

ARTIST-DESIGNER COMBOS GIVE SKWACHÀYS LODGE A MAKEOVER

Posted by [John Thomson](#) on Friday, September 12, 2014 · [Leave a Comment](#)



Dream World Forest beds (Above)

Skwachàys Lodge, pronounced squatch eyes, a downtown residence and gallery administered by the [Vancouver Native Housing Society](#) is updating 18 of its suites with First Nations themes. Thematic hotel rooms aren't new – look at New York, London and Berlin – but, in Vancouver at least, teaming up an aboriginal artist with a commercial design house is breaking new ground. "It's given us more practice with really true collaboration," says **Judy Henderson** of Inside Design Studio.

"It wasn't about 'give us a design and we'll take it from there.'" says **Lou-Ann Neel**, one of seven First Nations artists involved in the project. Lou-Ann is an accomplished carver and graphic artist, a member of the Kwaqulth clan from Alert Bay BC and presently enrolled at Emily Carr University of Art and Design. "It was very much about collaborating and I really liked that,"



View of the Dream World Forest from the entrance

Neel's partner, Judy Henderson excels in commercial and hospitality interiors. At first, neither participant knew what to expect and the collaboration was as much a social experiment as it was a design consultation.

"I contributed the image, the story that goes with the image," says Neel. "They told me what they typically do – such as we like to do this for lighting purposes – and based on that I bounced back with questions. Would it work to have this colour scheme? This side instead of that side? It was a really great open discussion."



Bed Throws

"We started to develop some imagery and some textural components," adds Henderson. With Dream World Forest, one of two rooms she helped create, Neel started the process by taking a forest photograph and layering various design forms on top of it. "I'm aiming to find this neutral ground between our traditional style and our currently evolving contemporary style. I'm pushing it to the outermost limit that I can while still maintaining the integrity of the original form," she says.

Together, they turned the concept into a headboard mural. Henderson tied the room together with colour and balance. Neel hand crafted the throws that lie across each bed. "We've done a lot of projects but nothing will look like this one and that's the outside influence," says Henderson, referring to Lou-Ann's Kwaqilth voice.



Headboard wall Mural with a Forest Theme



Dream World Forest is based upon an ancient legend – the wild witch of the forest – but transferring First Nations stories to a wall isn't as simple as it sounds. "The legends belong to the family or a clan group and it's part of their origin stories. There are protocols in our designs that have to be considered" says Neel. Lou-Ann says she has permission to use the witch legend; that's why she suggested it.



Now that the rooms are almost finished, Dream World Forest, and all the other rooms too, will soon be accepting guests.



Tree stumps as bedside tables



Neel wants to pursue a career in interior design and says the Skwachays project was a tremendous learning experience...and more. She says guests will be pleased with the First Nations theme. "There's something about it. There's something that draws them to it. They can't explain it, I can't explain it but I want to open the dialogue. They're going to learn more, they're going to appreciate **[First Nations stories]** as a high art form."



Exterior of Skwachays Lodge