

# FRIEZE WEEK

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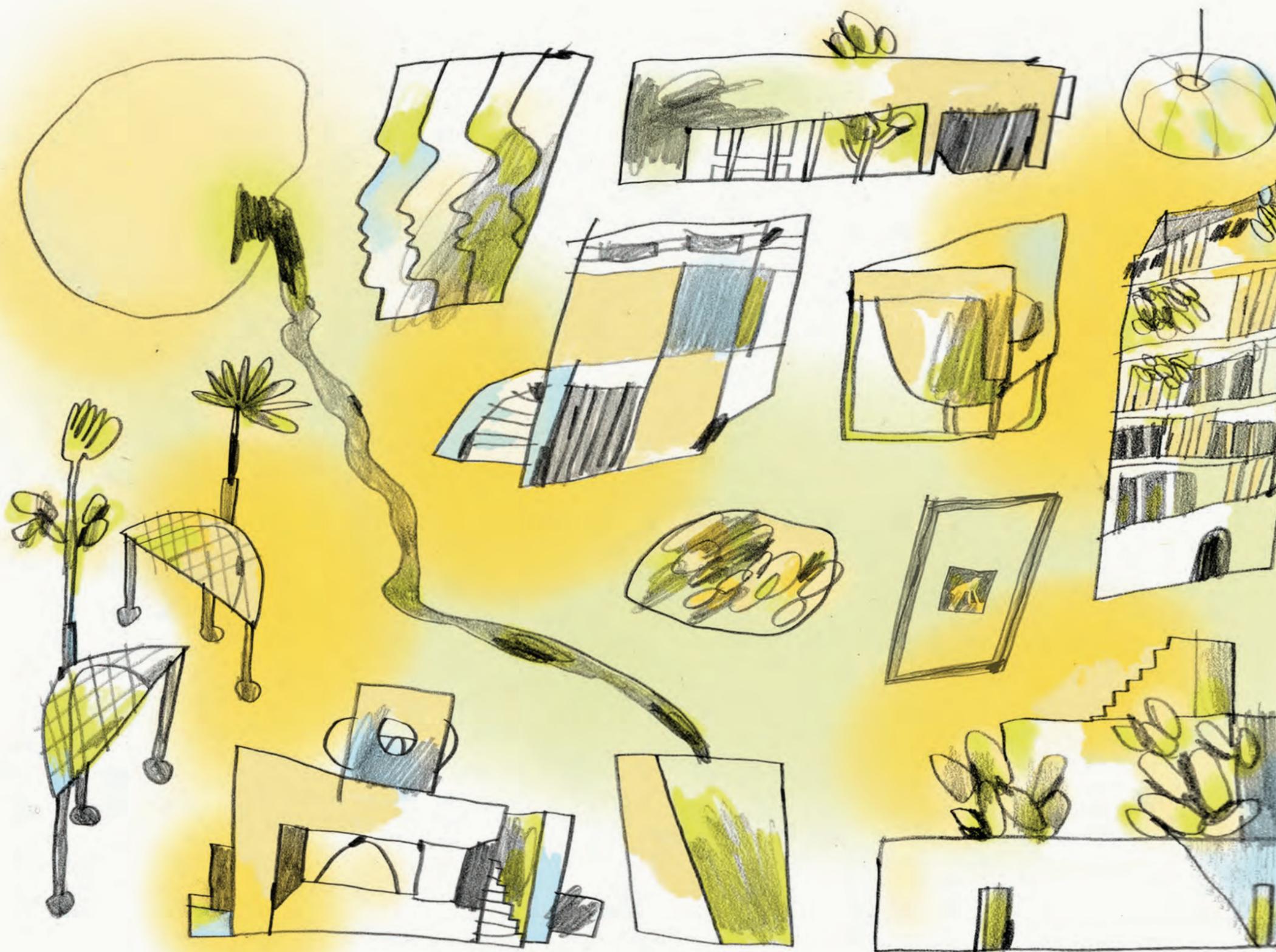
# Design's Dynamic Duo



One-time classmates, in 2014 Adam Charlap Hyman and Andre Herrero formed their New York and Los Angeles-based architecture and design practice, Charlap Hyman & Herrero. Its deeply considered, multivalent approach to spaces has won insider acclaim, including a place on the *Architectural Digest* AD100. For *Frieze Week*, Herrero—who recently joined the Frieze 91 committee—and Charlap Hyman jumped on the phone with Kat Herriman to discuss their work

Illustrations by Peony Gent

## INTERIORS

**KAT HERRIMAN**

**Do you think your backgrounds in architecture have affected the kind of designs you do?**

ADAM CHARLAP HYMAN

Certainly, that is a big factor in wanting to do ground-up projects. When I started getting into architecture studies, it felt right. But then when I got more myopic and did some furniture and sculpture courses, I realized that what I was most excited about were the things you could hold in your hand. Still, a strong appreciation for what architects are trying to do with space informs a lot of the design choices we make.

