

masters of innovation

Eleven original thinkers changing our perception of the world,
according to Ian Schrager

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John Pawson

Over his prodigious career, John Pawson's crisp, minimalist style has been translated into category-defining retail spaces, galleries, homes, and hotels. Today, the British designer has a truly global design legacy, which is a particularly impressive feat considering he was something of a late bloomer, at least professionally.

Pawson was born to a wealthy family and schooled at the prestigious Eton College—famed for attracting royals, assorted aristocracy, and for producing future politicians. He worked in the fashion design department at the family-owned textile business in his native Halifax, an industrial town in the north of England and a center for wool manufacturing. It isn't a place known for its buildings, but it left an indelible mark. "The architecture was handsome, but what was necessary only," he says. "That sort of rubbed off."

Less unexpected was the impact of Japan, not only on his aesthetics, but his career. A film about a Zen Buddhist monastery inspired a young Pawson to desert Britain in favor of life as a monk. The fanciful endeavor was quickly abandoned. "I only lasted a few hours," he says. "The path was incredibly tough. It can only be done by a few people, and I wasn't one of them."

The reinvented and minimal St. Moritz Church in Augsburg, Germany



The Abbey of Nový Dvůr monastery in the Czech Republic comprises a series of workshops

A friendly connection landed him a job at Nagoya University, where he taught English. In those days a conservative and less globally connected city, he feels he learned more than he imparted while exposed to the culture firsthand. However, he would eventually be lured by the bright lights and energy of the capital for his last year in Japan. “It was a very curious time in 1970s Tokyo because even then foreigners were not that common,” he explains. “But they were very hospitable

to someone who was young and didn’t have much to offer.”

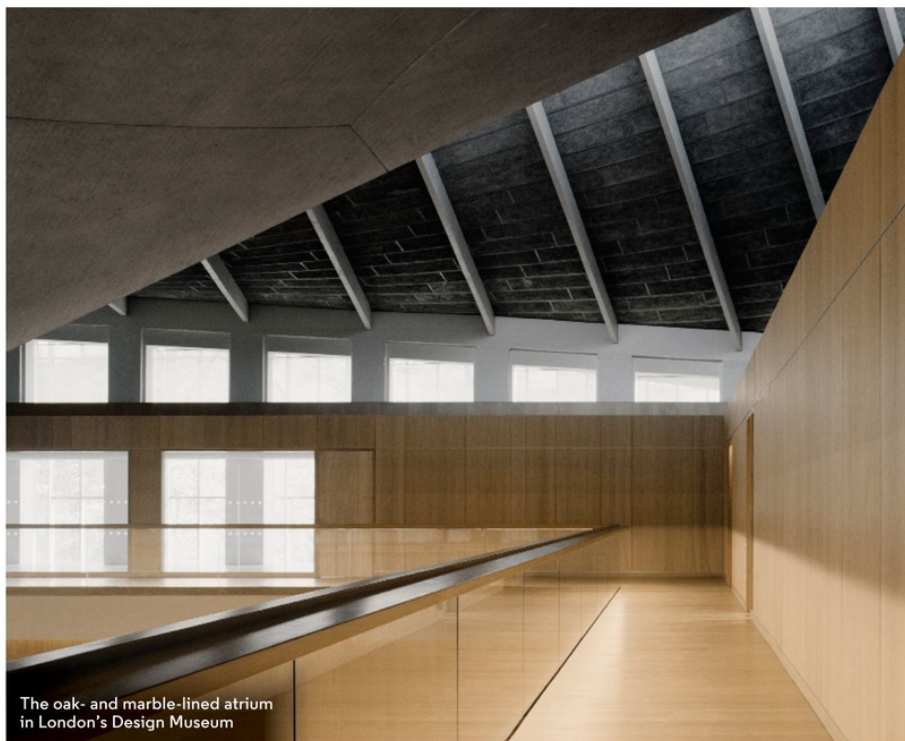
That hospitality came in the form of architect and designer Shiro Kuramata. Pawson found his work a revelation, and it also sparked a realization of the ideas he himself had been cultivating—a concern for simplicity and austerity, albeit without form. Kuramata would become a mentor to Pawson, encouraging him to pursue architecture professionally. He returned to London and enrolled at the Architectural

Association School of Architecture. “I hadn’t realized it was possible to learn how to design,” he says. Yet, Pawson was always designing, whether changing his room around at school or dreaming up a hair salon as a teenager (he asked his parents’ artist friends for feedback). “I thought people could or couldn’t. But I was taught to design, which was brilliant.”

