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setting the table
guest editor:
marcus samuelsson

hd Presenter of
expo+
conference

Zébulon Perron

Atelier Zébulon Perron
Montreal

If going by name only, Zébulon Perron seemed destined for the design world. His first name, a Hebrew word, translates to “dwelling place” or “one who dwells.” It’s fitting, then, that the Atelier Zébulon Perron founder grew up to encompass both definitions—someone who is detail-obsessed and crafts authentic, inviting spaces for others to pass time in.



Zébulon Perron with an armchair from
his debut furniture collection, OLI



Tutu-inspired pink crinoline pendants dance above a vintage walnut table at Café Constance in Montreal

Born in Montreal to a jazz musician father and a therapist mother, Perron and his brother, who is also a designer, were encouraged to draw, which he says had “a profound influence” on the trajectory of his life. He also recalls always loving architecture, even if his first buildings were constructed of Lego. Though he initially pursued the discipline and possesses “tremendous respect” for it, he felt too constrained by its exacting requirements and realized with design he felt a greater sense of liberty, where he had more control in creating people’s experiences. So, he changed his focus.

While studying at Université du Québec à Montreal, Perron recalls that

the city was not the bustling metropolis it is today due to a then-struggling economy. Opportunities for designers were scarce. Driven by fear that he would be unable to pursue his passion, he began taking on projects while still in school to build his portfolio, crafting a retail shop here or conceiving a restaurant concept there.

In 2008, he founded his namesake atelier, which boasts an office in Montreal’s trendy Mile End District. The studio sets itself apart with exacting attention to detail, custom designs, and a product line that includes furniture and lighting. “It is a fundamental human need to exist in the public sphere with people we don’t know,” says Perron.

This philosophy lies at the core of his firm and dictates his people-first approach to design. “As much as I love form, materiality, details, and all of that, it turned out that the most interesting aspect [of design] to me was social,” says Perron, who views designing spaces akin to a play. As a director of sorts, he sets the stage as a place where people can come together, enabled by the smallest details like an alcove or a furniture arrangement where two strangers can strike up a conversation or old friends can reconnect. “This is a backdrop—it’s a theater for people to live an experience together.”

His method is two-pronged. There’s the technical aspect, where he hones in



Teal banquettes add a modern touch to Brasserie Henri, housed inside Montreal's historic Birks Building



Mirrored panels wrap the perimeter of Brasserie Henri



Greenery and chipped walls give Montreal's Café Parvis a vintage aesthetic



An ombré wallcovering in Marcus at the Four Seasons Hotel Montreal evokes the ocean

“What I love about the possibility of what we do is that you go through a threshold, and you’re transported somewhere else. For me, good design does that.”

—Zébulon Perron



Custom seating in the Marcus lounge pairs soft velour with smooth terrazzo



Blush-hued terrazzo clads counters, walls, and floors in the women’s restroom in Marcus

on the space, visualizing how people will move within it and what they need. Then there’s the visceral component. Perron uses a meditative process, closing his eyes, and asking how he wants to feel in the space, which, he says, helps direct his choices.

Taking on projects that span retail, commercial, and hospitality, Perron isn’t interested in developing a signature design language. “In our case, we have a profoundly contextual approach. From project to project, the ideas we have are kind of like a clean slate,” he says. No matter how the spaces will be used, he emphasizes that each needs to be in its own context. He therefore searches for the details that will express the personality of the project and make it unique. “How do we give it form, life, and spirit?” he asks.

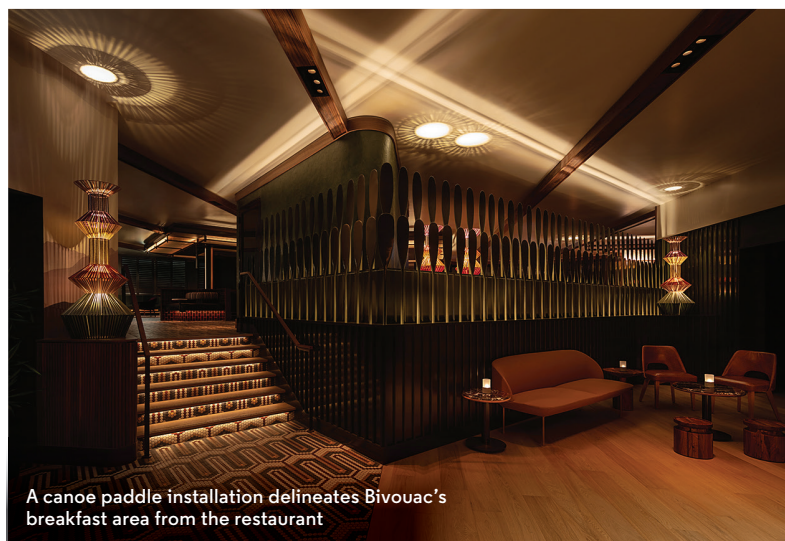
Take the ballet-inspired Café Constance in Montreal, located in the same building as Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, where delicate pink pendants in the shape of tutus delicately dance



Recessed lighting illuminates the curved seating at Bivouac restaurant in the DoubleTree by Hilton Montreal



Light fixtures that look like jellyfish hang from a metal-slatted ceiling in Gentile Pizza Parlour in Montreal



A canoe paddle installation delineates Bivouac's breakfast area from the restaurant



Copper lighting and marble partitions accent the open concept main dining room at Marcus



Custom lighting gives the Marcus lounge an ambient glow



A grid ceiling made of wood complements the leather- and brass-accented Brouillon café in Montreal

overhead, or the retro-inspired Gentile Pizza Parlour in Montreal, where a slatted ceiling swathed in metallic paint plays off a striped tile floor and a laminate wall panel nods to the basements of the '70s and '80s.

Then there's one of his most recent projects, Hav & Mar in New York's Chelsea neighborhood, Marcus Samuelsson's newest restaurant and their second collaboration after Marcus at the Four Seasons Hotel Montreal. Perhaps the chef's most personal project yet, it pays homage to Samuelsson's Swedish and Ethiopian heritage, with "Hav" being the Swedish word for sea and "Mar" the Amharic word for honey, a name that Perron calls "tremendously inspiring." The design draws on the contrasting landscapes, textures, and color palettes of the two countries while also finding common ground between them. "Because we planned the space to make it dynamic socially, we added an open kitchen," says Perron. Between the interiors, custom artwork by artist Derrick Adams, and the leaders of the restaurant being women of color, Perron calls Hav & Mar "an original proposition. I don't think there's anything like this."

Also in the works, is the renovation of the historic Hôtel Nelligan in Montreal, and Sanaaq Centre, a 50,000-square-foot multi-programmatic public project with the city of Montreal that will span a public library, café, media lab, and food lab. "What I love about the possibility of what we do is that you go through a threshold, and you're transported somewhere else. For me, good design does that." **hd**