

# INTERIOR DESIGN

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*inside art*



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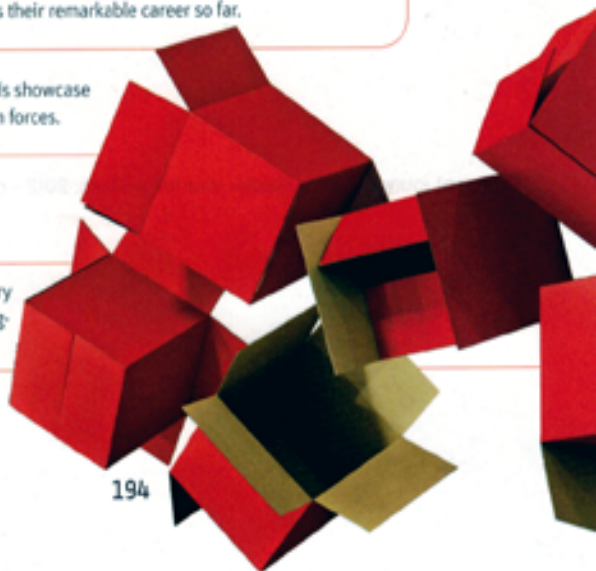
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text: craig kellogg photography: andrew bordwin

## top of the charts

Gensler's Alexander hotel  
is a big hit in Indianapolis





**Previous spread:** Anthem, Paul Vilinski's wall-mounted installation of birds made from vinyl records, enlivens the Gensler-designed Alexander hotel in Indianapolis.

**Top:** Marble unifies the ground-level entry and the upstairs lobby. **Bottom, from left:** Anthem's birds spread across lobby walls. Street artist Nick Walker spray-painted portions of the garage.

**Opposite left:** The entry's mirror-polished stainless-steel 39 Point 76181 Degrees North 86 Point 154688 Degrees West is by Mark Fox. **Opposite right, from top:** Adam Cijanovic painted 10,000 Feet, the conference center's mural on polyethylene. Pendant fixtures handmade by MacArthur Foundation fellow Jorge Pardo are part of his design for the bar, Plot 99.





**The Alexander hotel may have** the only men's room in the Midwest that sparkles like stardust. And against this stellar wall covering hangs *Alien Landscape*, a three-part photographic work that shows a father-son spaceman combo, dressed in absurd moon suits while cruising farm roads in a 1963 Mercury Meteor sedan, then gliding across a parking lot in a shopping cart. We're clearly not in Kansas anymore. Or Indiana, as it happens. With the museumlike Alexander, Indianapolis joins the club of U.S. cities where contemporary art brings cachet to emerging neighborhoods. (Think Chicago, New York, Los Angeles.) The hotel is in a former industrial zone once controlled by Eli Lilly and Company. Still headquartered across the street, the pharmaceutical giant provides its new neighbor with corporate guests to fill the 157 rooms—largely separate from the extended-stay apartments occupied by pro basketballers.

Gensler's Chicago office built the Alexander for the Buckingham Companies. For interiors, the developer reached out to Gensler's Houston-based principal Nancy Nodler. She began work even before Dolce Hotels and Resorts came onboard to manage the property, named after Alexander Ralston, the city planner who laid out downtown Indianapolis in the 19th century. Early involvement allowed Nodler to locate the lobby, bar, and conference center on two, clearing the ground level for income-generating restaurant and retail tenants. But loose ends remained. "We went with an overall neutral palette and museum-white walls, because we had to finish our construction documents and order the furnishings before we knew what the art would be," she explains.

Indianapolis Museum of Art senior curator Lisa Freiman selected and sited the 61 pieces. (She has since become founding director of Virginia Commonwealth University's Institute for Contemporary Art, slated to open in a Steven Holl Architects building in 2015.) In contrast with typical "art hotels," where exhibitions are transient, Freiman pushed to commission more than a dozen permanent installations. "To set ourselves apart," she states. ➤









Accompanying wall text incorporates a statement from each artist. Thus we learn, for example, that Paul Villinski transformed his favorite vintage records into a flock of vinyl birds taking flight from an old turntable sitting on a stack of other LPs. Across the lobby from the birds, nearly 4,000 black plastic combs compose a supersize portrait of an African-American woman who, we read, was a hair-care millionairess a century ago.