After testing the waters on an apartment he shared with his then partner, art dealer Hester van Royen, and on a



The lofty Calvin Klein Collection store in New York occupies a former bank hall



The oak- and marble-lined atrium in London’s Design Museum

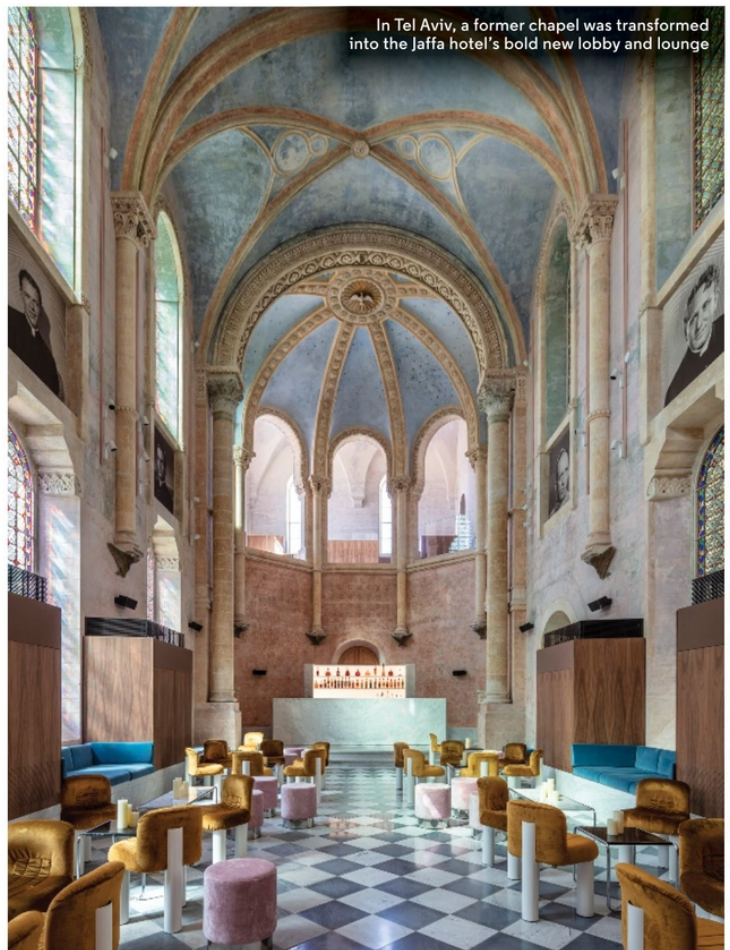
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A *Shade of Pale* installation in London displays Pawson's own photographs suspended at eye level in double-sided pairs



A banyan tree is the focal point of Jil Sanders' refined Tokyo retail store



In Tel Aviv, a former chapel was transformed into the Jaffa hotel's bold new lobby and lounge



A rendering of the upcoming rooftop bar at the EDITION West Hollywood

gallery space for Leslie Waddington, he eventually launched his own studio in 1981, which has now grown to a team of 20. "It isn't a holiday camp," he explains. "It's quite intense."

In the years since, Pawson has worked with a host of household names, including retail spaces for Calvin Klein and Versace. He designed Ian Schrager's home in New York, and collaborated with him on EDITION Hotels and Gramercy Park Hotel apartments. "I've certainly been given breaks," he jokes, "but it's hard work, and hopefully, at the end, you have something new to show."

For all of the perceived glitz of his undoubtedly starry clients, it's a more understated project that Pawson feels is his most defining: a Czech monastery, Abbey of Nový Dvůr, where the ritual of manual work, prayer, and service informed the design. The studio describes the visual impact as low, and yet its strength lies in the refinement and exactness of the vision. "You're designing something that has

to work for somebody who never leaves the compound. To be approached for something like that doesn't happen to an architect, certainly these days."

Pawson's most recent project, the Jaffa, continues the theme of religious spaces. A luxury hotel in Tel Aviv's oldest neighborhood, it incorporates a historic former chapel, along with a 19th-century neo-Roman former hospital. He collaborated with developer Aby Rosen and local architect and conservationist Ramy Gill on the project, bringing new life to the original structures and adding a bold, contemporary wing. It's something he's particularly proud of, noting, "You won't find another hotel like it again."

No matter what, one certainty is that Pawson's future will continue to reflect the diversity of his past. "Variety is important. I get bored easily," he concludes. "You have a body of work and it's varied, but now I'm toying with how to pay it back a bit." For him, that may mean teaching again. This time, architecture, not English.

Ian Schrager's Manhattan apartment at 40 Bond Street boasts a glass rooftop pavilion

