

HOTEL & RESTAURANT TIMES

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HIREALL - 50 YEARS OF FITTING OUT IRISH EVENTS

FEATURING :

DESIGN BRAVERY

- CLARE MCDONALD



GUESTLINE

- THE NEW ERA OF SELF-SERVICE CHECK IN



Design Bravery

Dublin-born designer Clare McDonald, founder and creative director of the award-winning interior architecture studio Design Command, understands how to develop hospitality destinations that feel unique, inviting and relevant. Celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, her practice is thriving with commissions for international hotels, restaurants, bars and student accommodation. Based in London with strategic partners in Ireland, Design Command was honoured in 2021 by SBID (Society of British and International Interior Design)



with a Restaurant Design Award for Miceys Beach Bar and Restaurant, a venue helmed by Michelin-starred chef Michael Caines MBE at Lympstone Manor, his country house hotel along Devon's Exmouth coastline. This was followed by the 2023 Top ID Award from NEWH UK (Network of Executive Women in Hospitality) for the studio's impressive body of work. Recently, the team also designed a stage set at the

Independent Hotel Show, along with a networking hub at the Hotel Restaurant and Catering conference, both in London. Next up, Clare's wish is to enjoy a sort of 'homecoming' and bring her design expertise to hospitality projects in her native Ireland



Rooted in Design

Design has been in Clare's soul since her youth in Dublin. "As a kid, I dreamt about being a fashion designer in Paris," she says. "I knew that working in different countries would be part of the equation for my future." Studies in varied design disciplines shaped her creative approach. Display design courses at Dublin Institute of Technology sparked an understanding of visual merchandising and branding, whilst studying interior architecture at Griffith College

Dublin broadened her structural knowledge about how designers can completely change the ways buildings are used. She also became enamoured with art history, including architects Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe, and periods such as Modernism, Bauhaus and, in particular, the Irish Arts and Crafts movement. In fact, she even lives in an Arts and Crafts house today. Clare worked in several architectural and design studios

before setting up Design Command, including the London branch of international architecture and urban design practice HKR Architects, which also has offices in Dublin and Dubai. At HKR, she worked on projects such as the redevelopment of Dublin's 1843 landmark, Arnotts Department Store; the Groucho Club on London's Dean Street; and several five-star UK hotels.

Design Entrepreneur

Wildwood Restaurants' rapid expansion led to the developer calling on Clare's newly launched Design Command, since she'd already worked on 10 of its venues. Now, she's created more than 50 eateries for the brand throughout the UK and Europe, all with bespoke, site-specific designs. "Each building's character is at the forefront of our interior designs," she explains. "We've converted a Tudor building, old shopping centre entrances, and even a former Sainsbury's grocery in Cheam where we uncovered and restored amazing vintage teal mosaics that are also exhibited in the V&A."

Thanks to a network of full-time, part-time and freelance colleagues, plus a strategic partnership with architecture and interiors practice MDP + Partners based in Dublin and Waterford, Design Command can scale team sizes as needed. Whilst the studio's repertoire has expanded beyond restaurants, Clare says clients in every sector now ask for a 'hospitality feel.' Current and recent work includes a Northampton hotel inspired by local markets; a Thurrock hotel refurbishment mixing modern and Jacobean style with influences from the nearby Tilbury Fort; two pavilions at Germany's Hyatt Regency Cologne; luxury student accommodation in Spain and Portugal; and 13 co-working environments for office developer, Landmark. "Our ethos is to create stand-out projects that inspire users yet, equally, are functional," she shares. "We're very imaginative at the beginning of a design, placing the budget at the back of the mind so that creativity comes through 100%. It's important to form a strong concept from the start without limiting yourself, then 'value engineer' it afterwards."





Irish Homecoming

Clare’s vision is to tap into her collaborative, multicultural team’s global experience to help shape Ireland’s boom in sophisticated, design-savvy hospitality venues. “I’m inspired by Irish designers such as Róisín Lafferty and Suzie McAdam, and studios like O’Donnell O’Neill Design Associates, and what they’re creating,” she says. Her dream would be to transform an Irish Art and Crafts landmark, preserving heritage features whilst making it relevant for modern times. For example, the Dublin Gas Company, built in 1900 in the Neo-Tudor style but influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement, has been empty since 2019.

“It would be amazing to reinstate its lovely facade and transform the narrow lane connecting Hawkins Street with D’Olier Street by creating little cafés and bars, and then inside, a market with street food stalls,” she says. The Ormond Quay Hotel, where James Joyce wrote *Ulysses*, and Dollard House, which is now the restaurant *Roberta’s*, are also buildings where she’d love to create designs. “I particularly like the Arts and Crafts movement because there’s no fear involved,” she explains. “Whatever colours and intricate patterns the designers liked; they’d try them out. There’s honesty and integrity in the handmade forms.” It’s makes perfect sense that as an adventurous designer not afraid to try new things, Clare McDonald exemplifies those principles of bravery, too.



By Alicia Sheber