**KH What are your priorities?**

ACH I probably prioritize music-related projects, like the opera sets and residential interiors. I love it all though, really—people's kitchens and bathrooms, and even the way the closet works. I love trying to find the logic in the client's psychological approach to their house: what drives the things that they like.

ANDRE HERRERO

The projects that get me the most excited are the ones that are technically challenging, where you can't identify what the solution is right off the top and the answer comes through experimentation, through working. I love the larger, ground-up constructions, where we're making big architectural and structural moves that we haven't seen before.

We're working on a project in Mexico right now: this dystopic place on the beach. Building massive concrete structures very close to the water presents challenges that go beyond appearance. We're dealing with the soil testing, and just figuring out what the ground is made of has turned into a huge feat. And then you have to design it structurally—this place is going to be totally Whacko Jacko. It's super exciting.

**KH It feels, Andre, like you're battling the elemental and Adam is more about what is going on in everyone's heads?**

AH I'm a problem solver, I like figuring things out, but in terms of how I design, it's very much spatial and emotionally based. There's always a battle against the diagram, the thing that looks good. And it's always about imagining yourself walking through the space. How does it feel? That feeling is very important when it comes to interiors.

ACH There's something more rational, in the true sense of the word, about the type of thinking I have to do: finding a way of approaching the design of a closet, for example. How do these people get dressed in the morning? Clients don't necessarily know how they want every design. So, they're coming into a discussion about laying out the room that their kid will grow up in, and the conversation becomes about what kind of kid they want to raise. It's a very specific line of thought that is different to conceptualizing a building.

AH I can come across as very technical when I design, this rigid character who just knows how to get things built. But when I'm in my sandbox, playing and trying to figure out what the thing should be, it's a totally different, emotional process. I can switch it, and Adam has that same ability. He's technical, practical and considers the function, but at the same time, he goes into his world and designs and creates. I think that's why we work well together.

ACH We've also learned a lot from each other in terms of approach. Andre has taught me about thinking through spaces and material relationships: the way that light affects an interior and space is informed by place. We've absorbed many lessons from each other, which by osmosis have become part of the ethos of the firm and the people who work with us. We often overlap

in our approach and most of our team is quite versatile, thinking at different scales. It's extremely fun to work with architects on designing a lampshade or another object and, vice versa, to have somebody in our office contribute to the design of the facade of a large, industrial rehabilitation project.

AH And, on the other hand, it's important that the architects in our office do not try to architect everything. One of the things that architects do wrong is they try to construct this whole entire world, and then the place just looks like an architect's house. And it loses a bit of soul when that happens.

ACH An early bonding moment was when you were showing me books with all these structures you love, by these obscure, amazing architects, and I was losing my goddamn mind, thinking that the one thing that's wrong with these places is the furniture. And we said: if we could just make nice buildings and put cool furniture in them, maybe we'd have a firm. That's all we're trying to do, really.

**KH Something about your firm feels related to movies, theater and film; I feel like you both live your lives cinematically, but in very different genres.**

AH That's interesting. We love movies.

ACH We appreciate the totality of the experience of watching a film: how you can be absorbed into a complete world. Movies do that extremely well—and so can a building. It's an experiential endeavor.

AH It goes back to emotional spaces: in a way, films can choreograph how we feel. Even if a building has a different effect on people because there's less elements to work with—no music, no overt narrative—some of the ideas that went into that space might have derived from what we felt when observing other worlds created by other people.

## INTERIORS



**ACH** Yes, and this idea of world-building is essential to the relationship between architecture and interiors in our firm. Our goal is always to create a legible space that makes a complete gesture. That's what struck us when we were looking at those architecture books: it was so disappointing to see these amazingly well-conceived projects that fall short in one aspect, which punctures the entire thing and deflates it. I would say that trying to not have any leaks in what we're doing is at the center of this whole practice—would you agree, Andre?

