

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MAY TRUONG

Dynamic Duo

Design team
Yabu Pushelberg
brings a little Toronto
flavour to the world's
best hotels

WRITTEN BY
LISA PAUL

At 4:30 p.m. on a Monday, the pace at Yabu Pushelberg's Toronto studio shows no sign of slowing. Entering through the heavy ceiling-high door, shoes clicking across the concrete floor, only the reception desk is visible. But around the corner to the right, members of the design team stare intently at their computers, George Yabu is engrossed in a meeting, and Glen Pushelberg is sitting in his office at an imposing glass desk. Every detail in the studio exudes stylistic perfection, but one would expect nothing less

from Canada's most successful interior design firm, which has built itself an international award-winning portfolio.

Yabu and Pushelberg met at Ryerson University while studying interior design. The two were always friendly, but they went into business together almost by fluke. Three years after graduation, both men were trying to establish their careers and burning out on freelance projects, when they ran into each other on the street. They vented their frustrations. Then they found a solution: they decided to co-rent a studio on King Street, a relationship that over time, developed into a business and life partnership.

By the late 1980s, with a few projects under their belt, such as designing the Toronto's flagship Club Monaco on Queen Street West, YP was ready to purchase its own space. "In 1989 we bought this real estate and it almost killed us," Pushelberg says, gesturing to the space around him. The Booth Avenue property is still the one they're in today, though there was a brief period during the recession where they thought they might lose it. "The mortgage holder went bankrupt before we did." And it's a good thing too. The world of design could have missed out on something big.

Being on the brink of bankruptcy taught YP valuable lessons. "We did make mistakes at the beginning," Pushelberg admits, "because we weren't business people — we were designers. We are designers. But we've learned business by trial and error." In order to become more business savvy, Pushelberg began focusing on finance management and client relations, while Yabu stayed at the drafting table. Pushelberg has no regrets. "I



TOP PAIR:
Glen Pushelberg (left)
and George Yabu are
among the world's
most sought-after
interior designers.