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Designer of the Year: Shashi Caan
Designer of the Year Retrospective
25th Annual Interiors Awards
Furniture Systems
Design Ethics

25

commemorative issue

shashi caan

designer of the year

To say Shashi Caan is a busy person would be akin to saying Frank Lloyd Wright or Charles and Ray Eames were run-of-the-mill designers. First, there are Caan's two full-time jobs. Catch her one day and she may be working on a new building, textile, product, or environment with her firm, The Shashi Caan Collective. Run into her on another and she's bustling through the halls of Parsons School of Design, a division of New School University in New York, where she serves as director of the interior design B.F.A. program. When she's not in the academic world or at The Collective, she's involved as vice president of professional development for IIDA, contributing to scholarly periodicals, and speaking at and attending industry events. Free time, it seems, is a thing of the past—But she wouldn't have it any other way.

"I do work around the clock, but I love it," she says over a quick cup of coffee on a chilly November morning. "I wouldn't change it in any way. I love it because it's diversified and I get to deal with two different extremes, bridging them together." Besides, she adds, "By our nature, designers like to do a lot. Designers like to think a lot. The practice of design inherently wears many hats. We're the psychologists, the lawyers, the business people, the creative artists, the implementers, the problem solvers."

It is the multitude of possibilities to impact everyday life through her designs that drives Caan in all areas of her career. In everything she does, it is important to not just make sure she's producing effective, responsive design, but to also make sure that her colleagues are doing the same. "Interior design is very complex. It would appear that it's not—it would appear that these beautiful things were compiled to make a beautiful space. It isn't that," she says. "I started out thinking 'How fun. I get to work with someone else's money, look at great stuff and make beautiful environments.' I realized it's about affecting people's lives. There's a seriousness to what we do and a much bigger responsibility."

For Caan, the decision to be a designer was innate. "I think I just followed my heart," she recalls, which meant telling her parents that despite their hopes that she would venture into medicine, she was following her father, an architect, into the A&D community. "I love that interior design affects people, affects how we live, who we become, how we behave," she says. Says GianLuca Vernizzi, president of Create in Modena, Italy, and both a friend and client of Caan, "She has the most dedicated work ethic of anyone I have ever seen. She truly lives and breathes design."

By Katie Weeks
Portrait photography by Mark Van S.

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