However, after ten years of travelling I wanted to go back to Switzerland and started my own business in Zurich in 2008.

Did you always dream about becoming an interior designer?

I always loved colours, materials, painting, crafting, creating, changing my room. So, I think this was always inherent. If I always wanted to become an interior designer? I guess not. I had a phase in my life where I wanted to become a doctor. Interior design is also a people's business. We create environments where people should feel good and healthy. In the end, the creation of beauty was more important than maybe seeing sick people every day.

What does an interior designer do? How does a typical workday of you look like?

There is no typical workday! However, there are a few recurring things. When a project starts, we have detailed project briefings and meet with the clients. Then we start setting up ideas with the team, gather inspirations, start connecting with showrooms to order materials etc. We study plans, meet with architects and other related planners. It's a lot of work and a long process to translate your ideas into working papers. And yet, I think we are really in a fantastic job and work in an environment that is very stimulating.

You have worked in various projects across the globe. Is there one you would like to highlight?

Even though I am very international and am travelling a lot, I feel very connected to my local Zurich projects – such as your Rosau office building. And just around the corner is the beautiful hotel Storchen which I so very much like. Those projects are dear to my heart. We are doing a lot of projects abroad, so it is nice to walk in the city and say - wow there are some of our creations. That makes me and my team very proud. We love to see our work coming alive, and seeing people using our spaces and enjoying the ambience.

In your industry, does being a female interior designer give you advantages or disadvantages?

Interior design is always associated with women. But our job is understood wrongly. People think we choose furniture and materials, but this is just a small part of our job. These are the finishing touches so to speak. We are engaged at a much earlier stage, which is usually during and sometimes even before construction. The construction industry is usually very male dominant. I am not sure if we have advantages or disadvantages, you can see it either way. I never considered it as a question myself. What is important to me is that we women stay in business even if we have children. I support women with children, giving them the opportunity of part-time jobs. In my team I have several mothers which are valuable members. I think this should not be a limitation. I really support the environment of women being strong in their business.

If you could design anything, what would your dream project be?

I do have one. It is a resort design. I very much like the Aman Resorts. They always have this very local characteristic and are very gentle in the way they are intervening with nature. Taking into consideration the land where they build and they try to be environmentally friendly as much as they can. Their sophisticated design language is also very appealing to me. These aspects are very dear to me.

When working on a project, where do you get your inspiration from?

The main inspiration is the design brief from the client that you start with as well as the architecture and location itself. Of course, I also use my international travels as inspiration. Social media is really a driving force nowadays. Many years ago, you had to go to a specialty bookstore to find good design books. I still do that. I love beautiful coffee table or photo books. Social media solves a lot in terms of influences, styles and establishing connections to find materials world-wide. Having said that, your mind has to be a really good filter. Catching elements, digesting them and coming up with your own language, making your own interpretation and creating vision for a space.

How do you balance work and life?

We have a team member who is an Alexander technique practitioner. He teaches body-mind-awareness. We try to practice every day during a 15 minutes break. Most of the time it is four times per week. It really helps the team to release some stress and regain focus. In the weekends, I love to be in nature, walking in the forest as much as I can. My most creative time is when I am on holidays. In order to design a new space it is best when I can escape a few days, so I can bring the puzzle pieces in my head together.

Can your interior design be recognized?

I don't know. It is hard to talk about your own design. It is probably like asking a singer if he recognizes his voice. What people do say, is that my design has some kind of Asian influence and calm symmetries. I love symmetries. Designs should be warm and engaging. Maybe a signature of mine is that I try to get harmony in space – through structuring a space with the right dimensions and using appropriate materials and colours. This is my mission. Spaces are to be used by people. They need to feel comfortable within our projects whether they are commercial spaces or residential homes.

How is it for you to visit spaces where the interior design was neglected? Are you imagining another design in this case?

Yes, I have a very fantastic story about re-designing a space. Due to my pregnancy, I had to stay four months at the University Hospital Zurich. Four months of looking at the same wall every day. I can tell you, I really re-designed this space a hundred times in my head. This was a really amazing experience, showing me what a space can do to people. Uncomfortable spaces can depress you and may influence your physical well-being. I think hospitals and old-people's places need lots of love and attention. Unfortunately, a lot needs to change there.

What are the key elements of Rosau's interior design? On which basis do you choose its colours and patterns?

For the colour coding of the Rosau office building we took the vicinity to the park and lake as inspiration. The green of the park and the blue of the lake. Both very soothing colours, giving the space a quiet atmosphere. Especially in the working environment, you don't want to go with reds, oranges and aggressive colours. In general, we didn't want to be loud and too colourful throughout the space. Certain areas have a more distinctive colour coding. For example the kitchenette in the fourth floor will be in magenta colours. There is psychology behind colour coding. The chosen colours in the kitchenette are very engaging, social, warm and even create appetite.

In the staff restaurant we focused on new ways of working, dividing it into different zones. We asked ourselves, how do people collaborate and how to best combine food, eating and meeting in one restaurant. There will be some distinct areas of social zones and areas where you can be by yourself. To give an example we designed a communal table as well as a small lounge zone. The outdoor terrace, a mix between lounging and dining tables, will also be fantastic in summertime. The interior design will be accompanied by us until everything is set up. Currently, we are involved with your future caterer to select trays. Or we were even involved with the selection of plants.

As for the furniture we selected very modern and elegant Italian furniture pieces. Some of the furniture, such as built-in benches and tables, were even designed by ourselves. A Swiss company will build the custom pieces according to our proposal.

If you would move with us in 2020, where in the building would you like to work?

On your restaurant terrace for sure. Or I would go upstairs to your meeting spaces facing Lake Zurich. However, I think each individual space has its very attractive corner. Either you see the lake or you look to the park. SCOR employees are very fortunate.

When will the Rosau project be finished for you and your team?

We will be there until the last furniture piece is placed. Alongside the logistic companies that will place the furniture, we will do the fine-tuning. We make sure that everything, up to the last little lounge pillow, will be on its right place.

After Rosau what will be your next project?

We have many projects running simultaneously in different phases. Some of them are even ongoing for many years. We currently work on a big hotel renovation project, quite a few historical buildings and a huge private villa with guesthouse and many others are in development. When you design spaces you become part of a larger team, an identity - you even become a part of SCOR so to speak. When a project finishes, I do get very sentimental because we get attached to the project during the process. This is very emotional. It is like letting your baby go. You are lucky to walk by and see it later on. For the team it is always important to see the completed project that they worked on. This is our biggest gratification: see smiling faces, happy clients and see the baby walk by itself without our help.

Thank you very much for your valuable time to give these insights. When sitting in the coloured lounges or using the fitting restaurant trays, we will gladly think of you and your team.