

ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN DISRUPTOR



SHAWN HOBBS, AIA

DESIGN PRINCIPAL,
HBG DESIGN, MEMPHIS



DESIGNING YOUR OWN CAREER EXPERIENCE

THE EVOLUTION OF A DESIGN DISRUPTOR

Who or what is currently disrupting your business or industry right now?

Our firm is in growth mode; and we have some truly exciting design projects in the works, locally and nationally. A couple of years ago we designed one of the most highly-anticipated hospitality projects in the country – right here in our backyard at the Guest House at Graceland. We're currently designing the Hyatt Centric Hotel at One Beale and have several other local hospitality projects in the works. The growth of the firm is electrifying; right now, we have over a billion dollars in hospitality projects being designed or constructed across the country – I think you could say this level of activity is a positive disruption that we've been strategically planning for years. Our prominence nationally in the hospitality industry is allowing us to attract top professionals from outside the region into Memphis. Recruiting talent to Memphis is great not only for HBG Design, but – of course – for our city. We're growing outside of Memphis too – we opened an office in San Diego three years ago and we're already one of the 10 largest design firms in that city.

Advice you would give to professionals just getting started out in your industry.

Early in my career at HBG Design,

I was tapped to play a big role in a couple of “disruptive” design projects, Opera Memphis and the The Art of the Motorcycle Guggenheim/WONDERS Series exhibit. I've been profoundly impacted by the experiences and training I've been afforded; it's been a remarkable place to grow up. HBG Design has been flexible with me as my role in the firm has evolved. They have really taught me how to think big. What I've learned and would pass on to others starting out is to actively listen to the experience of those who have gone before you in the industry. Soak it all up. Challenge your colleagues respectfully and ask A LOT of questions. Most importantly – learn all the rules that govern your project. Then, break as many as you can for the greater good of the project. And find a firm that appreciates a little disruption.

Who do you like to talk shop with?

I love talking shop with anyone I meet, but it's been those I call “mentor” who've made true impact on my career experience. My first mentor was a real “disruptor.” He taught me how to focus on the sculptural aspects of design, as well as the fine details of the work. Great design creates a great experience for the user in a way that is simple and intuitive. My current mentor is the best communicator

I've ever known. His approach as a leader is exemplary; and he constantly inspires me to keep challenging myself. My mentors have inspired my own mentor role. It's important to be approachable and find common interests and hobbies with my co-workers. I want to know what drives them and the passions they have for architecture and interior design.

Can you talk about the most exciting thing you are working on right now, or have recently completed?

I've been working on the design of a \$250 Million resort outside San Diego, CA. Early in the design process I took a pilgrimage to Joshua Tree National Park to immerse myself in the environment and look for design inspiration within the regional context. I studied desert plant materials, rock formations, animals and birds, examining patterns in nature that would influence the design concept. There was a freedom in that expression that has become part of my personal design process. We've talked a lot about “disruption” -- I think a disruptor is someone who approaches problem solving without preconception. The goal is to coax out a better solution by looking at the issue from all angles. As a designer, I think you have to stay intensely curious and live outside of your comfort zone.

Shawn Hobbs, AIA was recently elevated to Principal at HBG Design, a nationally recognized architecture and interior design firm specializing in hospitality design, and Memphis' largest architecture firm for the past two decades.

How do you stay driven to stay ahead of industry trends?

I am curious about everything. I'm always creating. And I'm truly obsessed with how things work. It's natural for me to want to know what's next or be the one creating what's next. I'm also a furniture designer, motorcycle fabricator and metal fabricator and spend a lot of time with raw materials in my fabrication work, so I intimately understand how different materials behave and what their individual strengths and limitations are. In my professional career, this has deep meaning in my design solutions. It also allows me to help others understand and execute their design concepts more effectively. I think practicing “personal creativity” makes you a better designer and can help you see beyond what's in front of you, so you can think more about what's next.

Biggest challenge in your industry right now?

I would say a challenge exists for young professionals seeking a work environment that truly values employees and supports their career goals, especially in the current competitive climate. Finding the right fit goes far deeper than the design opportunities at the project level; that may be what piques your interest, but what keeps you engaged is knowing that what you do impacts the big picture – that your contributions matter. What I love about HBG Design is that everyone in the room has a voice – there's an intense focus on collaboration and an empowering culture that supports the individual to succeed and evolve through his or her passions for the work. I get to do what I love in a place I feel valued and respected. That's the sweet spot.