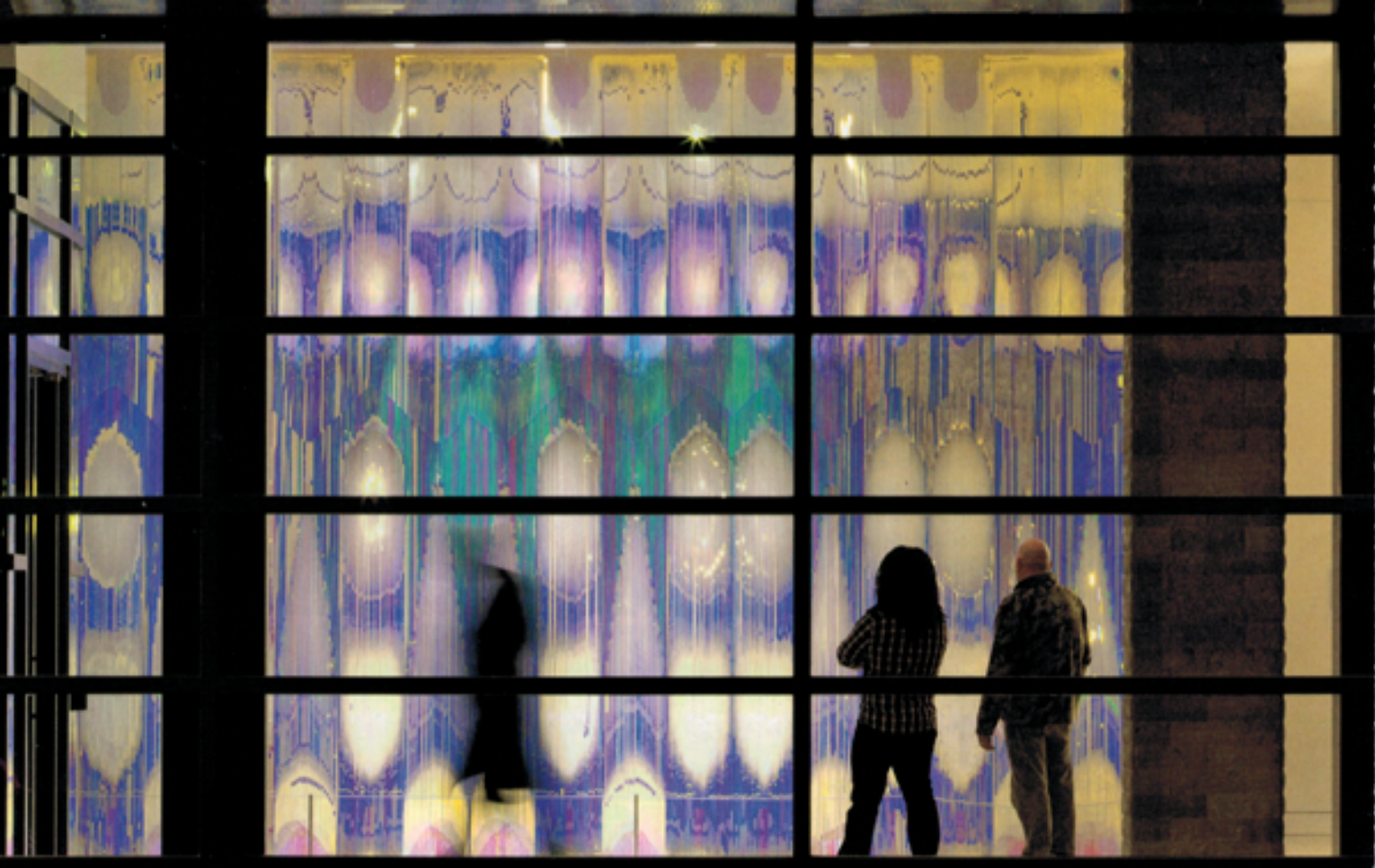
"I made a clear decision to focus the budget on locations where more people would be able to experience the art," Freiman says. The garage boasts spray-paintings by a humorous British street artist. In the conference center, a mural called *10,000 Feet* depicts the saturated greens and browns of the Midwest's gridded farmland as it appears from the air. Images of iconic Indianapolis signage, shot by the photographer of this story, Andrew Bordwin, cluster by the elevators in a guest corridor. And the entire 2,500-square-foot hotel bar can be considered art—commissioned from Jorge Pardo right after he received one of the MacArthur Foundation's "genius grants." Famous for working at the intersection of art and design, Pardo covered the bar's ceiling with clusters of orange-red, deep-purple, and teal acrylic pendant fixtures that recall anemones blooming at the bottom of the sea. He also contributed the floor's colorful, Mexican-style patterned cement tile, which Nodler numbered and detailed in her drawings, in Pardo's intended gradations, to keep the schedule moving. Retro orange armchairs underscore the Havana-born Pardo's seductive tropical palette. ➤



**Opposite:** To produce tonal shifts in the lobby's *Madam C.J. Walker II*, a portrait of a beauty entrepreneur from the early 20th century, Sonya Clark selectively removed teeth from plastic combs.

**Top:** Pardo also designed the bar's cement floor tile. **Center:** Oz Architecture and Viewtech partnered on the 441-car garage. **Bottom:** Outside the bar, decking is ipe.





