

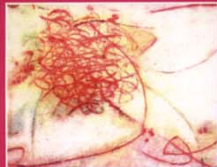
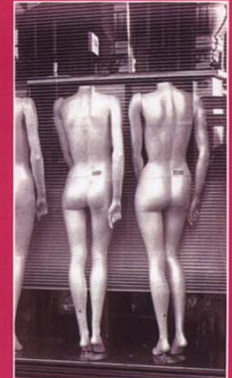
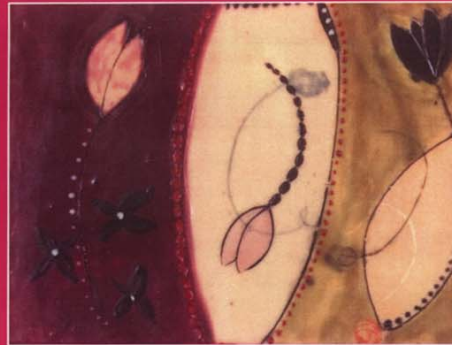


BOUTIQUE DESIGN,  
WINTER 2005/2006

HOTEL MAX

# THE MASTERPIECE

Denise Corso Designs a Punky, Grungy, Pretty, Powerful Hotel:  
Who Says that Rock is Dead?



BY REBECCA GOLDBERG

**W**orking out of one of the hotel's rooms, Denise Corso, lead designer for the Portland-based Aspen Hotel Group, and her team found themselves living — more or less — at the Hotel Max, in the weeks prior to its completion in fall, 2005.

Clockwise from top left: Rickie Wolfe, 'Circles IV'; Rue Reaumur, 'Dancing Neon Couple' and 'Truck Tires' all by John Armstrong; Moon Lee, 'Serendipity II'; (inset) Zanetka Kral, 'Long Awaited Dream'



Custom created Masland carpet offers a subtle hint of color against the door's black and white photography

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## HOTEL MAX

"Our design offices were onsite out of a hotel room. We were permanent guests," said Corso. "There were sometimes when we had to go to sleep, get back up and draw. Now that I look back on it, I see that is part of the process."

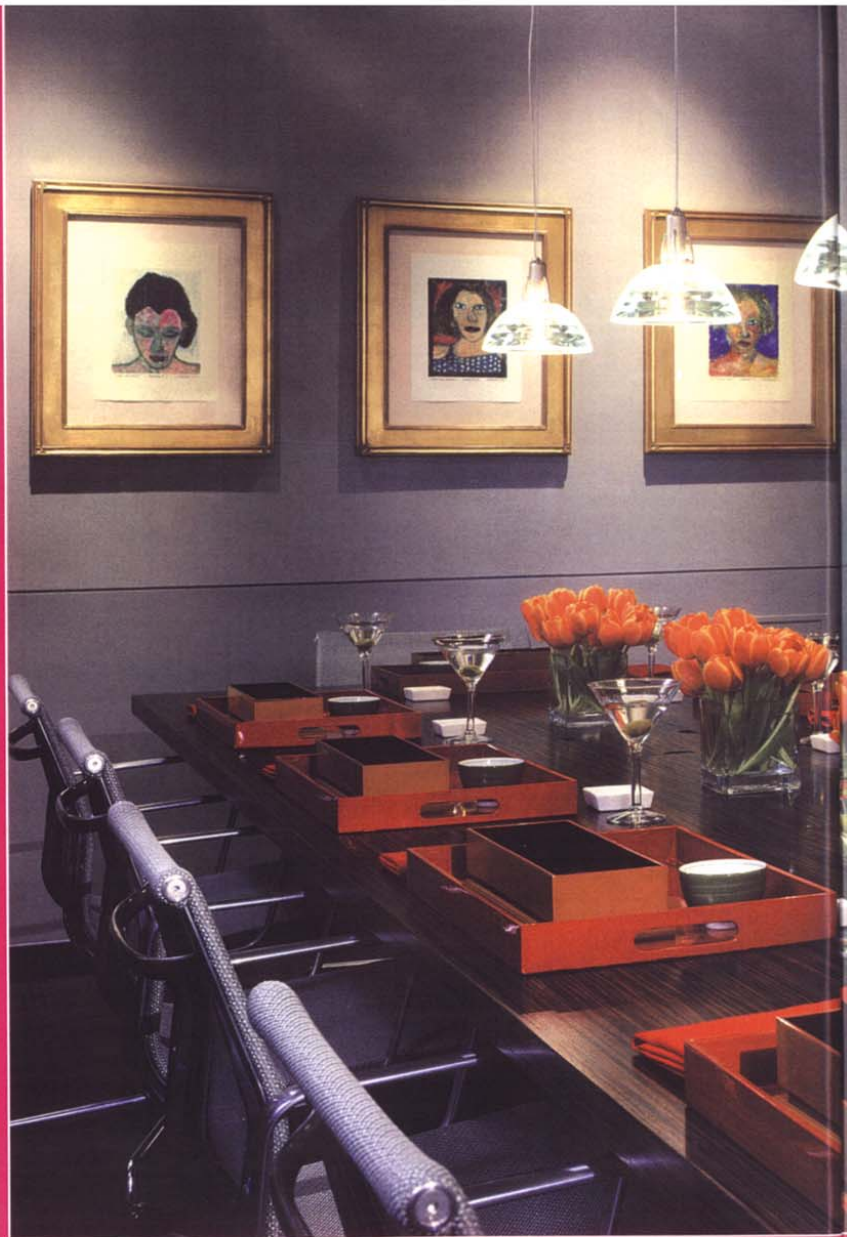
Corso along with her team members, David Kennedy, lead architect, and Cara King and Elaine Chan, both designers, were not the only guests during the renovation of the former Vance Hotel. The property stayed open while each of the uniquely challenging 154 rooms were re-done with an artistic, edgy-feel inspired by the city where it lives, Seattle.

