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CAN \$ 6.00 Volume 2 // Issue 3
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FARMBOY FINE ARTS RURAL BRAND OF DESIGN GOES GLOBAL

“FARMBOY” MIGHT SOUND LIKE AN UNLIKELY NAME for a design company that produces site-specific decorative art pieces for the hospitality industry, but then that was the idea. The self-reference to rural, workaday roots creates an immediate conversation piece and lends Farmboy Fine Arts a little mystery and a lot of brand recognition.

The brainchild of Todd Towers, who started the company in Calgary in 2000, Farmboy takes its name from Towers' art school nickname, and the fact that he grew up outside of Red Deer, Alberta on a working cattle ranch that has been in his family for five generations.

Farmboy's design work – and indeed Towers' personality – really has an authentic Canadian prairie feel: “I have derived a lot of my inspiration and vision for the company based on growing up in a rural environment devoid of distraction,” espouses Towers. “The ‘patch work’ topography that you see in freshly cut hay fields, the bent perspective of seeing the horizon uninterrupted by the city, this all contributes to a more formal or modernist approach to our contemporary design aesthetic: simple form, structure, line and composition.” This aesthetic allows them to connect with a certain genre of art and design work, especially 2-D work, and more specifically, illustration and photography.

Towers began his career as a painter (he has a degree in fine arts from the University of Calgary) doing mostly large-scale abstract pieces. Like many artists, however, he found the gallery world too narrow for wide exposure. He decided collaboration was the key and began working with other artists

to adorn spaces more frequented by the general public and Farmboy Fine Arts was born. Towers says that the niche market of producing art for boutique and high-end hotels and spas was not something he initially foresaw, “but after the dot-com crash and then September 11th, tech companies weren't seeing art and décor as their corporate priority, so we adapted,” reflects Towers. It was then that he shifted gears, set his sights on the hospitality industry, and initiated an entrepreneurial coup that is becoming a legendary Western Canadian success story.

Focusing on the chain of ultra cool W Hotels, Towers contacted the architects in New York who were doing work for the new W Hotel in Mexico City, and managed to secure an invitation for Farmboy to bid on artwork for 200 rooms. “With W, it was like preaching to the choir because they totally get it, they understand the importance of art. They really wanted to push the envelope of contemporary design, and that's great. It gave us an opportunity to do the kind of things we wanted to do: totally theme-based design and working closely with the architectural environment.” Although Farmboy was not awarded the entire contract, W commissioned certain specific pieces for the new hotel and asked Farmboy to bid on another, more ambitious W Hotel, this time in Seoul, South Korea. »



"I want to move forward, and new technology and collaborating with artists from around

