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# THE FARMBOYS

You don't have to be born in a barn to decorate glamorous hotels around the world, but it sure helps, writes **Sarah Bancroft**.



**FARMBOYS**  
Todd Towers (left)  
and Tim McCool

**I**t makes no sense to anyone in Calgary," says Farmboy Fine Arts founder Todd Towers of the company name. "But it's a huge icebreaker in New York."

"It opens doors. People are curious," adds Farmboy number two, Tim McCool. Two years ago, he was making 100 cold calls a week. Today, as he alternates between squeezing a stress ball and twirling a paper sunflower behind a desk at their 19th-floor Vancouver offices, he presides over an incessantly ringing phone and a dry-erase board detailing more than 75 international hotel projects currently on the go—none of them in Vancouver.

From working the Towers family cattle ranch in Red Deer, Alberta, to taking calls from Yves Saint Laurent and Philippe Starck—it's not so far-fetched a

leap when you consider the Farmboys' unassuming charm, corn-fed good looks and self-proclaimed agrarian working model (come on, folks, let's raise this barn! Er, luxury hotel).

Towers (the art boy, 33, a former model) and McCool (the business boy, 32) work with what they call a community of West Coast artists, industrial designers, architects and photographers to shape their identifiable brand of Zen art, most of which is nature-based and digitally rendered. They have created images of orchids for Bliss 49 spa in New York, built a mobile for the lobby of W Hotel San Francisco and are working with Calgary fashion designer Paul Hardy on spa robes for W's tropical locations. The Farmboys are also designing art for the new W Hotel Maldives, the forthcoming Hotel London, and the Westin at Times Square. In projects spanning from Las Vegas to Singapore to Montreal, they see their job as completing the mood and environment: "We're the lipstick and the earrings," explains McCool, using an unlikely metaphor for a pair of straight men.

Towers describes their beginnings as "guerrilla ghetto": jumping in a van and driving to hotel purchasing offices in San Francisco, and flying to Seoul unannounced with a hand-stitched canvas feed bag of artwork. But things are getting decidedly slicker around the farmyard. They're migrating to a huge new Gastown office space, where a music division will create original soundscapes for their projects. They've begun sending Vancouver photographers up in hot-air balloons to capture images of local flora for California projects, and they are bidding on the Aloft chain, W's new diffusion brand, with 500 hotels slated by 2012. Soon there will be Farmboy furniture, such as photographic light box tables, at retail. But true to their roots, the Farmboys still present their art proposals in feed bags—though Towers no longer stitches each one by hand. □



W Hotel Seoul's Executive Guest Suite (above) and the Presidential Suite