Hospitality Interiors

HOTEL, RESTAURANT, BAR & CLUB INTERIORS

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The Bamo team principals, left to right: Gerry Jue, Dorothy Green, Steve Henry, Michael Booth and Pamela Babey

Inspired international design

Four friends, two clients, and a borrowed computer – these were the humble beginnings of luxury interiors firm Bamo. Pamela Babey, David Moulton, Gerry Jue, and Michael Booth had worked together at SOM and The Pfister Partnership. When Pfister closed its doors, the four decided to open their own firm. As Bamo says: "We decided it would be more fun to continue working together than go out and find real jobs."

Twenty-three years later, they're still having fun while building an international portfolio of world-class properties. In some ways, this San Francisco-based firm has come a long way from those early days; in others, the firm's trajectory was set right from the start.

Initially named Babey Moulton, the firm is now simply Bamo. David has retired, and two principals – Steve Henry and Dorothy Greene – have joined the rank of principal, helping to lead a talented team of over forty-five. The personalities of these five principals are as diverse and interesting as Bamo's portfolio.

Pamela Babey, with her signature fiery-red hair, boundless creative energy, and infectious laugh, is considered by many to be a visionary in the world of luxury interiors. Her portfolio includes Four Seasons Resort Bora Bora and the illustrious Grand Hotel a Villa Feltrinelli on Lake Garda. Adept at marrying colour and pattern in unexpected ways, Pamela is passionate about sourcing unique pieces made with care. "I am infinitely inspired by a rich community of artisans worldwide who enable me to infuse each space that I design with elegance, expression, and enjoyment," says Babey.

Like many creative types, Gerry Jue's wheels are constantly in motion with a project approach that borders on methodical. With a Master of Architecture degree from Harvard, his pursuit of solutions and application of ideas is disciplined yet fluid. Gerry's hospitality commissions include Four Seasons Resort Carmelo in Uruguay; Matsuri, a Japanese restaurant in Santiago, Chile; and a luxury resort with historic elements in Colombia that is currently under way. Gerry also leads the firm's senior living practice and has designed a number of award-winning, ultra-luxury facilities in Japan … think five-star living through your golden years.

Michael Booth has the heart of a classicist, evident in the elegant restraint and clean lines of his work. A Providence native from artistic stock – writers, illustrators, musicians, and even a Knoll furniture dealer – it's no surprise that Michael Booth went on to attend the Rhode Island School of Design and is inspired by architecture and urban streetscapes. With Four Seasons, Peninsula, Mandarin Oriental and Rosewood among his clients – and current projects in Brazil, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Mexico, and the US – Michael suffers no shortage of creative stimulus or frequent flyer miles.

Steve Henry is a brilliant and prolific artist, with watercolour being his medium of choice. It is a talent that fulfils both personal passion and professional expediency. When designing, Steve is able to quickly communicate ideas to clients and staff through his captivating sketches and paintings. Layering is one of his fortés, and Steve is able to pull unexpected and eclectic elements together in perfect harmony. The New York Palace, Four Seasons Hotel Boston, and The Taj Mahal Palace Mumbai, are among Steve's projects.

World travel started early for Dorothy Greene, with a childhood spent living in South Africa and Scotland. At age ten, Dorothy moved with her family back to New Orleans, Louisiana. Introduced to design through her grandmother, Dorothy went on to pursue a degree in architecture from Tulane. It was never Dorothy's intent to pursue interiors but, once in the field, she fell in love with the intimate scale, shaping of space, and attention to detail. "Interior architecture is like solving an elegant three-dimensional puzzle, and a well-conceived space plan is what sets the groundwork for a timeless interior," says Dorothy. Her portfolio includes The Peninsula Chicago; Han Yue Lou Plaza, Solis Nanjing; and a luxury resort currently under way in Sao Paolo.

"I've known and worked with Bamo going back to 1996, they are not only an incredible team of creative minds, but also simply a wonderful bunch of people. That makes working together, with the huge effort that special projects require, a real joy."

John Miller

In addition to their strong architectural sense – four of the five principals earned architecture degrees before turning their talents inside – the Bamo leadership shares a passion for timeless design, impeccable detailing, flattering lighting and the finer things. These are the threads that run through their designs.