"We had to roost guests through the property and people were in shock. There was this old, rickety lobby and then they'd go up to their room and there was all this photography," said Corso.

"The rooms were old, small, quirky and no two were alike. There were 60+ bathroom types and views that looked out into interior alleyways. All this and you're working in a market that's pretty cosmopolitan. The question was, 'how are we going to stand apart?'"

Gordon Sondland, principal, asked Corso to head up the project, following her work on Hotel Lucia, one of a dozen other Aspen Hotel Group properties. "I knew the process—tight budget and an aggressive time frame," said Corso.

Knowing that Sondland was an avid art lover, she decided to incorporate the Seattle art community. The goal was to create a gallery of sorts, tying the design into



the history of the city and its famous natives.

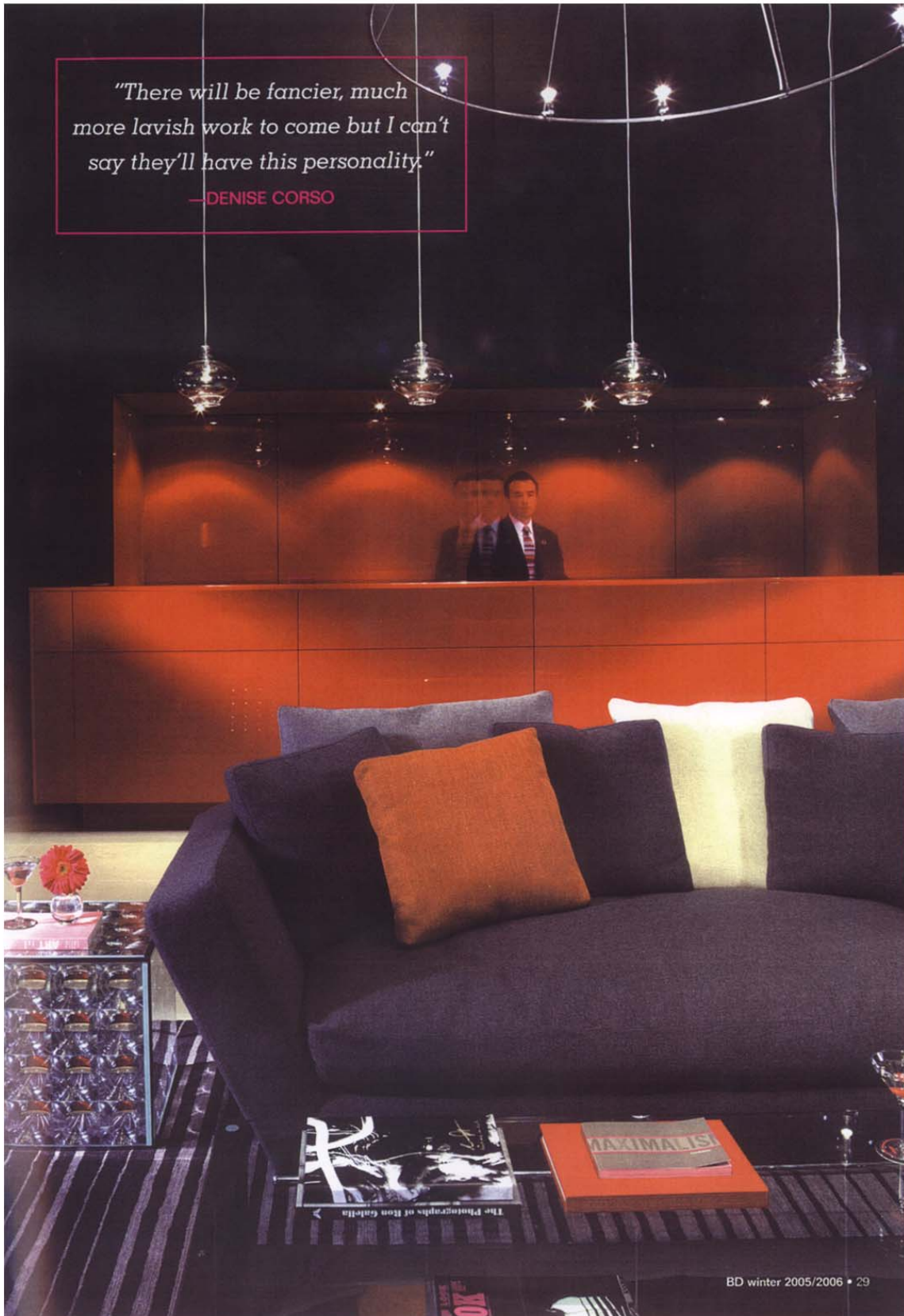
"We wanted to include these larger-than-life graphic photos on each door. And then we decided that we would feature one photographer per floor," she said.