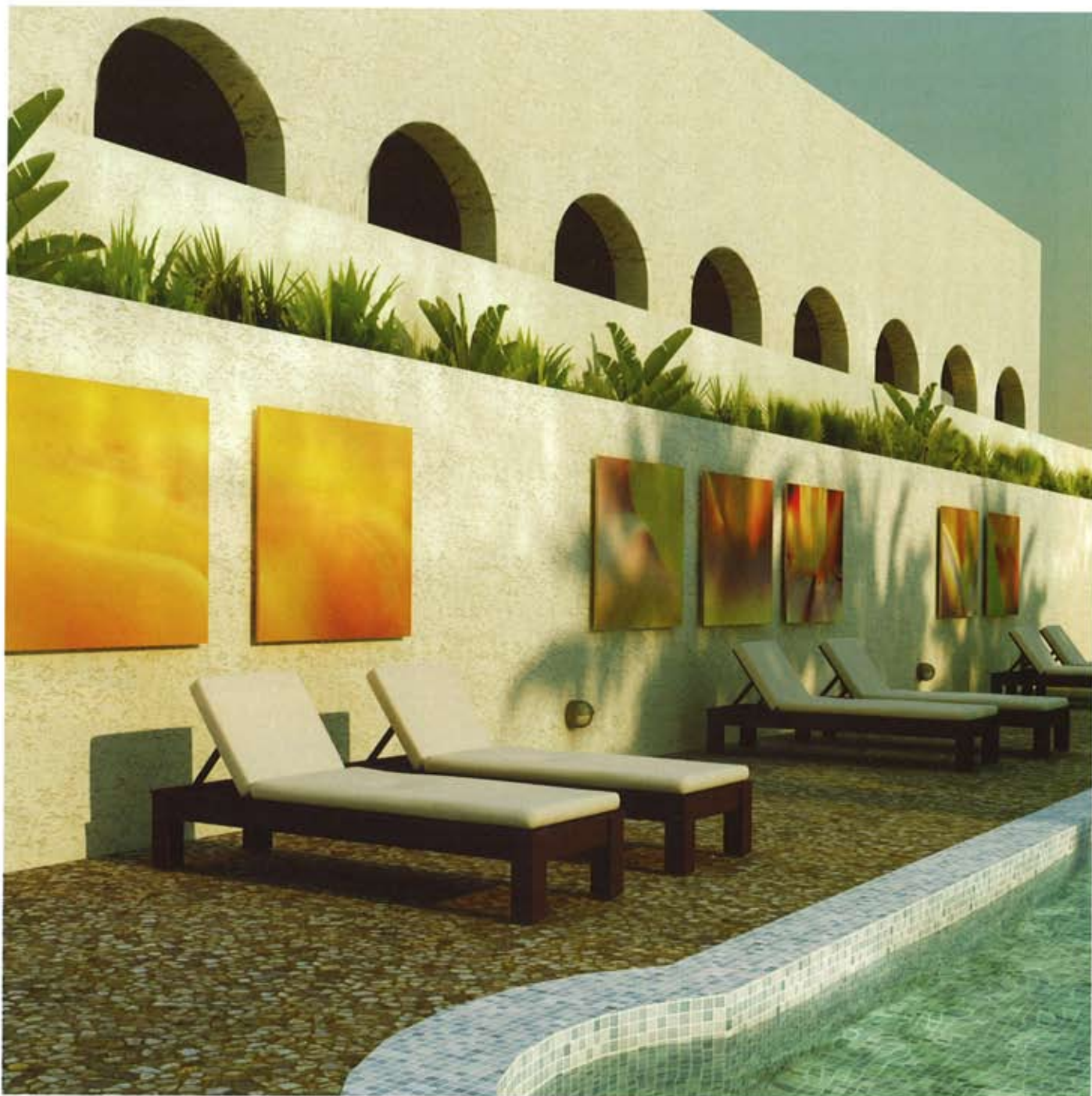


Above :: MIRA

Why not add spice and charm to simple mirrors? Farmboy transfers any graphic to any undorned mirror adding elegance and flare. Acrylic designed mirrors are an alternative to glass. MIRA is light weight and easy to install.

the world **always presents new ideas, inspirations** and manufacturing challenges.”

- TODD TOWERS



Above :: ADA - Acrylic Digital Art

Farmboy Fine Arts are pioneers in the field of ADA design work. The alternative to traditional framed photography, ADA designs are sleek, refined, and sharp. ADA has multiple uses including image specific designs adhered to a variety of surfaces such as sliding room dividers, furniture, design objects, and in backlit applications. A fabulous way to add colour, design and warmth to your space.



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Above :: SADA

This extremely durable art medium is perfect for headboards, corridors, or any high traffic public area. SADA is one of our most versatile art mediums and can be cut into any shape or size specific to your requirements. SADA's superior material is dent and scratch resistant and passes the fire test criteria of UL 94V-0 and UL 94-5V.

As W's first Asian property, the design possibilities were wide open and Farmboy was intent on making their mark. Taking a gamble, Towers decided to fly to Korea on his own dime to meet with the hotel's general manager. "He took me through the hotel, which was still under construction, and showed me the three model suites. I got invited to a board meeting, and I walked in and here was the whole team sitting around the board table. So I introduced myself and pitched Farmboy and our ideas for the hotel to them," Towers laughs. His hubris paid off because Farmboy was awarded the bid and in the end was responsible for almost 1,500 pieces, including art for the common areas and at least one piece for all 300 rooms. With only two months to execute the hotel's order, Farmboy found themselves immediately launched into the industry.

Farmboy's approach to decorative art defines contemporary: From backlit acrylic digital art to laser cut mirrors, the team uses advances in technology to develop new media in which to express their aesthetic vision. Collaboration is an essential ingredient and Towers is constantly procuring art from other major centres. "The design is done in-house and the content comes from artists and photographers all over the world. When we find a piece that is in keeping with our aesthetic, we license that work exclusively to us and our clients, and then we build productions around that." Farmboy is "trans-disciplinary" as it partners with manufacturers as well as designers, producing pieces in a number of media for virtually any space.

Last year Towers moved the company from Calgary to Vancouver's historic Gastown and added partners Tim McCool (who also grew up in Red Deer) and Tim Gudewill, as well as a team of nine designers and project assistants.

Looking to the future, Farmboy has no shortage of ambition. Their upcoming projects include a large Times Square hotel open-

ing in New York, and they are discussing plans to open new offices – perhaps in Miami, where Towers sees a wealth of Latin influences and a gateway to the growing hospitality market of Latin America. And then of course there is the dream project: Farmboy's own brand of boutique hotels.

When asked his opinion on how Western Canadian design is advancing on the world stage, Towers believes that Canadians are becoming much more recognized in the world of design for a few reasons: "We are popping up in key art and design leadership positions around the world. Also, we have some very well respected product designers and architects in Canada who are developing world-class products, as well as green-based design and LEED certified architecture. We really have a distinctive voice and its momentum is growing every day. I think that traditionally we have been our own worst enemies in terms of second guessing our own talent pool. As we become more global due to technology, our accessibility and the respect for our work have been building. Our aesthetic is becoming more recognized and understood by the world around us and more importantly, by ourselves."

And what of something closer to home and returning to his roots on the family's Alberta ranch? "My dad still runs the farm. One day I will take over and have a presence there, but that won't stop me from continuing Farmboy. I love being back on the ranch, where I can decompress and keep things simple." 