



COMMUNE

The founding of Commune—the West Hollywood-based design firm that, in five short years, has become one of the hottest names in the field, with a portfolio that includes residential interiors, shops, a restaurant, a hotel and sundry “branding” strategies—could make a good setup for a movie. Four friends (two New Yorkers, two Angelenos), all with quirky and seemingly incongruent tastes, get to brainstorming and, before you can say, “Hey! My dad’s got a barn,” a studio is born. And the Andy Hardy reference makes some sense. Commune principals Pamela Shamshiri and her brother, Ramin, worked in production design for films and commercials; principals Roman Alonso and Steven Johanknecht met at Barneys in Manhattan, where they handled, respectively, public relations and store display. More important, there is surprise

and drama in Commune’s work. Describing one project, Johanknecht calls it “theatrical, surreal, humorous and collected,” but he could be talking about the firm’s otherwise unclassifiable designs. In one house, they mixed an assortment of mounted deer heads and antlers with sleek modernist furniture. They placed mannequins in a giant gilded birdcage in a Juicy Couture shop. They gave the rooms at the new Ace Hotel & Swim Club in Palm Springs a hippie-campground vibe, with low beds, flowing canvas curtains and free-edge wooden furniture.

Johanknecht considers the principals’ varied viewpoints to be Commune’s greatest strength. “We don’t dictate a style,” he says. “We call ourselves image therapists—you try to get inside the mind of a client so that a look comes together organically.” Freud would approve. —GREG CERIO

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