The art work, which was

curated and corralled by Tessa Papas, was restricted to local artists, and later went on to fill a book based on the hotel called *Maximalism*.

The likeness of Spoonman, the subject a 1990s Soundgarden song, presides

over the third floor hallway, among other local street performers. The fifth floor pays homage to the Seattle grunge scene with Charles Peterson's archived photos of Eddie Vedder, Kurt Cobain and Courtney Love. And on the 10th floor, landmark signage





from around the city has found a new audience within the Hotel Max.

The graphic printing on the doors was produced and installed by Ivey Imaging.

"None of these photographers shot for commission,"

said Corso. "They went forward with the body of work they had."

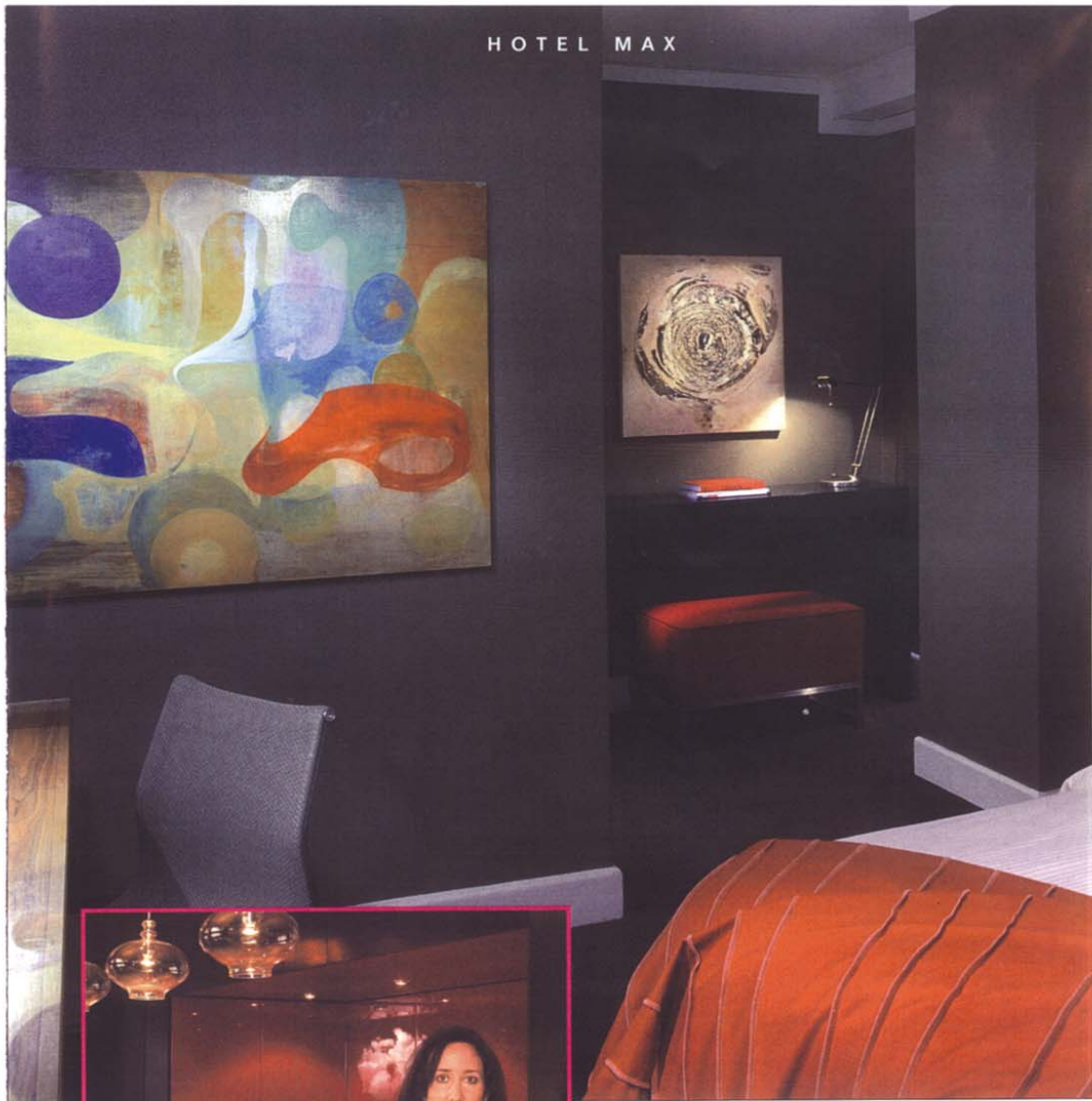
According to Corso there is no way to quantify the some 300-piece art collection because of the blood, sweat and tears that went into it. "We came up

