

Missing, and Envyng, Cheryl Rowley

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A hospitality design pioneer closes up shop as she opens a new chapter.

By [Mary Scoviak](#)

After a 25-year career redefining hospitality design, Cheryl Rowley announced last week that she's closing **Cheryl Rowley Design** (CRD) in Beverly Hills. The timing was a surprise, but the decision wasn't. She said in an interview with *Hospitality Style* late in 2008, she felt ready to open a new chapter in her life for several years, but then the recession hit and all bets were off. She made it clear that she intended to stay on as head of the firm until the worst of the downturn was over, not only to complete the work on the boards but also to ensure that as many staff members as possible would retain their jobs, have a chance to build out their portfolios and map out their future career paths.

She might have been tempted to see the studio move further into the recovery, but personal tragedy intervened. "The recent and sudden deaths of two very dear friends was a huge reminder that life is very, very short. It made me seriously question the fact that I have been living apart from my family for the past five years," she said.

That kind of thinking is why both the hotel industry at large and the people in it will miss Rowley. When she had to cut staff during the downturn, she acknowledged it was one of the worst days of her professional life. She knew not only her employees, but their families, their hobbies, their vision. It's one reason she shied away from building a mega-firm. Certainly, she liked directing a manageable-sized enterprise. But, from the time she sat at her design table with her daughter playing a few feet away, that sense of family has been pervasive.

Rowley's never been afraid to speak her mind. She was all about colors, strong patterns and stripes when everyone was saying design had to be beige. Before sense of place was common sense, she was letting the environment inform the design—and that's as far back as the 1980s when she was working with Jim Northcutt and infused the Hotel Hana Maui with influences of the Hawaiian landscape. After launching her own firm, she brought a modern sort of luxury to **Four Seasons, The Ritz-Carlton, St. Regis, Rosewood and Mandarin Oriental** as well as collaborating with the **Kimpton Hotel and Restaurant Group** on the original designs for the hip young Monaco and Palomar brands.

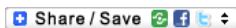
Rowley is also authentic. Having had the pleasure of working with her on a number of articles and specialty pieces on the firm, I came to appreciate her straightforwardness and her humor. She has a way of turning honesty into motivation, whether that's offered to a coworker or used to edit her own work. Every encounter is a two-way street. Rowley is both confident enough to know what she brings and smart enough to listen, learn and apply what she's learned. Like a handful of other top designers, she can look at every job from the point of view of the lender, operator and guest and tell you how the design responds to each one's needs.

"I am very, very grateful. I am grateful to have had the trust and respect of wonderful clients. I am grateful for the fantastic support of my peers and business associates and I am so deeply grateful to all of the many, many talented people who found a home at CRD," says Rowley.

Though she's made it clear she wants some downtime to be with her family on their home on Vancouver Island, to learn to weave and to lend some of her creative genius to her own surroundings, she's not ready to let go completely. A book is in the works as is a signature product line. She's hinted that she might be open to collaborations with other design professionals. Learning to weave is also on the agenda. "I'm a designer and I will always remain a designer - it's not just a job title; it's an intrinsic part of me and my life," she says. We all wish her the best.

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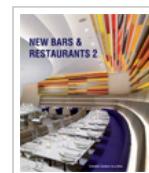
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