



WARREN SHEETS



## The Revolutionary Design Vision of Warren Sheets

By: Susan Kime | Posted: Nov. 2nd, 2011

### Photo Courtesy of Warren Sheets Collection

Warren Sheets is an awards-winning architectural and interior designer whose creative processes move in multiple areas. One of his most significant projects to date combines many of the exterior architectural features and all of the interior designs of The Grand Del Mar Resort in Del Mar, California. As a corollary to this project, he also designed its award-winning restaurant, Addison, and the Villas — wholly owned and fractional residences — at The Grand Del Mar.

### His company, Warren Sheets Design

is well known both nationally and internationally, as he has designed many other hotels, private estates, country clubs, an antique car salon and museum in Florida, urban townhomes, and recently a 57-million-dollar mansion on 13 acres above The Pelican Hill Resort in Newport Beach, California.

With a luxury pedigree like this, one would assume his design vision and identity might be of extreme over-the-top conspicuous opulence and largesse. But rather, his vision combines threads of authenticity and legacy, creating a tapestry of deeply considered ideas that have translated well into the overall life design goals of his clients.

I recently spoke with Mr. Sheets about his very different vision and mission in the world of contemporary design.

**JustLuxe:** What are the components of your design vision, especially your feeling about permanence?

**Warren Sheets:** Well, I think we live in a culture of consumption, of instant gratification, eating, living and doing in the fast lane, of quantity over quality, of multi-tasking, doing many things all quickly, doing few things well. We don't take time anymore, and usually, time takes us. So, there are many who believe that slowness in this peculiar cultural moment is revolutionary.

The slow food movement is one of its dimensions, defining a revolutionary culinary stance. But it can also be said that the idea of design permanence, of heirloom, and of authenticity, may also be the result of slowness. Taking time, and caring to find the right design element, the perfect fit, color, that will enhance permanence and legacy while diminishing the transitory.

**JustLuxe:** How did these ideas coalesce when you were asked to do the design work for The Grand Del Mar?

**Warren Sheets:** I was given a magnificent blank slate to work from. When I came onto the project, I was allowed an amazing amount of design freedom, and I knew from the outset, a resort of this magnitude is singular, unusual, and a visionary project that had the ability to create a profound experience of elegant European authenticity for the guest, through the permanence of its design components.



THE GRAND DEL MAR ENTRANCE



LOBBY, THE GRAND DEL MAR



DETAIL, ROSETTE ON DOOR



DETAIL, HAND CUT STONE WORK



DETAIL, HAND CARVED AND LAID POOL TILE

**JustLuxe:** Let me know which design components at The Grand Del Mar you see defining your design vision, and are most compelling and complex, authentic, permanent and beautiful!

**Warren Sheets:** Well, there are three details I love most, and all of them have stories. First are our Interior Doors. It was important to me and my partner, Sharon Regan, as both designers and artists, to be able to give back much of what we absorbed through our nearly 30-year education in European Art history. So, inasmuch as The Grand Del Mar is open to the public, I wanted to make certain that the guest experience — whomever walked through the Entry, Galleries and Public Spaces of The Grand Del Mar, would receive a sensory feel of being in a fine European hotel, and a fine European design gallery, also. With both these ideas, I wanted to carry out my commitment to both authenticity and permanence, by showcasing the decorative arts of Europe. This became one of my most important objectives I gave to this project.

To that end, I purposefully instilled many distinct decorative elements throughout the project, that are genuine reflections of Western cultural history. Two of these elements are seen in the design of the interior doors I designed that are specific to this project, the first being three different wood finishes: Aged Walnut, Antique Rosewood and Butternut.

The second interior door element was to use the Rosette in each of the ten antique rosewood door panels — the Rosette is a historic European motif borne out of French architecture. Spending a great deal of time in Italy and France, I have been intrigued by the Rosette and its integration into classical architecture. I remember seeing the Rosette design used in the magnificent domed ceilings of the Pazzi Chapel inside the monastery courtyard of Santa Croce, in Florence, Italy.

