

# INTERIOR DESIGN

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Two D.C. Residences

# Hotel Arts

Total Concept and SOM's Bruce Graham headline an international roster of designers and artists at Barcelona's grand hotel.

Barcelona is one of those magical places where art pervades the very fabric of the city and culture overflows the boundaries of museums and galleries to become a living, breathing, omnipresent force. In less vital settings, expressive architecture and design struggle to assert themselves; here, amid the glories of the past and the bravado of the present, design achieves a rare urgency and relevance to modern living. The developers of the grand Hotel Arts complex on Barcelona's waterfront, which opened early last year to great fanfare, clearly understood the challenge of building in such a culturally charged city. The hotel is a supremely ambitious undertaking, marshalling the talents of leading international architects and designers as well as Spanish and Catalan artists of startling diversity. Its many successes (and occasional shortcomings) point to the promise and pitfalls created when commerce conspires with art.

The centerpiece of the complex is the 44-story Hotel Arts tower, designed by now-retired Skidmore, Owings & Merrill senior partner Bruce Graham. The first beachfront hotel built in Barcelona's 2,000-year history (and the city's tallest building), the tower is the most prominent component of a vast master plan to reclaim the city's long-neglected waterfront. (The plan also included construction of an extensive marina complex and numerous residential and commercial buildings designed originally to serve the 1992 Olympic Games.) The complex was developed by The Travelstead Group and Japan's Sogo Company; the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company operates the hotel itself. Adjacent to the tower is a retail center designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect

Frank O. Gehry, who created the project's most enticing symbol: a massive, abstracted fish sculpture of woven metal strips that shade the retail court as they reflect the brilliant Mediterranean sun.

Presented on these two pages are introductory views of the hotel and a brief sampling of interior spaces. The bulk of interior design work was accomplished by the now-defunct firm Total Concept, an affiliate of The Travelstead Group headed by principal designer Edythe Travelstead. Included in the hotel's program are 455 guest-rooms (including 61 suites), two ballrooms, 12 meeting rooms and a wide variety of restaurants, cafes, bars and lounges.

On the following four pages we present more extensive views of the sumptuous private apartments that occupy the hotel's top ten floors. These were designed by the Barcelona firm Gabinete de Construcción y Arquitectura in association with prominent Catalan designer Jaume Tresserra. *Continued*



Above and below: The Hotel Arts tower, designed by SOM's Bruce Graham, is encased by an exposed steel exoskeleton. Frank Gehry's magnificent fish sculpture of woven, anodized aluminum strips crowns his retail center, adjacent to the hotel's terraces and gardens.

Opposite, clockwise from above left: Tapas bar, with furniture by architect Oscar Tusquets and Miguel Rasero's winning murals that synthesize the strength of Picasso's cubism and the delicacy of oriental watercolors; meeting room with tented ceiling and artwork by Merche Mendes; and the terrace cafe with Gehry chairs from Knoll and artwork by Maria Commelaran.

Photography: Rafael Vargas



Jaume Tresserra brings his signature style to bear on the Hotel Arts' luxe private apartments.

While the public areas of the Hotel Arts vibrate with the energy of multiple artists and designers, the luxury apartments on the building's uppermost ten floors reflect a singular vision. Jaume Tresserra, the well-known Catalan designer, has created interior environments that are at once lavish and terribly restrained. Working within clean, well-proportioned architectural shells designed by the Barcelona-based firm G.C.A (Gabinete de Construcción y Arquitectura), Tresserra has made exclusive use of his own finely wrought designs for furniture, lighting, carpets and accessories.

There are 30 private apartments on these floors, all duplex arrangements with living room and dining functions located on the first level and bedroom suites positioned above. Square footage ranges from 1,700 in the smallest of the one-bedrooms to 7,500 in the largest of the palatial three-bedroom apartments. Price-tags for these units run well into the millions of dollars, accessible mainly to affluent corporate types desirous of a Barcelona pied-à-terre with breathtaking views of the Mediterranean Sea to the east, the Pyrenees Mountains to the north and the manifold wonders of the city in-between.

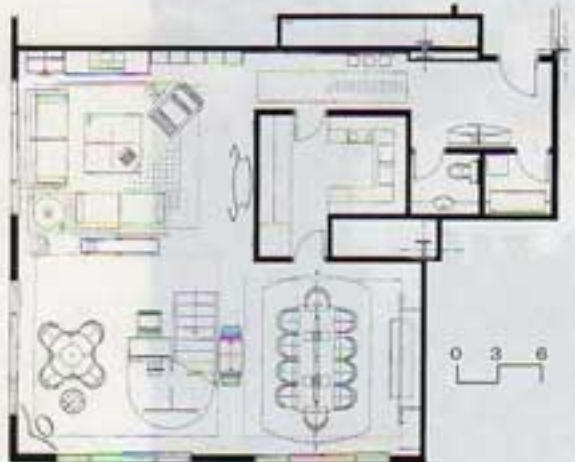
The character of the apartments is defined not only by the omnipresence of Tresserra's furnishings and custom designs but also by the artistic

*Continued*

*This page and opposite: Views of living areas and sculptural connector stairs from several apartments. Tresserra's own furniture designs are the inspiration for architectural detailing and built-ins.*



TYPICAL TWO-BEDROOM APARTMENT







The sleek, contemporary design is animated by beautiful woods and hand-crafted furnishings.



ethos that underlies all his work. Of his design philosophy in general (and his furniture objects in particular), Tresserra has said: "Our main objective has been the rejection of excessive industrial conditioning in which beauty is lost as a trade-off in the pursuit of financial gain. Faithful to this aesthetic commitment, shape has been given to the designs through the employment of the revered arts of hand-craftsmanship and artistry, and through the utilization of only the highest quality materials."

The designer's signature material is Spanish white walnut, a richly textured wood that Tresserra manipulates with a variety of hand-applied natural varnishes. Other exotic woods are used for accent inlays in the furniture and for architectural elements such as doors and room-defining screens. Brass, finished in silver or chrome, is employed for fittings and hardware. Upholstery materials are generally confined to pigskin suede and natural cotton in largely off-white colorations.

The decision to outfit these apartments in such a sleek, contemporary style may come as a surprise to many Americans, who more readily associate high-toned living with more solidly traditional, conservative refinements. But Tresserra's work, with its painstaking detail and elegant materialist aesthetic, seems appropriate for a city with a decidedly progressive attitude toward design. It certainly makes sense in a hotel that forcefully asserts the essential bond between art and design.

MAYER RUS

*This page and opposite: Views of bedrooms from various apartments illustrate the subtle variations Tresserra played on his major design themes. Generous, marble-clad bathrooms were richly appointed yet very contemporary.*