

LEGENDS AT WORK

What makes someone—or something—a legend? We ventured around the globe, from London and Amsterdam to São Paulo and New York, to find out. In the following eight stories, we tap the mind behind one of the most successful luxury brands in the world, investigate what made a particular sofa era-defining, sit down with one of the most prolific architects working today, profile an iconic American company on the verge of a creative resurgence, and examine other distinguished design authorities impacting the world in immeasurable ways. The details of their success stories may vary, but all of them, through their own strong, unmistakable visions, have risen above the pack.

ZAHA HADID

PIET BOON

KNOLL

TOMAS MAIER

ILSE CRAWFORD

LIGNE ROSET'S TOGO

LEON KRIER

FERNANDO AND
HUMBERTO CAMPANA



Piet Boon

One of the most accomplished designers working in the Netherlands prepares to open his largest project in New York City.

Amsterdam-based designer Piet Boon may have the youthful charm of someone at the outset of his career, but the 55-year-old is in fact an industry veteran who started his design practice 30 years ago. Boon hasn't always been a designer, though: He began as a contractor, but over time found himself pining for a more creative—and comprehensive—approach to commissions. In 2008, Boon sold his contracting company and shifted his focus to designing full time. These days, the brand that bears his name is a full-service firm. Boon himself runs the studio, which is responsible for clean-lined custom interior and exterior projects ranging from a private residential resort in South Korea to golf-club villas in South Africa. His partner, Karin Meyn, who leads his firm's styling department, is his creative director and business collaborator. Boon also designs an eponymous furniture collection and collaborates with high-end manufacturers such as Maretti, Tulp, and NLXL. He's even developed a line of limited-edition cars for Land Rover. Currently, Boon is finishing up what may be his most ambitious project yet—in Manhattan, at least: Huys, a 58-unit condo in a historic building on Park Avenue, set to welcome its first residents by the end of the year. Luxury can be a tough sell in today's economically conscious times, but Boon still believes in the power of ultra-high-end beauty. For him, it's an outlook that appears to be working.

Has your background as a contractor influenced your design work?

Yes. A lot of architects just make a simple sketch, and then at the end you see little mistakes. Because I was a craftsman, I'm always looking at the details. I'm always thinking about where to start and where to finish.

How did you know that becoming a full-time designer was the right move?

I got a little frustrated making things that were not always well thought out, so I started to design myself. As we grew bigger and bigger, design became more important for me than the building. I couldn't handle it anymore, so I sold it and put everything on design. Most of my first projects were interiors, little villas, kitchens—those kinds of things—all around Holland. It's such a small country!

Has it been difficult to simultaneously maintain your vision and expand your reach over the past three decades?

About eight or nine years ago, I did a huge apartment on Fifth Avenue in New York, and I realized that it was still very important for me to be involved in all these projects—the clients needed to see my face. But we were growing and growing, and it was not possible to send Piet Boon to everything, so we made a new company profile. It's my name, but now it's a complete brand, with 45 employees. That helps a lot—we can do so many more projects. And we have a very clear portfolio and website, so it's easy. People who are coming to us know what to expect. We also listen very well. I'm not trying to make their home my home.

What are the biggest changes you've seen in the industry over the years?

Technology has improved so much. Sound, lighting, and heating systems have really evolved. We've made things a little lighter and brighter, but the lines and the feeling of symmetry, those are still there.

Your work sits squarely on the side of luxury. Have you seen attitudes toward indulgence shift?

Of course. People are more closely watching what's going out of their wallet, but a lot of people would rather have something really good and really high-end. Quality is one of the most important things, in my opinion. And we've got a total range of clients, but most of them aren't coming from old money; they've made their own companies, and I like to listen to how they did it. It's always something different.

Tell me about Huys. What was your approach?

A lot of the apartments from various developers feel a bit like a hotel, with a long hallway and plain door to your room. We tried to change that. Huys was a historic office building, a beautiful building, but the windows started at three feet high. The good thing about this was we were able to do something on the exterior—we made floor-to-ceiling steel window frames that pop in and pop out and add a lot of texture. On the inside, all the lighting fixtures are special, from Dutch designers, and we're working with Royal Tichelaar [the country's oldest ceramics factory] to make some pieces as well. Even the doors will each have a small bronze object from a Dutch artist and a handmade number. The most important thing is the personality. People will feel like it's their home. In my opinion, there are no mistakes in the building. It's very clever, it's very strong. When it gets older, it will get more beautiful.

Were there any challenges specific to building in New York City as opposed to, say, in Europe?

So many codes! That was the most important but also most difficult thing for us to learn.

You've done commissions all over the world. Apart from more technical aspects, how do you approach new projects?

I'm traveling so much, and I get a lot of inspiration by seeing the flow and feeling of these different places. We try to study how the people live, the way they think, and then design for the culture and environment. For instance, in the Caribbean, where I've done a lot of work, a lot of houses were completely closed because of the air conditioning. The beach is very easy for me because I'm a bit of a beach boy. I like kite surfing, and I like the ocean. We design in a way that works with natural cooling, with an open living room where you can regulate the wind, so you can smell and see and feel the sea. A holiday house should be easy; there shouldn't be any maintenance. We get a lot of stuff from the island, then integrate it. That way, they don't need the carpenter to repair everything.

In your journeys, have you found that attitudes toward design vary around the world?

I'm sure Europe is much more open to design, but we bring a Dutch way of thinking to all our projects. A loft in New York will be completely different from a loft in South Korea, but when people look at our drawings, for them it's European.

Your partner, Karin Meyn, works with you in your studio. What's your work relationship like?

I once had a guy ask: "You work together? And you like that?" It actually works very well because she's got her own department in the company, and I've got my own department. Our styling department works with everything inside that moves, from curtains to tables to tableware to kitchenware. It's one of our most important parts, because it means we can completely finish a house. I'm always very happy with it because she comes in and makes a project complete. She makes it really beautiful.

Who are your personal legends of design?

I really love Tadao Ando. He's my biggest hero. I also love Studio Job. And many years ago, I looked very much to—of course—Philippe Starck. He's also a hero of mine. I've seen everything he's done. When we were selected to do the Delano Hotel in Vegas, I looked at how he did his in Miami, because we had to come up with something completely different. **S**

A home by Piet Boon at the Oak Valley golf and ski resort in South Korea. (OPPOSITE) A model of the exterior of Boon's Huys condo project—located on Park Avenue in Manhattan and welcoming its first residents later this year—on a table in his firm's Amsterdam office. (PREVIOUS SPREAD) Boon in his office.



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