

**ID** SBID  
INTERNATIONAL  
DESIGN  
AWARDS  
2020



# The Social House

**A THRIVING CREATIVE HUB IN THE HEART OF KENYA'S CAPITAL CITY, THE SOCIAL HOUSE IS A STUNNING HOTEL AIMED AT ACTING AS A MELTING POT THAT BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER. THE BEAUTIFULLY DESIGNED HOTEL IN NAIROBI INCLUDES 83 BEDROOMS; FOUR FOOD AND BEVERAGE OUTLETS; SEVEN MEETINGS AND EVENTS SPACES; A GYM; AND AN OUTDOOR POOL.**



**W**ork to transform the space initially began in 2016 but following two changes in designers, the work was completed in February 2020. Areen Design was responsible for a look that has been fantastically received, and was recognised in the 2020 SBID Awards with a nomination in the Public Areas category and an award win in the Hotel Bedroom & Suites Design. The hotel has also been nominated in the AHEAD awards in the Hotel New Build category.

Areen Design had already established a presence in Nairobi with its designs for two other hotels and was therefore familiar with working in the area. Senior Designer Balkaran Bassan spoke to PREMIER HOSPITALITY INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE about the work:

*"Our first introduction to the project brief was through a discussion with the client*

*Juliet Njogu, where she shared her vision for a hotel that would appeal to individuals from many different walks of life; a hotel that would feel different and yet familiar each time they came back; and ultimately a hotel that would have an identity and character of its own.*

*"This was a really interesting premise for us, furthered by the brand guardian James Stuart's brief around the concept of a 'Melting Pot.' Kenya itself has always been a melting pot of influences, with Nairobi and its dynamic, vibrant population right at the heart of this fusion. That tied in really well with a design brief that encouraged us to move away from any traditional notions of a hotel and free up how we imagined all its different parts."*

With these concepts as the overarching themes for the project, the interiors and exteriors were designed to capture the idea of a collection of authentic, intriguing

and evolving spaces where guests could shape their own personal experiences, connections and journeys.

The rich materiality and natural tones are inspired by so much of Kenya's natural environment, whilst the industrial accents and details reflect the urban side of Nairobi. The influences are therefore much more subtle, without pandering to any of the design clichés that are seen in many sub-Saharan hotels. Balkaran continued:

*"Keeping the eclectic ethos in mind, a key part of our design process was to create little moments of surprise that would play out against larger iconic or standout items, all the while complementing a design language that reflects a residential warmth and sense of familiarity. As an example, this juxtaposition plays out perfectly from the moment you walk through the front doors and into 'The Living Room' and... well... it's not every day you see a Maasai riding a Harley Davidson in mid-air, before sitting down for coffee and cake with a heron's head poking out of the lamp in front of you!*

*"When you look at how all the spaces are functioning today, you can also see how the design and flexibility of the spatial planning adds to the range of experiences on offer for the guests whether that's through the constantly changing Meetings and Events spaces; the connection between the indoor and outdoor spaces; or the changing moods from mornings by the antique coffee roaster in the Living Room to fun evenings in the Peruvian inspired Inca Rooftop Bar and Restaurant."*

The Living Room is a 24-hour café-bar coffee roastery that acts as an informal hangout space at the heart of the venue. With its casual dining and take-outs, The Living Room places an emphasis on healthy cuisine that takes global inspiration. »

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The Other Room is bold and simple farm-to-table dining. The pool/lawn side restaurant is bathed in sunlight and features a Scandinavian-styled interior. Locally sourced ingredients are prepared and served to maximise their natural flavours.

Copper is the hotel's urban brasserie. With an open-fire grill and warm, contemporary interior, Copper is a lunch and dinner destination with a food offering that places an emphasis on meat, fish and vegetarian options.

Finally, Inca is The Social House's rooftop Peruvian melting pot. With its colourful Peruvian tones, Inca is a celebration of Peru's diverse culinary heritage. Sharing platters and cocktails lead the way and combine with live music and events to create a unique and memorable experience.

Reflecting on the project and its success, Balkaran concluded: *"I was born in Nairobi and grew up in East Africa, so personally it was very special for me to be involved with a project where I could revisit some of my own roots whilst also fusing these together with my own journeys in the design world of London.*

*"More than this though it's been fantastic to work with a team where everyone has been entirely committed and so passionate in bringing the Social House to life - whether that's been John, effortlessly balancing project management with the installation of everything from kitchen hoods to parrot and beetle sculptures; Mercy and Emily in Housekeeping sourcing the perfect bulldog tissue dispensers and helping me install cushions at 2am; or Sam ensuring the smooth delivery and installation of an antique coffee roaster whilst juggling DJ and event bookings!*

*"And of course, it has been very rewarding to work with a client like Juliet and a brand guardian like James, both of whose vision for this project taps into a really exciting future for hospitality design in Africa." ■*

To find out more, please visit [www.thesocialhouse.ke](http://www.thesocialhouse.ke)



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