

State-of-the-art

In Trinidad, a veteran interior designer and self confessed minimalist transforms retail, corporate and residential spaces into works of art by focusing on clean lines and the subtle interplay of light and textures. Story by Rachelle Gray



he Falls at West Mall, located in the suburb of Westmoorings in northern Trinidad, is unlike any other shopping centre in the country, or indeed the entire English speaking Caribbean. Wrapped in a futuristic steel and glass façade and incorporating state of the art design technology, this ultra modern split-level shopping centre has all the design elements of an international mall of merit.

The initial concept was to design a mall that would emphasize the presence of water, greenery, light, and sky, and at the same time, seamlessly unify the disjointed parts into a shopping and lifestyle space with lots of panache.

Enter interior design consultant, Karen Aboud, founder of InDesign Limited. Aboud has a highly diversified portfolio of high end projects ranging from penthouses and private residences to commercial spaces such as banks, restaurants, retail showrooms, casinos and of course shopping centres.

She was hand-picked by the mall's owner, (whose private residence she also consulted on) to complement an elite design and engineering team consisting of famed Trinidadian architect Stephen Mendes and Honorary Fellow of the Royal Institute of Engineers, Tim Mac Farlane RDI. A project of this magnitude Aboud saw as a natural progression for her.

"When Richard Azar bought the mall he told me, 'I want you to do the design for me and I want it to be magnificent'," she says. "So we travelled, we sourced people, and then I worked closely with Stephen Mendes and we came up with a concept."

This experience is a far cry from what Aboud encountered when she returned to Trinidad 12 years ago. "When I came back, there wasn't a market for interior design," she recalls. "I love business. I love interior design and creating spaces, so I started a gift shop business where I sold exotic items."

Opening pages: Left; Where the four entrances converge at the atrium of the mall the single most impressive feature is a fountain that hurls water high enough to entertain those on the second floor.

Right: Maintaining an aquatic theme, mini fountains simmer along the ground floor concourse.

Opposite: Traces of Karen Aboud's playfulness emanates throughout the mall and is illustrated opposite in the form of her love affair with dangling glass bubbles clustered together which appear to float to nowhere, and in her expressed interest in special effects lighting.





Above: The escalators flanked by mature palms.
Left: High gloss walls and ceiling, tens of thousands of beads, create the backdrop for this showroom on the Mall's Northern entrance. Special effect lighting changes the mood in this space from bright and vibrant to serene and mellow. Karen stresses the importance of light and it's power to transform. "Lighting is everything"
Opposite: The remarkable glass treaders located at the eastern and western entrances, which lead patrons to the mezzanine and subsequently the second floor, and the blue glass canopy that drapes the perimeter of the mall, were all supplied by Space Decks.



That venture quickly diversified to include furniture. Eventually it led to interior design projects for the private homes of clients who were aware of Aboud's training and expertise.

A graduate of the Florida Art Institute with a degree in interior design, Aboud has travelled widely and paid close attention to international interior design styles. She is a self confessed minimalist who loves clean modern lines.

Any concerns that the mall might be an attempt to transplant things foreign to a warmer climate are quickly answered as Aboud relays the indelible lesson her travels have impressed upon her. "Those trips gave me a sense of understanding styles and knowing where to leave them. "I have a sense of appreciation that some designs suit some spaces and not others. When I go into a space that I design, I don't want it to be like a replica of something that I saw when I was, say, on a trip to Moscow. I want it to be creative how I interpret the space and how it can be functional for the client."

Architect Mendes ran a spine-like skylight the width of West Mall, as it is commonly called, opening up the second floor concourse to the feel of the outdoors while protecting it from the elements. Glass, marble, and water fountains help to create an organic realm, while directly influencing lighting and the perception of spaciousness in the commercial environment. And as the sun treks across the southern Caribbean sky, the entire mall undergoes a transformation, reflecting nature's shifting light as the day lengthens.

Above: The barrel vault at the East and West entrances, with curved glass supplied by ABEL. The funky shaped furniture are also part of Karen's overall design ethic for the mall.

