



# In the Beginning. . .

Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz went all the way back to Genesis to reinvent an Arizona resort as the Mondrian Scottsdale

text: c.c. sullivan photography: ken hayden



**Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz** doesn't just design spaces. He *tells stories*. With materials and mass, furnishings and finishes, light and volume, his interiors talk a blue streak. His latest tale unfolds in Scottsdale, Arizona—at the first of several Morgans Hotel Group efforts to duplicate the success of the Los Angeles-born Mondrian.

*The existing porte cochere now boasts polyester drapery.*

While the Mondrian Scottsdale offers a few Louis Ghost chairs and other fleeting homages to the L.A. original—masterminded by former owner Ian Schrager, styled by the inimitable Philippe Starck, perpetually overrun by Hollywood hipsters—the overall story line definitely isn't borrowed. It takes some between-the-lines reading, but the →





**Opposite:** In the lobby, Hanns-Peter Krafft's sheep stool stands parallel to a row of wool-covered wingbacks and fiberglass lamps, all custom.

**Top, from left:** Palms line the driveway. A custom ostrich-feather pendant fixture hangs above the Eero Saarinen-style table that serves as the concierge desk. **Bottom, from left:** Tinted mirror clads the front of the reception desk. In the Red Bar, synthetic velvet upholders different types of custom seating.



scenario goes roughly like this: Boy meets girl.

A pilgrimage to the L.A. Mondrian left Noriega-Ortiz fixated on an unlikely image, Albrecht Dürer's *Adam and Eve*—the primordial pair captured the essence of the Mondrian's nightly lounge scene, the designer felt. However, he says, the Scottsdale couple's Eden is a "big ranch, where guests arrive by stage-coach." Thus the bougainvillea-covered gates to the driveway and the "covered wagon" of a porte cochere with billowing white drapery. Inside, desert-inspired whites and pinks veer sharply to the Southwest.

(That's as opposed to the more intense, Mexican-influenced colors that dominated this 34,000-square-foot property when it was the James Hotel by *Interior Design* Hall of Fame member Deborah Berke.)

The Mondrian Scottsdale's double-height lobby is a garden of surreal visions and eclectic furnishings, all creamy white. Along one wall, traditional wingbacks accompany giant floor lamps with fiberglass bases molded into human forms, just like some 1930's porcelain candlesticks Noriega-Ortiz found on eBay. A stool in the shape of a sheep stands in the middle of the

oak floor. To the rear is a huge fiberglass tree trunk, multiplied by mirrored walls. A brown runner leads to Asia de Cuba, a restaurant Noriega-Ortiz visualizes as a sun-bleached "farm" lorded over by a gigantic fiberglass egg. Near it, he installed a backlit photo enlargement of a rooster.

But visitors beware! Amid the pure white lurk tinges of temptation. Rose-colored mirror clads the reception desk, and the shop is painted pink. In the Red Bar's mural, sassy cherubs wield iPods and cell phones against a backdrop of scarlet swagged curtains. Beneath the tops of built-in desks in the cleverly refurbished →



*This page: A wicker chair, wooden and aluminum stools, and a custom bed are clustered in the entry.*



guest rooms, a red light shines through a red acrylic panel, drawing attention to the juicy red apple behind. Have a bite. Or don't.

The 194 guest rooms are pleasantly stark and mostly not Starck. The low built-ins and platform beds are slick black with stainless-steel accents; above is heavenly white. Subtle touches recall the lobby's Eden-ranch motif. On bathroom mirrors, Noriega-Ortiz says, flowery stencils are intended to "romanticize the room and make it a little more human."

For many visitors, the Judeo-Christian references will remain veiled by the whimsicality. Unless one happens to ask the bellhop, that is. While preparing for the opening, Noriega-Ortiz gave an "art seminar" to help staff respond to curious guests.

"As soon as they heard Garden of Eden, it clicked," he says. One response: "Oh, the sheep is the Lamb of God, and there's the tree of life." Another: "Yes, and the people on the lobby lamps are nude because they're pure."

