

# Hospitality Interiors

INTERIOR DESIGN FOR HOTELS, RESTAURANTS, BARS & CLUBS

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Weslodge, Dubai – interiors by Navigate Design



# Areen Design's expanding procurement division sets the bar high

With the recent addition of Geoff van Wijk as principal of Areen Design's procurement division, Hospitality Interiors' Gemma Ralph took this timely opportunity to learn more from him about the firm's procurement methodology, and his aspirations for the department in the years to come ...

While Geoff's appointment will bolster Areen Design's prestige and offer significantly, the firm is by no means a novice in the procurement sector. From its inception in the 1980s, Areen Design's procurement department has in fact become one of the largest procurement agencies in the hospitality sector, its capabilities ranging from traditional purchasing and procurement management, right through to a complete turn-key package.

"We benefit from having a large team of very experienced contract, project, logistics and procurement managers and coordinators who have been with the company for a long time," affirms Geoff. "Our department is loyal to the design process, product quality and delivering a transparent fee-based service. Furthermore, there is a strong emphasis on knowing the market and our broad supply chain, which covers FF&E, OS&E and architectural materials."

Areen Design's commitment to evolving its impressive procurement offer within the hospitality sector, in particular, is evidenced by the significant level of experience and industry knowledge Geoff will bring to the team in this field.

His unique childhood and the plethora of roles he has held across the breadth of the hospitality spectrum have equipped Geoff with a unique

insight into the delicate balance that must be struck in order to design, brand, operate and manage a hotel successfully.

"I grew up in hotels, literally, travelling the world with my hotelier parents," Geoff explains. "After completing a degree in Hotel Management at the University of Surrey, experience in hotel operations with Four Seasons, branding agency work and hotel pre-opening project management with The Parker Company, I set up and ran Furnish in 2007, bringing new service levels to hospitality procurement projects in Dubai and the GCC.

"My project experience includes The Park Hyatt Dubai, The Anantara Abu Dhabi, One

Aldwych London, One & Only Dubai, Kanuhura Maldives, Shangri-La Abu Dhabi, Arison Maritime Center, and more."

Geoff's multi-disciplinary professional experience is the perfect counterpart to Areen Design's integrated design and procurement approach. The firm prides itself on being able to deliver a project in its entirety, from the initial concept to even the tiniest of finishing touches for an opening ceremony. Ridding the process of unnecessary supply chains, delays and budget overspends, this holistic approach offers real and significant benefits for the client.

"There are many advantages to working with a company such as Areen Design with a complete set of integrated design services," says Geoff. "The Areen Group and its subsidiaries offer architecture, multi-sector interior design, and procurement. Clients benefit from a deeply engrained design know-how combined with procurement services based on quality and product durability.

"Design specifications are written with localisation, budget, and suitability in mind, thanks to close collaboration between our departments. All this translates into better quality specifications, early and accurate budgeting, transparency, greater efficiencies, and ultimately



Geoff van Wijk



*JW Marriott, Tetouan - All day dining restaurant*

cost savings while delivering a high quality service.”

With this successful model in place, the real challenge is to convey its manifold benefits successfully and to the right target audience. Cue Geoff.

“My role is primarily to expand the current offering and build more awareness of Areen Design’s specialist procurement resources and expertise,” he explains. “The remit includes responsibility to bring the procurement agent model to more hospitality customers, as well as applying Areen Design’s sourcing, quality management and production ‘know-how’ to help other industries roll out their brand experience through quality interiors and custom FF&E.”

Communication is a key challenge within the procurement sector, on a number of levels. For Areen Design in particular, there are often cultural barriers to negotiate. A significant portion of the firm’s hospitality work is conducted overseas, particularly in developing markets across Africa and Asia. This diversity within its portfolio is celebrated by the firm, but it nevertheless necessitates a degree of cultural awareness and sensitivity.

Effective communication also comes into play for Geoff and the team in the event of



*Sheraton, Madagascar - Lobby*

managing expectations with regards to budget, or indeed in emphasising the relationship between price and product quality.

“One of the most interesting aspects of this job is how we as procurement agents find ourselves at the centre of the hotel development process, dealing with contractors, designers operators and owners, often within a cross-cultural setting,” says Geoff.

“This brings its fair share of challenges too, like finding the balance between what a design specification calls for and what a budget can afford, or defending an operator’s brand standards when challenged with cheaper alternatives.”

Downward pressure on cost to the detriment of quality is not just a battle Geoff and the team face within the context of individual



*Sheraton, Madagascar - All day dining*

projects, but is a much wider concern within the procurement industry as a whole.

"In the case of fee-based procurement agent services, the key topical issue is the pressure on fees for a service that makes a significant contribution to the design and delivery process," Geoff explains. "As a result the industry suffers a high staff turnover, which consequently affects the necessary knowledge of the supply chain.

"Areen Design is large and diversified enough, however, to offer clients greater flexibility and a choice between supply and procurement models while maintaining design standards."

In much the same vein, Geoff observes a problematic lack of awareness surrounding protocol and quality management from those outside of his field. For Geoff and the team, an intimate knowledge of global industry trends,

manufacturing techniques and professionals acts as a remedy for unrealistic demands.

"A good example of a frequent challenge is explaining the process when instructed to find three price alternatives for a specified product," says Geoff. "This is not as simple as sending a tender out to three manufacturers to have it made. We need to explain repeatedly that this requires a collaborative review of suitable product alternatives available in the market, a decision on design suitability and a commercial review.

"This is where our product knowledge and strategic sourcing make the difference to supplying a carefully considered design alternative or simply a product of inferior quality to save on costs in the short term.

"The team and I focus on knowing designer products, trends, manufacturers and factories worldwide so that we can work with our

designer colleagues in sourcing the best product for their creative vision.

"In the case of custom production, we translate that creative vision into durable products by understanding manufacturing techniques and managing quality at every step of the delivery process."

Though the hospitality sector is a particularly fruitful arena for Areen Design, and will feature prominently in Geoff's plans going forwards, the firm is increasingly turning its sights to other industries for whom Areen Design's expertise and considered approach would prove equally advantageous.

"As more industries turn to design to elevate their service offering and look to the hospitality industry for design standards, Areen Design is taking steps to offer our sourcing and production know-how to a broader audience," says Geoff. "We are proud to have secured a project with a prominent global retailer for multiple locations, opening later this year."

With its work in the hospitality sector continuing to prosper and with prestigious retail projects on the cards, who knows what heights Areen Design's newly-expanded procurement team can reach in the years to come.

[areen.com/work/procurement/](https://areen.com/work/procurement/)

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*Westin Palace, Madrid - Executive guest room*