



LUXURY

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THE MAKERS

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In his home country of Holland, Piet Boon is a starchitect, his signature monochrome interiors hidden behind the 17th-century façades of Amsterdam canal houses, paraded in landmark Rotterdam penthouses and bringing super-prime minimalism to some of Holland's most decadently modern villas.

Boon – pronounced Bone – is an architect and designer whose high profile at home and his Hollywood looks (think Dennis Quaid meets Morten Harket) see him regularly snapped by local paparazzi at launch events, or simply sitting at a pavement café with his wife, Charlotte, a Nike design director.

His name has travelled far beyond the Netherlands, however. Boon has a similar reputation in New York, ever since making his Manhattan debut in 2005 when he redesigned a Fifth Avenue apartment overlooking Central Park that subsequently sold for eight figures, breaking records at the time.

In Asia, his studio's projects include the stunningly elegant Andaz hotel in Seoul, which opened last September. And among his 40 or so current commissions is the Caribbean resort of Half Moon Bay in Antigua, which promises to reinvent ultra-luxury living when it opens in 2023.

Since Covid-19 hijacked the world order, Boon – like everyone – has had to adjust. Most of the studio's 65 staff are working from home – including Boon's 23-year-old daughter Puck (he also has a 25-year-old son, Koen, who has a career in analytics). 'I've still been mostly working in the office, so with everyone else at home it has felt like being in quarantine anyway,' says Boon, who works alongside his long-haired Vizsla dog, Kees.

His architectural projects take years to materialise, so their progress has been largely unaffected by the pandemic. 'Online meetings, rather than travelling for site visits, aren't my favourite way to communicate, but nothing major has changed for the running of the projects,' he says. 'Most are long-term agreements. Demand for designing high-quality living spaces is still very strong.'

But the other side of his business – furniture design – has been harder hit, with many Studio Piet Boon products made in Italy. 'We were so happy to see the factories reopen in early May,' he says.



Flying Dutchman

Piet Boon's architecture and design projects are flourishing around the world, despite the challenging times *By Zoe DARE HALL*

When Boon and I first met, in February, of course none of this was on his mind. Seated behind a long desk in his cavernous studio in an industrial park just outside Amsterdam, the 62-year-old looked every inch the superstar, tanned from a recent trip to Cape Town.

If anything was troubling him at that time, it was a matter closer to home. His actual home, in fact: a pipe had burst at the Amsterdam property, the basement flooded, and Boon feared some pricey damage.

When you see the house, you can understand his concern. Besides the black-tiled outdoor swimming pool and a garden designed by his friend Piet Oudolf, Boon's minimally furnished, neutrally coloured haven is peppered with pieces from his art collection.

'A house without art is a house without soul. I've been collecting for 30 years, including a lot by Studio Job,' he says, referring to Belgian artist Job Smeets' studio, which created the hand-painted bronze chessboard in his office (though Boon confesses he can't play).

Irksome as the flood was, if anyone understands the fractious relationship between homes and water, it's Boon. He master-planned an entire floating neighbourhood in the Dutch coastal town of Almere back in 2010.

'You'd think in a country like the Netherlands it would be something we do all the time, but it's harder to get permission to build on water here than it is on land,' he says.



With Italian production up and running again, Boon points out one of the pricier products, the Cocoon marble bathtub (he has one at home), costing nearly £25,000, and a new design he's proud of, the Disc patio heater, priced around £5,000. Other products, such as a super-sized modular sofa, are inspired by errors. 'I designed my first sofa 15 years ago and it wouldn't fit in the property. It was awful,' he recalls.

It's important to him to offer a wide range. 'If you can't afford a Piet Boon house, you can buy the hardware. Like in fashion: you may not be able to afford the Tom Ford tuxedo, but you can get the glasses.'



Boon admits he doesn't sit still for long. He takes sport seriously – especially kitesurfing, cycling over the Dutch dunes, and cold-water swimming (he leaves his outdoor pool unheated 'as it's healthy, it fits my routine, and it's crazy to heat a pool in wintertime just for a few laps').

It's in the Caribbean, though, that he found a haven where he can mix business and pleasure. Boon first visited the island of Bonaire in 1998, then bought a plot of land and built a holiday villa. 'It's a very small island and I know everyone and everywhere on it,' he says. 'I've designed about 25 houses there. I don't like air conditioning, so I design many of the rooms so they are open, with no glass windows, to let the breeze through.'

Boon is now working on a project of 70 permanent beachfront residences, raised on stilts to protect them from the waves.

He has a new focus in the Caribbean, however, as the lead designer of Rosewood's Half Moon Bay resort in Antigua, set around a crescent bay surrounded by hills. It will be home to some of the region's most expensive self-build mansions, on beachfront plots priced from \$10 million to \$25 million (£7.7 million to £19.2 million). There are also Rosewood-branded villas for sale, designed by Boon, from \$4 million. Enquiry levels have been high.

'The location and the nature are unbelievable. It's all about the arrival experience,' Boon says. 'You don't



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His self-built house marks a career transition from builder to designer. 'I began in construction, like my father, but design was my passion. I started to build kitchens, which were copied many times by other designers,' says Boon, who grew up on the outskirts of Amsterdam with his parents and two brothers. Self-taught, he learnt by working with talented architects. His own Amsterdam house was his final construction project before he turned to design.

Boon launched his studio in 1983 with his then wife, Karin Meyn, and they are still co-owners and colleagues: Karin is the creative director; Piet, the designer. 'She has a refined sense of colour and a special eye for art, unique objects and home accessories. I have a clear eye for clean lines, materials and compositions,' he says.

The dynamic between exes works through a division of roles, he believes. 'We admire each other's work. This has never changed. Of course, you have to find a balance and be able to give it some time, but we have always believed in respecting our own responsibilities within the company. It's something I am incredibly grateful for.'

Like many architects, Boon doesn't stop at creating the fabric of the building. Normally, he and his team design up to 20 products a year, many of them displayed in the studio's huge on-site kitchen and bathroom showrooms.



OPPOSITE Designer Piet Boon at his studio in Oostzaan, Netherlands. CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT Boon's house on the outskirts of Amsterdam. Piet Boon designs including an apartment on Fifth Avenue, Manhattan; a luxury beach residence at Half Moon Bay, Antigua, for Rosewood Hotels and Resorts; and the Porsche 911 Targa 4S Exclusive Alex Edition

want to give it all away – it needs to open up gradually until you see the bay itself, the Instagram moment.'

He describes the feel as 'barefoot chic' – a much-used phrase, but he has a specific idea of what it should mean. 'It won't be like certain resorts that are so quiet and laid-back that there's nothing to do and you have to wait half an hour for a coffee,' he says. 'There will be a lot happening at Half Moon Bay – you can go hiking, biking, kiting, pick vegetables in the resort's garden.'

Another project, set to open later this year, is a rooftop restaurant in west Amsterdam, for which Boon designed everything, from the interiors to the cutlery.

It means a lot to him to be creating landmark places in his hometown – including a new luxury hotel in the former Palace of Justice overlooking Prinsengracht canal.

'I live, breathe and smell Amsterdam. We'd been doing things all over the world, but it seemed crazy not to be doing this,' he says, adding that the Rijksmuseum – designed by Dutch architect Pierre Cuypers in the early 1880s – has been an influence for the hotel. 'I want people to be able to walk in and not feel they are being watched. The Dutch don't like to feel they are on show.'

Instead, it's his buildings that take centre stage. And it seems Piet Boon is just the designer to pull off that desired combination of beauty and understatement. ●