That said, Bamo doesn't have a signature style. In fact, the company believes it is more important to have style than be in a style. Because each project is unique, so should each design. It is best for the project and more interesting for the team. "I delight in the possibility that permeates each new project," says Babey.

The team prides itself on its listening skills. "We start by asking a lot of questions," says principal Steve Henry. "Only by understanding our clients' wishes – as well as the context of the property and the competitive set – can we begin to craft the story of how the property should look and feel."

The process works, as evidenced by Bamo's envy-inspiring client list. In fact, the firm's first client was legendary hotelier Robert H Burns, founder of Regent Hotels. The project, the development of a hotel in the heart of Milan's fashion district, began as a simple interior building renovation within an historic neighbourhood.

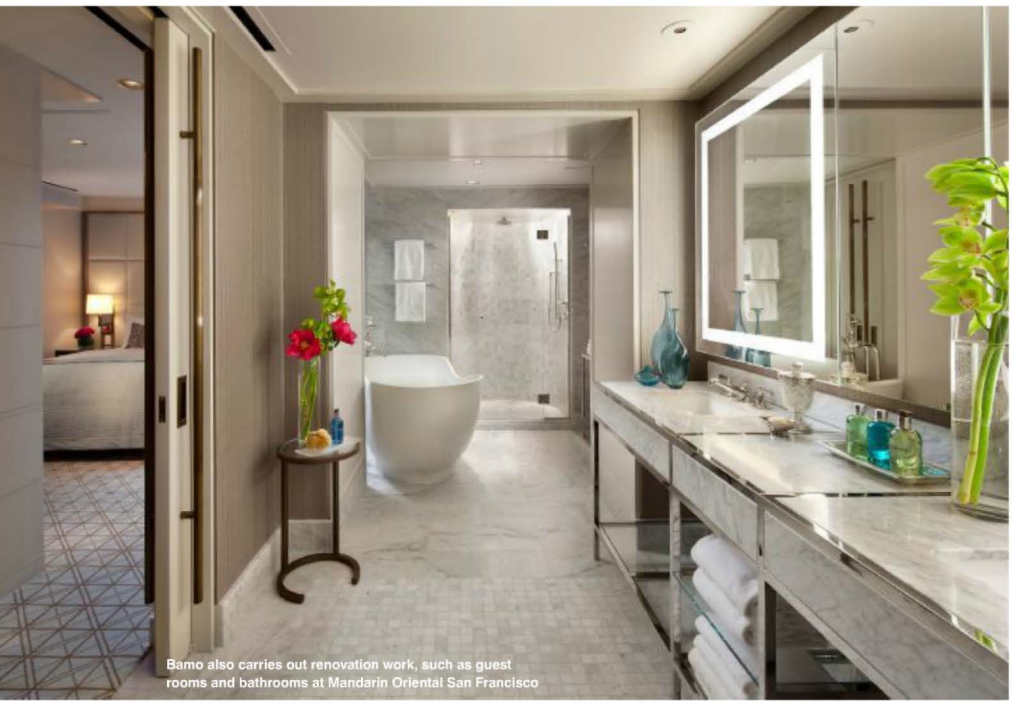
With the discovery of a 15th century cloister on the site, it soon grew into a massive excavation project and historic architectural restoration involving the Italian preservation authorities. Bamo was up for the challenge, handling both interior architecture and design.

Before the project was complete, Four Seasons purchased the Regent brand. Bamo continued on course, designing the hotel to appeal to traditionalists and international travellers with more contemporary expectations. Bamo's design restored the interiors in a way that added modern luxury while staying true to the spirit of the original monastery. When the hotel opened, Four Seasons

Four Seasons Boston

"In my 50-plus years of designing, building and operating hotels, I have never worked with a better group than Bamo. They are outstanding, from detailed planning to highly efficient execution."

Robert H Burns



Bamo also carries out renovation work, such as guest rooms and bathrooms at Mandarin Oriental San Francisco

founder, Isadore Sharp, declared that Four Seasons Milan marked the beginning of a new standard of hotel interior design.

It was indeed a prodigious start for the newly-launched firm. Since then, Bamo has worked with many of the world's leading operators. In addition to Four Seasons – to date, ten Four Seasons hotels have been completed or are in process – Bamo also includes Peninsula, Mandarin Oriental, Rosewood, Ritz-Carlton, Taj, and Capella among its many clients.

