

# CEREAL

USA | LOS ANGELES

## Hotel Joaquin

A CONVERSATION WITH ROBERT MCKINLEY

*LAGUNA BEACH'S FINGERPRINTS ARE ETCHED INTO EVERY CORNER AND CREVICE OF THE PROPERTY. SUN HATS HANG IN GUEST ROOMS, SWIM FINS SIT OUTSIDE IN BASKETS, SURFING BOOKS LINE SHELVES, A BEACH BOYS LP WHIRS ON A RECORD PLAYER.*



I grew up not too far from the Pacific coast. Desensitised to the ocean, trips to the beach were relegated to casual, often mundane, occurrences. Yet stepping into Hotel Joaquin on Laguna Beach, California, during a late afternoon in autumn, I am struck by the novelty of the familiar: whiffs of salt air, panoramic skies animated in coral and azure, resounding waves swashing against Shaw's Cove below. The ocean anew.

At Hotel Joaquin, inside and outside blur: Laguna Beach's fingerprints are etched into every corner and crevice of the property. Sun hats hang in guest rooms, swim fins sit outside in baskets, surfing books line shelves, a Beach Boys LP whirs on a record player. It is a locale ripe for escape — an opportunity to unplug, with each of the property's 22 rooms free of televisions and other electronics.

My phone runs out of battery, and I am in no rush to find an outlet. I find myself, instead, wandering the hotel's terrace, cocktail in hand, noticing details of Studio Robert McKinley's design: terracotta walkways, natural wood finishes, nods to the South of France. There is an intentionality in the way Hotel Joaquin moves and feels, and I am aware that I can conclude this only because the hotel has allowed me to; I have been given the space to slow down, to see, and to savour.

I chat with Robert McKinley about his inspiration, the influence of fashion on his work, and the designer's favourite details from the hotel.

CEREAL: How did you come to work on Hotel Joaquin?

ROBERT MCKINLEY: The owner, Paul Makarechian, approached our design firm. He wanted something clean and fresh, with a hint of European inspiration, all while keeping that California spirit present. We loved the idea and just ran with the concept.

CEREAL: Had the property been a hotel prior?

RM: It was a 1930s motor lodge with a wood construction, very much in the vein of a California bungalow. It was very charming, and we didn't want to lose that charm, so we tried to keep as much of the original construction as possible. With landscaping, too, we tried to keep as many of the original plants and trees — even the wacky, topiary-type trees in the courtyard. I felt those were unique and they transported me back to old school California.

CEREAL: Is your approach different when designing for a hotel rather than a residential project?

RM: With all of our work, we try to connect with the purpose of a project, and how we want people to feel in it. With Hotel Joaquin, we wanted people to feel like they were truly away from it all. We wanted them to really feel like they were at the beach, and we wanted to provide a space for guests to unplug, which is why we don't have televisions in our rooms. There's also an analogue element with the turntables and the LPs, not just because they're cool, but to give our guests the ability to fully detach from their phones: when you want to play music, for instance, you often have to use your phone, and when you pick up your phone, you see that text message or that e-mail, and you're right back into work.

CEREAL: You have a background in fashion. Has that affected your process at all?

RM: It does quite a bit. I look at fashion trends; I find inspiration in textiles and accessories, and how some of the hardware could possibly relate to interior hardware. I love that beautiful patina that develops on the handle of a Louis Vuitton bag over time, so we also try to use materials and finishes that age gracefully. We look at colours from different fashion collections, as opposed to home or interior trends.

CEREAL: What is your favourite part of the design process?

RM: After the conceptual stage, I have a lot of fun honing in on details and bringing them to life. I always get excited when the samples start coming in, and I can see and touch them.

CEREAL: What were some of those details from Hotel Joaquin?

RM: We were able to showcase local artists as well as incorporate some European touches. France was somewhere that resonated with both Paul and myself because of its strong surfer culture. Each room has vintage pieces that we purchased in the South of France and in Paris at different flea markets, whether it be chairs or artwork or side tables. We found some great pieces — oil paintings of female bathers, a beautiful resin sculpture. So there's a lot of fun little details and objects that are more granular, that guests can discover as they walk through the property.

CEREAL: How have your travels affected your work?

RM: I'll often travel to a property and think, "this must have been really cool five years ago." So when approaching design, rather than try to create something so trendy it will feel out of date just as quickly, we look for a sense of timelessness. We hope our design at Hotel Joaquin will age well.







