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finding joy

guest editor:  
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By Jana Schiowitz



## man of many parts

Growing up as one of 10 children on a farm in Northern Ireland, Colum McCartney knew little more than tending to the fields, milking cows, and picking mushrooms. But taking over the family farm was not his dream; being creative was. An interest in painting led him to the School of Art and Design in Belfast (now the University of Ulster) where he developed a fascination with furniture design. "When I was there, I saw these really clever, exciting, useful shapes and forms," he says. "I was hooked."

After college, McCartney found that opportunities in product design in Northern Ireland were scarce. With a small grant, he founded a pub, restaurant, and nightclub design and renovation company, designing much of the furniture and lighting for the spaces himself. "My love for product design always asserted itself," he says. Yet five years later, his struggling business made him set his sights on other places and opportunities: San Francisco to do construction; London to work for Sir Terence Conran and Keith Hobbs; and then back to San Francisco to open up a division of United Designers, which turned into his own namesake firm.

In 2003, McCartney became bi-coastal with the opening of a New York office; many projects followed, including Hotel Vitale in San Francisco, Hotel Sax in Chicago, and AVIA hotels in Napa and Long Beach, California. But after the economic downturn hit his business hard, he closed the West Coast office and made New York his home base. "Business is tough for the design industry these days, and there is not as much work to go around," he says. "Competitiveness is becoming one of the most important aspects of good design."

McCartney stays competitive by creating interiors and products with longevity, functionality, comfort, and a "smile" factor. His pieces—including lighting, furniture, and screens—are quirky, appeal to many tastes, and reference modern and historical architecture, art, nature, and places like Ireland and New York.

"For me, an interior is sometimes a kit of parts that comes together to create an environment," he says. "While they should all work together seamlessly, I think it is interesting for the parts to have individual character and to engage the user in different ways—to pique their curiosity and to make them smile with the satisfaction of comfort and knowing that it works well."

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*Clockwise from top:* A look at some of Colum McCartney's best-known interiors: a heavy emphasis is placed on wood at AVIA Hotel in Napa, California; the lobby's sitting area with luxurious furnishings and a closeup of a suspended sconce at Hotel Sax; and a unique bench complete with an opening for a flower vase at Hotel Vitale's spa.

