

## PRESS RELEASE

21 May, 2026

### HBA APPOINTS FOUR NEW PARTNERS ACROSS THREE CONTINENTS

Appointments reinforce the firm's global leadership in hospitality and lifestyle design

**SINGAPORE**, 21 May 2026 – HBA (Hirsch Bedner Associates), a world leader in hospitality design, today announced the appointment of four new Partners: **William Bles** (HBA Residential, EMEA), **Douglas James** (Light Directions, Global), **Abhishek Mathur** (HBA Mumbai, India), and **Mars Yao 要兴** (HBA Shenzhen, China).



Their elevation reinforces HBA's commitment to both nurturing internal talent and strengthening its leadership bench across key international markets. Together, the four Partners bring decades of collective experience across hospitality, ultra-prime residential, mixed-use, and architectural lighting design, extending the firm's specialist capabilities and geographic reach across three continents to deliver holistic, end-to-end design solutions.

HBA now counts 32 Partners globally, each guiding multidisciplinary teams across the firm's 29 offices worldwide.

*"This year's Partner appointments embody everything we value at HBA; creativity, technical rigour, and an unwavering focus on client service. They are the living expression of our OneHBA strategy: uniting all our talents, studios, and design disciplines, to make the whole greater than the sum of its parts."* **Chris Godfrey, Co-CEO, HBA**

#### **William Bles, Partner and Principal of HBA Residential EMEA**

With over fifteen years of experience in hospitality and ultra-prime residential design, William has shaped some of the most prestigious projects across London and the wider EMEA region. As Partner and Principal of HBA Residential EMEA, and based in HBA London, he oversees HBA's regional teams, guiding projects from concept through to completion with clarity and discipline. A Chartered Architect and RIBA member, William plays a central role in

strengthening HBA Residential's presence across Europe and the Middle East, working closely with private clients and developers at the highest level.

Trained as an architect, William approaches each project as a complete proposition; shaped by client, context, and brief. From spatial storytelling to material specification, every detail is resolved within a single, coherent vision. His portfolio spans ultra-prime private residences, landmark developments, and complex heritage assets.

*"Looking ahead, I'm focused on expanding HBA Residential's presence across key European markets, while continuing to build on the momentum we've established across the Middle East. A significant part of that is the continued growth of our Dubai studio, where we're bringing together a specialist team to support the level and complexity of projects emerging across the region."* **William Bles, Partner and Principal HBA Residential, EMEA**

## **Douglas James, Managing Partner, Global, Light Directions**

An entrepreneur and lighting designer with over 30 years of experience, Douglas specialises in the architectural integration of light across digital, art, and sculptural disciplines. His work creates immersive, carefully curated experiences shaped by a deep understanding of light, surface, and space. As Managing Partner of Light Directions, HBA's specialist lighting brand affiliate, he leads a global practice, overseeing teams across eight offices on three continents and delivering projects worldwide, from bespoke objects to complex, large-scale developments.

Douglas's appointment reinforces Light Directions as an integrated creative force within the broader HBA Group, embedding world-class lighting design at every stage of the design process.

*"What drew me to this role at Light Directions and HBA was simply the completely unique opportunity to radically evolve the process of designing with light — to redefine light's role within the creative industries."* **Douglas James, Managing Partner, Global, Light Directions**

## **Abhishek Mathur, Partner, HBA Mumbai, India**

Abhishek established the HBA office in Mumbai in 2015, where he leads an exceptional team delivering a diverse range of hospitality projects from concept through to execution. With over 20 years of professional experience as an architect and interior designer, he is a registered Architect in India. Before joining HBA, Abhishek worked with prestigious firms across New York, New Delhi, and Singapore.

Over the past decade in HBA, he has led multidisciplinary studio teams across Singapore, India, and Indonesia, successfully delivering complex, multi-scale projects. Abhishek and his work have been featured in prominent publications including Forbes, where he was recognised as one of the Top 30 Architects and Designers in India.

Abhishek believes design must move beyond aesthetics, shaping how people feel, navigate, and remember a place. His approach balances global benchmarks with local narratives, craft traditions, and material authenticity.

*“My ambition is to establish HBA as the definitive creative force in India. India stands at a pivotal moment of transformation in hospitality, and we see extraordinary potential in its growth story. The goal is not simply participation, but leadership: delivering work that sets new benchmarks for design excellence across the region.”***Abhishek Mathur, Partner, HBA Mumbai, India**

## **Mars Yao 要兴, Partner, HBA Shenzhen, China**

With sixteen years of experience in hotel planning and design, Mars 要兴 brings deep expertise in both architecture and interior design. He has completed numerous internationally renowned hotel projects and received multiple prestigious awards, including the 2018 Germany iF Design Award for Hotel Design, and the 39th Gold Key Award.

Mars continuously maintains a belief in innovation, leveraging his creativity, rich practical engineering experience, and close attention to detail to achieve a comprehensive understanding of every project phase, from architectural structure to interior design.

Mars crafts contemporary spatial languages with an international vision, translating local culture and wisdom into every project. For him, design goes beyond the visual, it becomes a vessel for dialogue between people, culture, and time.

*“The brand spirit of HBA has long been my design belief. I will take Shenzhen as my strategic starting point, build on the strong momentum of the China market, and let the strength of the HBA brand shine even brighter in China.”* **Mars Yao 要兴, Partner, HBA Shenzhen**

---

## **About HBA (Hirsch Bedner Associates)**

At HBA, we believe in the power of great design to positively impact lives. Design that opens us to new ideas, new innovations, and new connections. Design that gives form to emotion.

Founded in 1965 by Howard Hirsch and Michael Bedner, our legacy of leadership in hospitality interior design now spans an ecosystem of design services and disciplines.

Today, we are a dynamic and multidisciplinary creative collective, bringing decades of experience to bear across design specialisms, markets, and industries. From hotels to homes, art to architecture, landscaping to lighting, HBA delivers design solutions that transcend function, creating environments that inspire and evoke emotion. With over 1,500 professionals in 29 offices across four regions, each year HBA partners with clients in over 80 countries.

Recognised globally for excellence in hospitality design, HBA has earned numerous awards and industry accolades, including the Gold Key Awards, the AHEAD Awards, *Interior Design's* Best of Year Awards, and the DNA Paris Design Awards. In 2026, the firm once again ranked No. 1 on *Interior Design* magazine's annual Hospitality Giants of Design list, and was named on *Forbes'* inaugural list of America's Top Hospitality Architects & Designers.

For more information, visit [hba.com](http://hba.com)

**Social media accounts:**

LinkedIn: [HBA / Hirsch Bedner Associates](#)

Instagram: [hirschbednerassociates](#)

Facebook: [HBA / Hirsch Bedner Associates](#)

YouTube: [HBA / Hirsch Bedner Associates](#)

WeChat: [HBA室内设计](#)

Rednote: [HBA赫斯贝德纳设计咨询](#)

**Media contact:**

Sherman Ip, Account Director, Petrie PR

Email: [sherman@petriepr.com](mailto:sherman@petriepr.com)

Mobile: +852 9475 1655

Download high resolution images [here](#)