

Karl Fournier & Olivier Marty, Studio KO

Although these French architects' large-scale projects have taken them across multiple continents, they still maintain their studio's esprit de corps.

With offices split across Paris, London and Marrakech, Studio KO's architectural style encompasses stark simplicity and quirky opulence. By fusing their traditional design backgrounds with Moroccan influences, Karl Fournier and Olivier Marty create vibrant interior and exterior experiences with an abundance of warmth and a dash of eccentricity. They work across everything from "abstraction to architecture" and devise both private and public spaces for clients throughout Europe, Northern Africa and the Americas. They speak to us about how everything they do is influenced by partnership: between cities, between styles, between clients and between each other.

What is your view on longevity in design?
— *Karl (right):* We think that following our path without trying to foresee the future will make our designs durable in the decades to come.

How have you learned to balance a client's wants and needs with maintaining your own creative edge?
— *Olivier (left):* We often say that a great idea is not the average of everyone's good ideas. On the other hand, projects involving the owners' suggestions and considerations are often the best ones. We always start by forming a strong conceptual statement for each project and constantly refer back to it.

How is it different designing for a private individual (for a home or apartment) versus designing for public audiences (for boutiques and hotels)?
— *Karl:* Private residential projects have a major ingredient that enriches the process: the client—their obsessions, taboos, fears and dreams. When it comes to public projects where we don't necessarily know the audience, we often create a narrative that envisions a specific story for characters within the space. That helps us make the project alive and vibrant.

What are some design tricks that encourage us to interact with one another?
— *Olivier:* People from different backgrounds share architectural objects around them, and they experience them from different perspectives. It's amazing to notice how a room can suddenly become full of friends just because you added soft pillows, or how there's always an exciting energy where the drinks are located at a party.

How important is it to retain the history of the space you're working with? Why?
— *Karl:* When we work on existing buildings, we always start from the "bones" of the building. We feel that this process of archeology is essential: We put the rip-out on hold until we have surveyed all the little details that define the architectural language.



PHOTOGRAPH: NOEL MANALI



PHOTOGRAPH: DAN GLASSER

Above: Nestled in the Atlas Mountains near Marrakech, the clay-covered walls and clean lines of Studio KO's Villa K pay tribute to both historical and contemporary design. With offices in Paris, London and Morocco, partners Karl Fournier and Olivier Marty spend a lot of time exploring this exotic location.

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What is your relationship with the natural world when you are designing constructs within it? — *Olivier:* For the Villa E [one of a series of lodges built in the foothills of the Atlas Mountains in Morocco], we focused on the solar orientation and the relationship with its location. We used mainly local resources such as stone that was directly extracted from the soil. It probably explains how immediate and natural the house now looks in its beautiful surroundings.

Your designs often mix opulent and quirky elements with stark simplicity. What is the key to achieving the perfect balance of both? — *Karl:* We choose an object for the power it has and its significance. Not, “Ah, it’s pretty—the color will match well...”

How are your personalities portrayed through the work you do? — *Olivier:* We use a wide range of languages for our projects. But what remains constant is the attitude, which is what defines us. There are also probably some major elements of our personalities that appear in the architecture; sincerity could be one of them.

Why did you decide to open an office in Marrakech? How has this choice influenced the aesthetic of your work? — *Olivier:* It happened by chance through an amazing French Moroccan—we started off as clients, and we then became close friends. A few years or so after that, we were offered our first commission there, and it all happened very quickly. We built an incredible network in Morocco: Hermès, Agnelli, Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé. But above all, it allowed us to discover the strength of the local

craftsmanship and gave us the desire to emphasize that craft as a key element of our work. There is a much stronger common root between Eastern and Western design than what you would expect. Gradually, some professional relationships have even turned into friendships.

What have you learned from your time spent in Marrakech that you have applied to your personal life? — *Olivier:* In Marrakech, there’s a different approach to time and a certain distance that makes you realize that there’s a solution for everything.

How important is a sense of humor in your line of work? — *Karl:* It’s compulsory! Even if it’s hard, we should never take ourselves too seriously—starting with the atmosphere at the office. We have a project to collect all the jokes that our staff make while working.

What are the advantages of working with your partner? — *Karl:* There is a constant support that comes from love—it makes the duet much stronger than solely being business partners. Satisfaction and reward come at the same moment. Sharing the creation of architectural objects inspires a very strong feeling, almost like having children—however, that will not prevent us from also having kids of our own one day!

How have you learned where to push and pull depending on each other’s talents? — *Olivier:* It’s a complex issue that’s never completely solved. It moves—like a living body—and the moments when both of us are equally sharing involvement and creativity are precious. **GFK**