**AH** Yes, but I don't think we put that much pressure on ourselves: the idea of no leaks. We sometimes find joy in the leaks and make them bigger, make a chaotic moment that allows us to create something new.

**ACH** There are things that are confusing in a good way, and we relish those moments, but there are also moments when we fight against the conditions of a given project. We're fighting to complete a vision in its entirety and it's hard because, sometimes, you need to compromise on certain elements; projects are often defined by these compromises and how you've structured them to your advantage.

**KH** Do you think that this auteur framework is why your firm often works on gallery exhibitions and the homes of people in the art world?

**ACH** On the one hand, it relates to our interest in the art world and in the work of artists.

**AH** We're academically raised as artists. That's a big part of it.

**ACH** We're relatively well-equipped to understand what an artist may be trying to do with their work, which can help us make a space that complements, enhances or clarifies their practice.

We also understand some of the questions the artists are asking, which we also ask in our work.

**AH** We're empathetic and can get into artists' heads a little bit and understand what they're trying to tackle, even if they might not be good at verbalizing it themselves. By speaking in a design language, we can really connect. We love the prompts that artists give us.

**ACH** We have a different approach but can make something that responds well, which is extremely fun. This idea of empathy is important to us and a big part of our process in working with clients—it touches on the psychological aspect that we were talking about before, but it's also part of any good collaboration. We work with artists to create spaces, but we also commission artworks, artistic furniture and design pieces; that comes out of a real joy, that everyone in our firm gets, from seeing and learning from the way someone else approaches things.

**KH** Following on from the idea of interiors and emotions, what has it been like for you to work on a hotel? To me, such projects seem to be at a different level, because of how many people's journeys you have to manage at once.

**ACH** For both of the hotel projects we're working on, we're lucky to have been hired by extremely creative people. There is someone coming to each commission with a distinct point of view, who is asking us and the hospitality industry questions that, when answered, seem to tie together a lot of hotels and hotel experiences. They have both been very stimulating and meaningful, which is funny because I had assumed that it might be a little boring because you have to create the same thing over and over again. We've been pleasantly surprised and taken aback by how challenging—in a good way—these projects have been.

**AH** It's exciting because this is the first time that we will be able to create an intimate space that is someone's home for just one night. It's like architectural cosplay. It's not someone's home and

they're curating it—we're working with them and it's exactly how they want.

**ACH** Yes, the ephemeral nature of the experience that we're creating has been liberating.

**KH** Hotels are like this special suspension of life.

**AH** And we're doing some unconventional things because, hey, it's just for one night.

**KH** What you can commit to for a night is totally different from what you can commit to for a lifetime.

**AH** Yes, you're not going to get married to that hotel room.

**KH** You get to play in the "fuck" category of "Fuck, Marry, Kill?"—in an architectural sense.

**AH** That's a great way to put it.

*Kat Herriman is a writer and creative director of Cultured. She lives in New York, USA.*

*Adam Charlap Hyman and Andre Herrero are co-founders of Charlap Hyman & Herrero, an architecture and design practice based in New York, USA, and Los Angeles, USA. The practice was selected for the 2017 Chicago Architecture Biennial and received the America Institute of Architects' Los Angeles Emerging Practice Award in 2020. Charlap Hyman & Herrero was included on Architectural Digest's AD100 and AN Interior's Top 50 lists. Herrero is a member of the Frieze 91 committee. Visit: [ch-herrero.com](http://ch-herrero.com)*

*Frieze 91 is a membership program, guided by an international committee of thought leaders and designed to deepen members' passion for art, connecting them to the most exciting artists of today and masters of the past. Frieze 91 members enjoy curator-led tours of acclaimed institutional exhibitions all year round, as well as first VIP access to Frieze fairs, exclusive content and offers, and more. Recent and forthcoming events include a studio visit with artist Alex Olson in Los Angeles, a private tour of the Cy Twombly Foundation in New York, a behind-the-scenes tour of "Lee Alexander McQueen: Mind, Mythos, Muse" at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and a private tour of "In America: An Anthology of Fashion" at the Met's Costume Institute in New York, led by associate curator Jessica Rega. To apply for membership, visit [frieze.com/frieze91](http://frieze.com/frieze91) or email [frieze91@frieze.com](mailto:frieze91@frieze.com)*