**Top:** Guests look into the entry to view Alyson Shotz's *Standing Wave* in dichroic acrylic strips. **Bottom, from left:** Walker transformed the entry to a sky bridge connecting the hotel to extended-stay apartments. Vinyl wall covering in the men's room backs *Alien Landscape*, C-prints by Brian McCutcheon.

**Opposite left:** A penthouse for private events caps the seven-story hotel, built by Gensler's Chicago office. **Opposite right, from top:** Walker's *Vandal* references its own medium. One of the 157 guest rooms faces Eli Lilly and Company's headquarters.





When some of the other color and texture accents planned for the hotel unfortunately got value-engineered out, Nodler went back tirelessly with suggestions for alternatives. She worked with Freiman on paint to highlight alcoves for art—take the brilliant red visible behind a screen of mirror-polished stainless-steel calligraphy. These tweaks made the interiors inseparable from the works displayed. “Everybody understands that art is the ‘brand’ of the hotel,” Freiman notes.

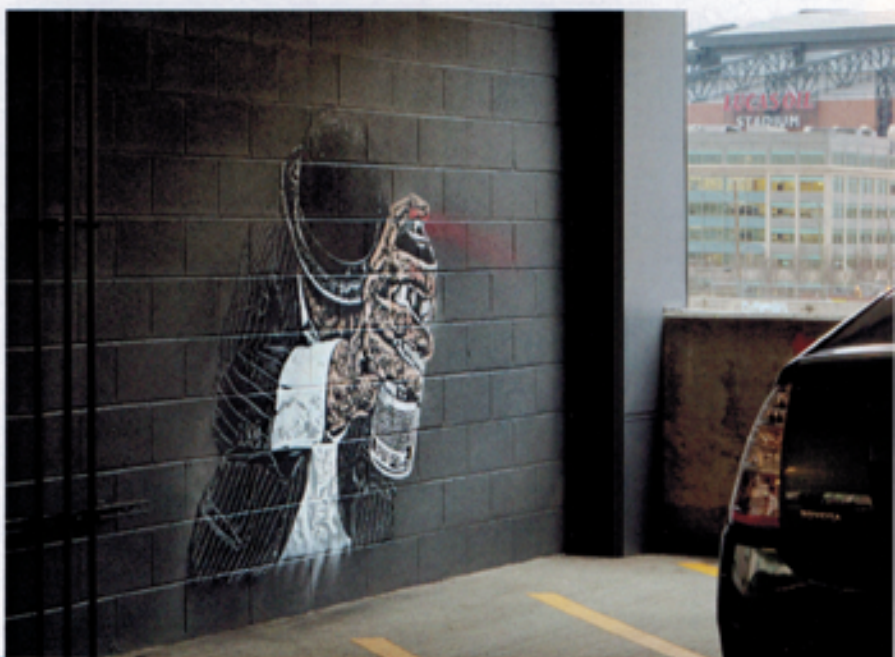
As Freiman identified locations for commissions-in-progress and informed Nodler, the latter responded with elevations drawn to the intended scale. Some pieces got enlarged as a result, and potential stumbling blocks were identified and avoided. “You don’t want to arrive to install a sculpture and realize a door’s there,” Nodler says with a laugh. Ditto for inconveniently placed electrical boxes and thermostats, even a console table. It was because Nodler was in the loop on the selection of the spaceman photographs for the men’s room that she was able to quietly specify its stair wall covering. On Freiman’s first visit, she was absolutely over the moon. 🌕

#### PROJECT TEAM

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#### PRODUCT SOURCES

FROM FRONT DETAILED: TRACK LIGHTING (ELEVATOR LOBBY), PYKAUFMANN CONTRACT; DRAPERY FABRIC (CONFERENCE CENTER), ALLERHUIJ; CHAIRS, SANSHARTO; TABLES (CONFERENCE CENTER, LOBBY), ODABASHIAN; CARPET, RUGS, CHARTER FURNITURE; SEATING (LOBBY), SOFAS (BAR), THROUGH DWELL HOME FURNISHINGS; PILLOWS (LOBBY, BAR, GUEST ROOM), CARL HANSEN & SON; CHAIRS (BAR), KARTELL; STOOLS, IBOLAJI NATURAL FURNISHINGS; TABLES, JANUS ET CIE; FURNITURE (EXTERIOR), CONCENTEX; WALL COVERING (RESTROOM), BERNHARDT HOSPITALITY; CHAIRS, OTTOMAN, BED (GUEST ROOM), CHALLENGER LIGHTING COMPANY; FLOOR LAMP, AYRE ARCHITECTURAL LIGHTING; TASK LAMP, PENDANT FIXTURES, THROUGHOUT GOTHAM; RECESSED CEILING FIXTURES.



Go to [interiordesign.net/genslerhouston13](http://interiordesign.net/genslerhouston13) for more images of the hotel.