Because of its recurrence in and around European gardens, architectural structures, interior detailing, furniture, fabrics, clothing, emblems, graphics, food decoration, and so much more, it was unquestionably important that that the Rosette form, be firmly entrenched into the design of this resort. And, 5,648 rosettes, 1,230 gallons of painting materials later and more than 8,300 man hours later, we had our doors. The second is our Italian Family. Serefino Menziatti, is a gentleman I have worked with now for more than twenty years. He was a comptroller of a design client of mine, who eventually came to work for us. It was he who introduced both me and my partner Sharon, to a family that he knew that lived in the northeastern part of Italy in a small town near Verona. They were exceptional carvers, stonecutters, and sculptors. They were extraordinary, and in all senses, authentic.

We began to import much of their work, which eventuated with our having imported more than ten million dollars in stone, fabricated in Italy from that four generation Veronese family. In fact, it this family — the great-grandfather, grandfather, father and son, and their small group of junior apprentices that made each and every stone element — the carved arches, stone fireplaces and inlays, carved medallions and more for The Grand Del Mar Resort. In addition, they provided all of the stone slab and stone tile materials for both the interior of the public areas, guest rooms, Villas and Addison Restaurant.

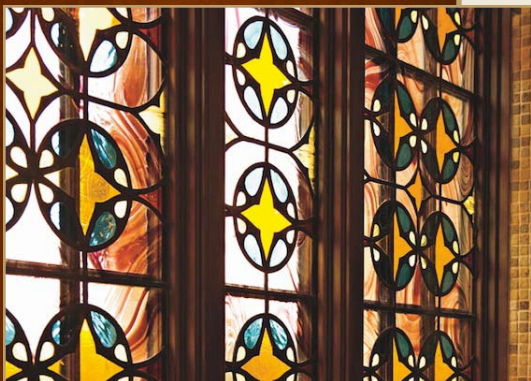




DETAIL, HAND PAINTED TILE



DETAIL, STAIRCASE SCROLLWORK,  
HANDPAINTED GOLD LEAF



DETAIL, CAPELLA WINDOWS

And most amazing? First, each column in the Resort (more than seventy) is a one complete vertical piece; they are not two halves that have been put together, and second, the medallions in the Lobby, Rotunda, Capella and the inlaid tiles at the Chapel are all hand carved and assembled. They were not created by computer. By hand, yes, by hand! Cut one piece at a time, by this four generation family. They and our design staff worked together to create objects that represented authenticity, grace, and most importantly, permanence.

And third, are our Hand-painted designs. While working on this project, I made a personal commitment to use artistic details and techniques that represent what is seen in architecture and buildings throughout Europe. One of those techniques incorporated hand painted designs on the walls and ceilings throughout the Public Areas, and in each of the Guest Rooms and Suites. However, the thought of using the over-popularized hand painted stencil designs on the walls and ceilings, was a concern. I wanted the work to be genuine, not look like a dime-a-dozen.

To this end, I did an extensive amount of research to locate authentic European hand painted designs that represented much of the wonderful hand painting seen in well known landmarks like the Chapel of Saint Theresa in Venice; or ceilings in the buildings found at the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence.

I was more than fortunate, to locate a company that had access and the rights to a motif library that contained many of the designs I was looking for. And karmically, the company was less than fifty miles away from The Grand Del Mar! Throughout the three year project, ultimately we used more than thirty-eight different designs from their collection — for each of which I painstakingly created a custom color palette. Toward the end of the project, I had created more than fifty-five different colors that were used in the many hand painted borders on the walls and ceilings.

**JustLuxe:** Do you think that the hand painting at The Grand Del Mar, in addition to all else, perfectly symbolized your commitment to permanence and authenticity?

**Warren Sheets:** Yes. I was determined that the hand painting at The Grand Del Mar be authentic and honest. But for all my design work at The Grand del Mar and elsewhere, I have adhered to the “measure twice, cut once” idea. What this means for me is I must conceptualize it, measure it, and see it in my head, knowing it fits, long before I ever suggest the idea to the client. To design with permanence and authenticity as goals, I work at creating design paths, and from those, the overall design identity of the project. My discipline is more of a calling than a job. I orchestrate the unheard, yet still deeply felt, design melodies as I go.