Bamo has continued to work for its first client. Robert H Burns contacted Pamela again after he acquired the Villa Feltrinelli, which had been the residence of exiled Benito Mussolini during the final years of WWII. Bamo was hired to transform the derelict 1892 neo-Gothic castle on Lake Garda into a sumptuous 21-room hotel, handling everything from design to planning, including determining the number of guest rooms and bathrooms, dressing rooms, and public spaces. Rave reviews again followed the hotel's opening.

Robert H Burns continues to sing Bamo's praises: "In my 50-plus years of designing, building and operating hotels, I have never worked with a better group than Bamo. They are outstanding, from detailed planning to highly efficient execution."

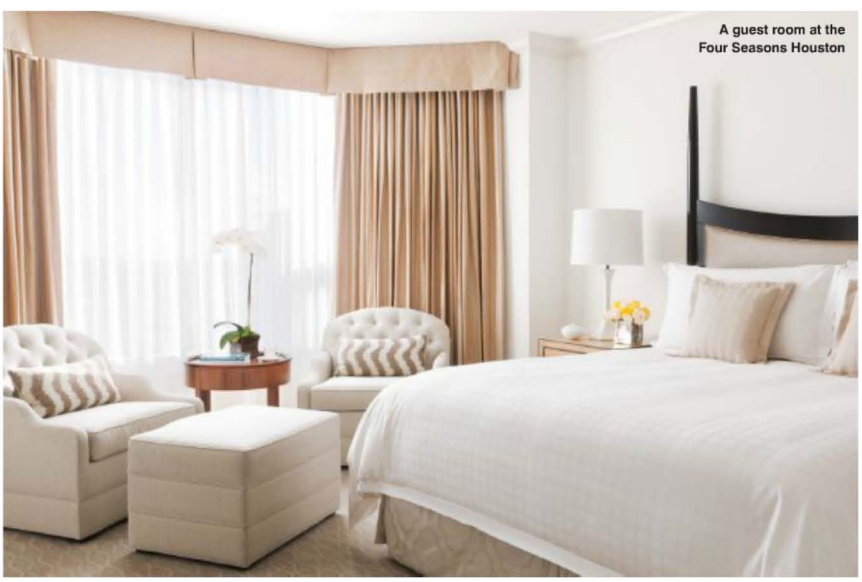
Another hallmark of Bamo's work is subtle

sophistication. Even when the materials are luxuriant, Bamo's spaces tend to include understated elements that make them approachable and comfortable. It's obvious that as much thought has gone into how the space is going to feel as how the space is going to look. Perhaps it is because they've been staying in and analysing luxury properties for decades. Bamo's keen understanding of the discerning traveller is readily apparent when experiencing the spaces they've designed.

Not all of Bamo's projects are historic in nature. New, ground up construction projects include The Peninsula Chicago; the award-winning Four Seasons Resort Bora Bora, complete with over-water bungalows; and Rosewood Sand Hill, which has become the social epicentre for Silicon Valley's venture capital community. Recent renovation projects include The New York Palace, suites at Four Seasons Resort Hualalai, and Mandarin Oriental San Francisco. One of Bamo's earliest projects was renovating Mandarin's guest rooms, so the team was delighted to return 20 years later to tackle the entire hotel, reorganising areas to make better use of space and infusing the property with fresh, contemporary elegance.

A lobby at the Rosewood Sand Hill in the Silicon Valley, 35 miles south of San Francisco

A guest room in an outbuilding of Villa Feltrinelli on Lake Garda in Italy



A guest room at the Four Seasons Houston

With a portfolio spanning 20 countries on five continents, Bamo continues to trot the globe. The firm currently has hospitality commissions in ten countries – Spain, UAE, Qatar, Brazil, Italy, China, French Polynesia, Mexico, Colombia, and the US – with all of its work done from its San Francisco office. Han Yue Lou, a Solis hotel, recently opened in Nanjing. Bamo is also fast at work on Four Seasons Hotels in Dubai and Madrid.

Where does Bamo find inspiration in order to keep its designs fresh? The short answer: everywhere. Bamo is obsessed with design, absorbing aesthetic details from art and architecture to fashion and film. The entire team, not just the principals, travels frequently, indexes everything, and studies how people use space. This acute understanding enables the team to continue to create new, amazing design experiences that appeal to sophisticated travellers from all corners of the world.

