

LOREN

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Loren Daye, founder of Studio LOVEISENOUGH, on connection, clean slates and anti-novelty.



@lorendaye @studioloveisenough

Eighteen months ago, the ground floor of Ducie Street Warehouse was a building site, a cavernous space punctuated only by steel columns and the occasional construction worker. Its transformation, into the intimate, interlinked spaces of CULTUREPLEX, seemed impossible. There aren’t many who’d have approached its interior design without a flicker of fear, or who wouldn’t have fallen back on the usual warehouse tropes: bare brick, glazed tiles, exposed ceilings. Yet while it has all of the above, Ducie Street Warehouse sits apart from its Manchester neighbours, a building both of the city and removed from it - a concept achieved by interior architect Loren Daye, founder of New York studio, LOVEISENOUGH.

DAYE

While her route into interiors was unusual, there’s a kind of perfect logic to it. Loren’s father was a professor of Buddhist Studies, “a specialism so niche he was called on across the world”. Loren often went with him, living in India as a baby, spending time on a ship as a five-year-old, moving to Norfolk when she was twelve. As formative experiences go, it left her with an enthusiasm for the unfamiliar. “It’s fascinating to work in places where I haven’t grown up, learning about the culture of cities I don’t call home. It’s the most seductive thing,” she says. More than that, though, it’s given her a particular approach: “I go into a new city with no assumptions at all; I start every project with a clean slate. It keeps the energy alive, this sense that there’s something new in every project we work on.”

The clean slate works in other ways. “One of my colleagues, Eric Cheong, and I agreed that in order to survive long-running projects, that take years to complete, where we’re not in control of all the decisions, we have to have something like emotional amnesia. Every night, we reset.” Even so, the constraints of the Grade I-listed Ducie Street Warehouse kept her up at night. “We weren’t allowed to touch the steel columns. We couldn’t even put a sleeve around them, or have the joinery touch them. Their scale was so vast it was like renovating a bridge. It’s an intense building,” says Loren. “It brought a lot of colour - orange, red, the terracotta of the brick - and colours that aren’t neutral. The structural steel had to be a baby blue. While I love colour, there’s a lot of neutrality and tonality in what I do, but all that given colour took the pressure off. It gave me permission to be calmer, gentler.”

While Loren acknowledges a visual link between some of her projects, she makes no play for a signature style. “Interiors these days are all about contrast, juxtaposition and visual stimulus. We try to take a more measured approach, that’s more tonal, more subtle. It’s anti-novelty,” she says. “So, it’s about building spaces for people, connecting with the people who will use those spaces, because whatever you create will end up playing a part in their lives.”

Loren, it has to be said, has form. Her work sits at the intersection of architecture, interior design and public space. Over the past ten years she’s developed projects for organisations as diverse as the Tadao Ando-designed Fabrica and Atelier Ace. Her role as Creative Director for the latter saw her work on Ace Hotels across the world, including London - which in turn introduced her to Pablo Flack and David Waddington, the pair behind Bistrottheque, Hoi Polloi and, now, CULTUREPLEX. “We had an incredible time making decisions for Hoi Polloi,” she says. “It was a very fruitful period, and it made me want to do more work in the UK.”

For all her success, Loren Daye came to design almost by accident. She read Chinese Studies at university, only applying to study interior design after a friend suggested it (“I didn’t even know what it meant to go to design school.”). She ended up working in high-end residential interiors, an experience that gave her a deep understanding of materials and finish, and how they can create character just as much as architecture or lighting. Residential led to retail, in turn leading to hotels, and to long periods spent travelling and living away from home (she spent a year in Shoreditch, for example, working on Ace Hotel London).

It follows that Loren’s next few projects - a self-initiated wellness project, a neighbourhood café - are US-based, smaller in scale, and give more opportunity to explore those ideas of connection and community. That’s not to say she isn’t looking to return to the UK. “It was gift to work on a building like Ducie Street Warehouse, a building of that scale in an urban landscape, with those relentless columns,” she says. “Paired with the challenges of a listed building and the need to understand a new city, it’s one of the most exciting spaces I’ve worked on.”