Opposite page: This onyx-lined pool, with its blue glass tiles is a mirror image of the beautiful Caribbean sky. Antique terra cotta tiles reclaimed from a French chateau surround it. Their use serves two purposes, first aesthetically; these hand made tiles have a warm, earthy colour, which goes well with the backdrop of the garden. Second they absorb heat in the day and release it in the evening as the temperature drops making the pool area the place to be as the sun sets.





“I am very into lighting,” says Aboud. “I think lighting is everything. A beautiful space with the wrong lighting can become ugly, and an ugly space with the right lighting can become beautiful.”

“I want to do special effects lighting to transform the ceiling with different types of lights, transform the floors, highlight the murals, and change the mood at different times by using different lighting effects,” she continues. “I think lighting has always been a big part of what interests me about design. We are going to be using a lot of lighting effects on the skylight, so that at night, colours can be reflected onto it and images can be projected onto the floors. And from the centre of the skylight we’re putting big pieces of art.”

Aboud has kept colours light so the walls didn’t look busy and the environment looks natural. She chose white for the floors to make the space look wider, while tenants upgraded their store fronts by installing solid glass doors. Apart from two mural-sized, glass-tile fusion mosaics that drape the walls at the eastern and western ends of the second floor, she has kept colour to a minimum in order to highlight the stores.

Aboud speaks enthusiastically about the close collaboration between herself and Mendes in shaping the look of the finished structure. “We used simple things to unify the whole mall into a place which could be changed seasonally,” she says. “It’s the kind of mall



where anything you put in it looks good. It’s a good background for anything. The main colour comes from the stores. The rest of the mall remains subtle.”

Throughout the property and the premises, fountains splash and burble. Indoors, the Mermaid fountain, a sculpture of capricious beauty in bronze that has been an “icon” for the mall, remains as a landmark piece in the design. Along the ground floor concourse, mini fountains simmer, and in the belly of the mall, where the four entrances converge at the atrium, the single most impressive of the fountains roars and sends jets of water 25 feet into the air, high enough to entertain shoppers on the second floor.

Opposite page top: The ANSA McAL Corporate Booth at the Queen’s Parl Oval, Port of Spain, Trinidad. Wooden floors, easy leather chairs, wall wrapped in sport memorabilia, 14 televisions strategically placed and a fully fitted self service bar makes this the perfect place to enjoy a game of cricket.

Opposite page bottom: Karen worked this private residence around two two elongated pieces of art. The living/dining space completely wrapped in glass brings the outside indoors.

Above: The bathroom at Prime Restaurant is a surreal space of blue glass tiles, granite and rich wood. Clean lines and warm tones transport patrons into a luxurious world.



Aboud believes The Falls at West Mall has redefined retail space for this part of the Caribbean.

“In Trinidad, people are now getting to a stage where they understand,” she says. “Before, we just put up some slack wall, hung some shelves and sold the product. It’s not like that anymore. Its much more sophisticated, the whole retail market, the whole world has become competitive so you have to bring your retail store, your marketing, your merchandise up to mark.”

Stephen Mendes wanted the revamped mall to have a clean futuristic look, yet reflect contemporary Trinidad. The transformation has been five years in the making and is almost finished.

“It is beautiful architecture now,” says Aboud. “It is where we can sit back and say ‘let’s make it a mall.’”

Above: The interior of Panini Café was a real space challenge. With only 700 sq. ft., Karen had to accommodate seating for 12, a cashier’s station, kitchen and service area.

Opposite page top: The interior of Prime Restaurant in Trinidad.

Opposite page bottom: 45,000 one inch handmade iridescent glass bubble tiles were individually laid to create this sparkling entrance exciting patrons as they enter the Princess Casino

Made in the Caribbean
enjoyed worldwide
designer leisure
& dining furniture

ANGUILLA
ANTIGUA
BARBADOS
GRENADA
St KITTS & NEVIS
St LUCIA
TRINIDAD & TOBAGO
UNITED KINGDOM
US VIRGIN ISLANDS

A photograph of an outdoor seating area. There are two wooden armchairs with red cushions and a round wooden coffee table. The background shows a view of the ocean and a distant island.

PRECISION
QUALITY WITH STYLE
www.precisionguyana.com