The Morgans Hotel Group probably takes things a bit less literally. CEO Ed Sheetz handpicked →

**Top, from left:** Murano glass chandeliers are paired with Asia de Cuba restaurants' trademark communal table, this one a custom piece topped in antiqued mirror. In the bathrooms, new elements are the stencil on the mirror, the paint color, the chrome towel hooks, and the vinyl towel basket. **Bottom, from left:** Guest rooms retain existing oak-veneered built-ins, now lacquered; the sheers and the Philippe Starck chair are recent additions. A mantelpiece and a fresh paint job reinvent the gas fireplace on the bar's terrace.








**Top:** A grapevine ball conceals pool mechanicals on the lawn outside the cabanas. **Bottom:** At the corner of the 120-foot-long lap pool, chairs by Marco Maran flank a table by Marcel Wanders.

Noriega-Ortiz after asking him to draft a series of two-minute sketches conveying his pitch for an urban resort that's celebrity-oriented with a provocative wink at original sin. As for the irreverent biblical narrative, Sheetz agreed to risk it. Besides, Noriega-Ortiz elevates this hotel well beyond his story line, thanks to a sparing use of color and texture, a sculptural approach to form, and wide-ranging, often surprising furnishings.

That combination recently won him the commission to renovate L.A.'s Mondrian, too. Let's hope he'll spin more of his yarns. 

**PROJECT TEAM:** MARISA GOMEZ; DRAGAN DEJANOVIC; SARAH ANDERSON.

DRAPERY FABRIC (ENTRY), TWO-TONE PILLOW FABRIC (BAR), BED FABRIC (ENTRY, BAR TERRACE), STOOL FABRIC (RESTAURANT), HEADBOARD FABRIC (GUEST ROOM), PILLOW FABRIC (BAR TERRACE), CHAISE FABRIC (POOL AREA);

KRAVET, SHEEP STOOL (LOBBY); MEIER THROUGH MOSS, DRUM STOOLS (LOBBY, CONCIERGE); THROUGH CLIPPER TRADING COMPANY, CHAIR SOLID FABRIC (LOBBY, CONCIERGE); KNOLL, DRAPERY FABRIC (LOBBY, CONCIERGE, RECEPTION), SOLID PILLOW FABRIC (BAR); RICHLOOM FABRICS GROUP, BANQUETTE FABRIC (LOBBY), BANQUETTE FABRIC, LOUNGE CHAIR FABRIC (BAR); VALLEY FORGE FABRICS, TABLE (CONCIERGE); WHITE ON WHITE, CHAIR PATTERNED FABRIC; OSBORNE & LITTLE, RUG; ARONSON'S FLOOR COVERING, TABLES (BAR); WEST ELM, SIDE CHAIRS; BROOKLINE FURNITURE, METAL STOOL (ENTRY); THROUGH FOUR HANDS, VASE; THROUGH ELEMENTS OF HOME, PILLOWS; TARGET, MATTRESSES (ENTRY, BAR TERRACE); WEATHEREND ESTATE FURNITURE, WOODEN STOOL (ENTRY), MANTEL ACCESSORIES (BAR TERRACE), VINE BALLS (POOL AREA); THROUGH STAR DECORATORS WHOLESALE, CHANDELIERS (RESTAURANT); ARTE DI MURANO, SINK (BATHROOM); LACAVA, SINK FITTINGS; MOEN, HOOKS; KOHLER CO., TABLE LAMP (GUEST ROOM); FONTANA ARTE, PENDANT FIXTURES; HALL-MARK LIGHTING, CHAIR; KARTELL, THROW PILLOW FABRIC (GUEST ROOM), DRAPERY FABRIC (GUEST ROOM, CABANAS); FABRIC INNOVATIONS, SIDE CHAIRS (POOL AREA); PARRI, TABLES; MOOOI THROUGH TWENTIETH, ARCHITECT OF RECORD; DLR GROUP, GENERAL CONTRACTOR; HOWARD S. WRIGHT CONSTRUCTION CO.