with an idea and we believed in it and we made sure that our work did not overshadow the artists' work." Yet she stresses that the hotel is more than funky

doors: "the guests can say that it's not just my room that has a groovy door. It's a groovy experience."

The experience was carefully tailored by Corso

**This page: Quiet furniture sets the scene for bright artwork in the boardroom; Top right: The bright red desk makes the lobby pop**



Designer: Denise Corso

to subdue the property's quirky spaces.

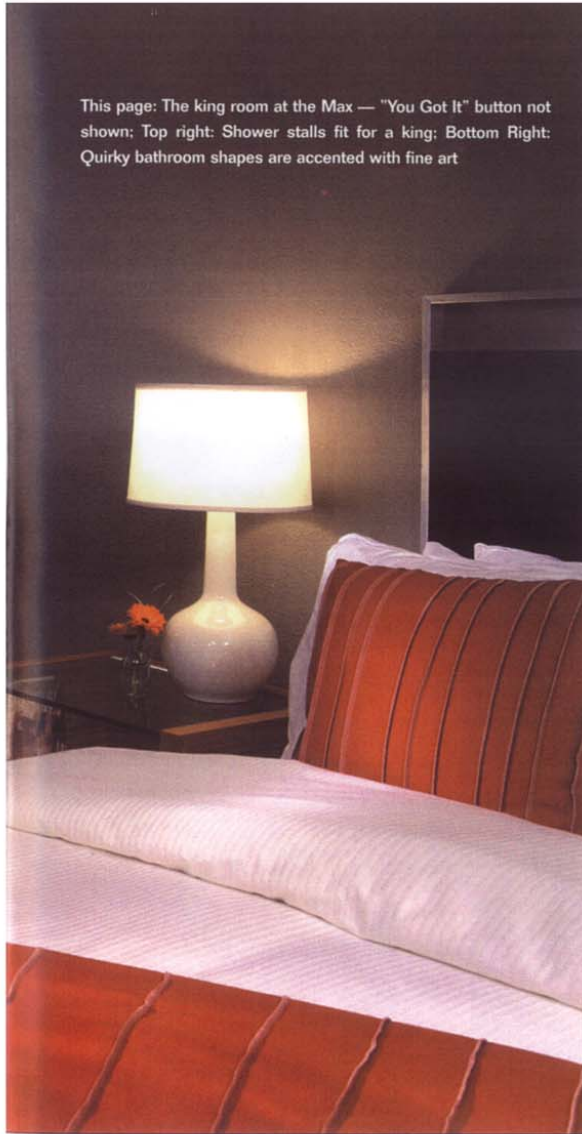
"The Maximalism concept was created to divert the guests' attention from small spaces and the bathroom. The rooms are meant to be much quieter; the focus is on the art and keeping the furniture low—a maximum experience in a minimum space," she said.

She accented these low-

volume spaces with Maharam upholstery and shower curtain fabric, case goods by Hilbrecht Fine Furniture, MDC Wall-coverings in the bathrooms, Durkan carpets in the guestrooms, and Masland carpet in the corridors.

Unlike the guestrooms, Corso designed the lobby to have a real high-volume punch.

This page: The king room at the Max — "You Got It" button not shown; Top right: Shower stalls fit for a king; Bottom Right: Quirky bathroom shapes are accented with fine art



"People are intrigued by the drama that's set up in the lobby where the ceiling heights are 17 feet high and expanded. We added a tall fireplace there; it's the only red object in the lobby. It pops. It's ballsy," she said.

"I would not call it trendy. I'm proud of that. I think it will hold up in years to come."

Corso will go out on her own in early 2006, forming

her firm Corso Staicoff with partner Jim Staicoff.

The firm has hopes of continuing in hospitality design. "There will be fancier, much more lavish work to come but I can't say they'll have this personality," she said, admitting that after all, there is only one Great Gatsby.

"If the hotel was a book it would be a bestseller," she laughed.

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