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"I enjoy simple, beautiful things."
—Eva Chow
$10 U.S.

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QUINTESSENTIAL COAST

For nearly a decade, Commune has been defining California cool.

BY BROOKE HODGE PORTRAIT BY TODD COLE

When the industrial designer Dieter Rams said "good design is as little design as possible," he could have been describing Commune's work. Since hanging out its shingle in 2004, the Los Angeles interior design collective Commune has left its indisputably cool mark on restaurants, residences, shops and hotels from Palm Springs to Tokyo. While the firm has quietly been transforming homes in L.A. with its warm, modern, no-design approach to design, its recent spate of commercial projects—in particular a shop for Heath Ceramics in L.A. that opened in 2009—announced Commune's aesthetic to a much larger public. This year alone will see a luxury hotel in Panama City, a furniture line with Environment, and, following on the very successful heels of its Palm Springs sister, L.A. will get its own Ace Hotel Downtown.

Commune's partners—Roman Alonso, Steven Johanknecht, and sister and brother Pamela and Ramin Shamshiri—approach each project collectively, something that is vital to the firm's collaborative spirit, which now includes 30 architects, interior designers and graphic designers. The partners come from diverse backgrounds in interior and retail design, film production design, public relations and event planning. When they first came together almost 10 years ago they realized that with their pooled expertise they could fill a void in L.A. for designers who wanted to work on projects of varying scope and scale. While each partner brings a particular experience to the table, the firm's work has a holistic and relaxed aesthetic. Each interior has its own identity and the design of each new project develops from its own particular sense of place. Yet there are distinct elements that have come to define Commune's cool California aesthetic philosophy.

Eclectic inspirations range from the clean lines, textures and patterns of Bauhaus design to the intricate, eccentric work of Tony Duquette and from the rugged beauty of California's coast to the rustic refinement of Donald Judd's Marfa, Texas, compound. There is a distinctly personal touch to the work and, indeed, Commune believes in working with local craftsmen and artisans and in bringing the hand into everything they do. "We support community," says Roman Alonso. "And we want our projects to be tied into the culture that they are part of."

Their design for Farmshop, Jeff Cerciello's popular restaurant and market in L.A.'s Brentwood Country Mart, features tables by the Joshua Tree artist Alma Allen, dishes by Heath and candleholders by L.A. potter Adam Silverman. "Whenever possible we prefer to work locally rather than globally," adds Alonso. Commune is working with Allen, Heath and Silverman again and with the furniture makers Tripp Carpenter and Michael Boyd on a Marin County Farmshop that is slated to open in April. "Not only do we want our interiors to have a warm, human touch," says Alonso, "we want all of our products to have the heart and soul that comes from the hand and not from a machine."

Mattison, a boutique for menswear designer Derek Mattison, opened in L.A. in 2012 along with a San Francisco shop for Heath. At Mattison, Commune introduced some of Alma Allen's sculptural wood furniture along with custom planters filled with Hindu Rope, a flowering succulent also known as Krinkle Kurl, to offset the hard surfaces of the shop's mirrors and chrome fittings. The tile and flooring is from Exquisite Surfaces, with whom Commune will collaborate again this year on a new collection of tiles.

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