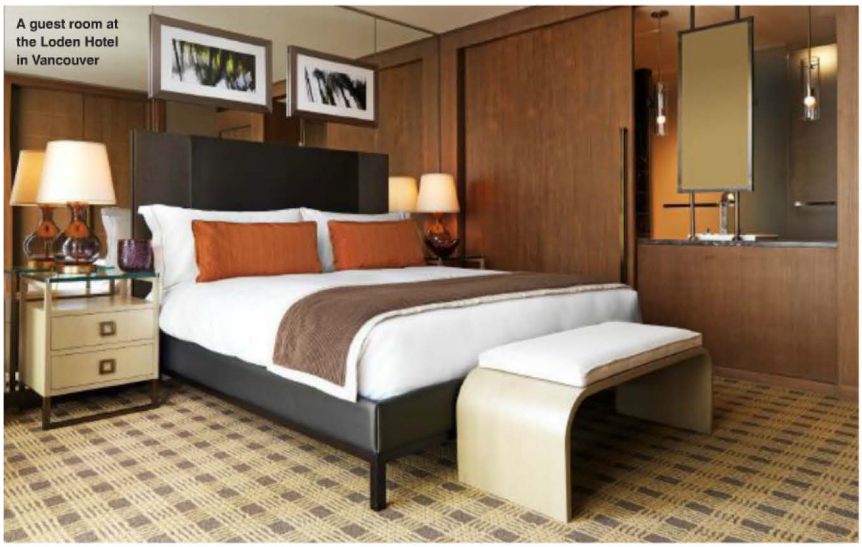
Bamo believes that another critical element to its success is its clients, as client involvement is key to their approach. "This does not necessarily imply

an inordinate amount of client time," says Michael Booth. "However, the project is more rewarding and the end result much richer when the process is collaborative and fluid." Pamela Babey continues: "The perfect client is passionate, engaged, professional, and challenges us."

One such client is John Miller, with whom Bamo worked on The Peninsula Chicago. "I've known and worked with Bamo going back to 1996," says Mr Miller, who is now the vice-president of design and construction in Asia-Pacific for MGM Hospitality. "They are not only an incredible team of creative minds, but also simply a wonderful bunch of people. That makes working together, with the huge effort that special projects require, a real joy. And that's what helps make great things happen!"

From New York to Nanjing, location and regional culture play major roles in Bamo's interior design. Some contexts offer a stronger cultural influence than others, but whatever the locale, the designs share a concern for craftsmanship and appropriate use of materials, as well as mindfulness of scale and proportion.

A bathroom with a view from the Four Seasons Bora Bora



A guest room at the Loden Hotel in Vancouver

The elegant Salon at Villa Feltrinelli

The team loves to draw upon local sources to inspire its creative selection of materials, furnishings, art, and antiques. They also pay close attention to the regional quality of light and its effect on colours, as it varies dramatically from place to place. In short, Bamo strives to create a timeless sense of place without resorting to stereotypical imagery.

In addition to hospitality commissions, Bamo's portfolio includes elegant private homes and ultra-luxury condominium towers. Residential commissions, some of which came about because the client stayed at a Bamo-designed hotel, include private homes in Hong Kong, New York, and California; a palace in Abu Dhabi; ultra-luxury condo' towers in Taichung and Toronto; and a lavish superyacht built by Benetti.

Bamo believes that its simultaneous focus on hospitality and residential work leads to an elevation of both. "The more we develop our residential eye and resources, the more we're able to achieve true levels of residential comfort and scale in our hospitality work," says Gerry Jue. "Conversely, the tools and technology necessary for commercial work allow us to manage residential commissions efficiently and accountably."

Whether it is a hotel in Uruguay or a private residence on The Peak in Hong Kong, Bamo often integrates bespoke pieces into its designs. Custom furniture, textiles, carpet, and lighting are designed to not only fit a space perfectly but also the client's personality. Most are produced for the specific commission only, though there are exceptions. Gerry's 'Rubix' light fixture is currently available through Boyd Lighting.

Bamo continues to garner accolades for its contributions to the world of interiors. Its founders are members of Hospitality Design's Platinum Circle and the firm was recognised by Interior Design magazine as the 2011 Gold Key Designer of the Year. Yet the team remains grounded. "We design because we can't imagine doing anything else," says Michael Booth. "We're grateful for the opportunity and for our amazing team. None of this would be possible without them."

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