

Off the Cuff: A Q&A with Charles & Co.'s Vicky Charles

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Vicky Charles is cofounder of Charles & Co.

“Off the Cuff” is a Q&A series from Luxury Daily exploring the career paths, current projects and next steps of those shaping the world’s best luxury brands.

The interviews feature a Proust-style twist, allowing readers to get to know industry leaders on a personal level. This edition features Vicky Charles, cofounder of interior design firm Charles & Co.

In this Q&A, Ms. Charles discusses staying open to creativity at all times, shutting out the noise and the luxury of choosing to spend time with the things and people you love.

Here is the dialogue:

What was your first job ever? What did it teach you?

My first job was waiting tables, and the skills you learn in the catering industry are invaluable for any career — including how to read a room, develop listening skills that help in sales and, best of all, knowing that each night is a do-over if it doesn’t go well.

Which skills have been critical to your success? Did you gain these skills within or outside of the workplace?

Listening, trusting your gut and perfecting the ability to shut out noise when you need to focus and be creative.

Both, because you can’t separate the workplace from creative inspiration; it’s constant and not something you can just turn off. You’ve just got to stay open. We all need to practice listening all the time.

What is the best piece of advice you’ve ever received?

Always try to work with people who are better than you so you can learn.

How has your field changed since you started out in luxury, and what do you think your industry will look like in a decade?

Access to social media has opened up the field, allowing anyone to become an expert on interiors. Collecting images for concept boards through Pinterest, Instagram and other platforms has become much easier — but it's also become harder to focus on your own creative voice and shut out the noise.

I think honing that skill amid so much distraction is one of the industry's biggest challenges. Focus on making work, not on social media.

What recent projects have ignited your passion for working in luxury?

We are about to finish the Hotel Ancora in Cortina, which is a luxury experience for guests, opening in June this year.

So much care went into the color palette choice so everything is in harmony and into choosing textures so they age well.

Taking the time with the invisible part of design is also so important — the things a guest won't notice unless they are designed incorrectly, such as lighting, so everything works well and is functional.

Bad design is when none of the above works and is the opposite of luxury.

Who, in any industry or sphere, would you most like to share a long lunch with?

Georgia O'Keefe — a trailblazer. I would love to talk to her about color.

How do you get into the right mindset before a big meeting or presentation?

I remind myself that I'm really lucky to work in this industry and to enjoy every minute of the creative process. If I believe the work is good, and this is the only time I have a meeting, then it's fun.

On your days off, what can you be found doing to relax or have some fun?

Long walks outside with my dogs, my family and my friends. I live in a really beautiful part of the world, so the more time I can spend off a screen — outside, walking, talking — the more I feel like I'm winning at life.

What does luxury mean to you?

Being able to choose how you spend your time. We all have the same 24 hours in a day, so choosing how to spend it — ideally doing something you love with people whose company you enjoy — is true luxury.

Whether a product or service/experience, what is your favorite luxury indulgence?

A drawn bath — if I'm lucky enough to have time in the morning to do this before my day starts and see the sunrise while the world is still sleeping.