



RINGO H.W. CHILUABE

Schoos: 'There are a lot of restaurants that have amazing food. But design-wise, it is nothing really daring.'

**INTERVIEW**

**Thomas Schoos**

**Title:** Designer

**Company:** Thomas Schoos Design Inc.

**Born:** Neuerburg, Germany, 1967

**Education:** Degree in stone sculpture, Dusseldorf

**Career Turning Points:** Opening up design shop, working on the house of Jada Pinkett Smith, opening the O-Bar

**Most Admired People:** Tom Ford, Philippe Starck

**Personal:** Single

**Hobbies:** Plants, animals

called me up and said "I bought a penthouse. I need everything." I met up with him up in the apartment. He was this little guy. He looked at me and said, "You are interviewing me." I said, "Yeah, I would like to know what you do, how you live." We did his penthouse in six weeks, and I asked him about everything. I said, "What are your colors? What are your foods?" We put food in his refrigerator. You make somebody feel at home.

**Q: How much does it cost to hire you?**

**A:** Usually, we do a percentage. Like, let's say your house costs you \$2 million. We take 25 percent; that's our fees. We design it for you. We lay the house out. Then, you have to have architectural fees on top of that.

**Q: How did you get into restaurants?**

**A:** Tao came four and a half years ago. It is one of the biggest (restaurants) in New York. It is 19,000 square feet. By accident, the owner walked in (to my shop) and he said, "I am building this new restaurant, would you be interested?" That was my first one. I can show you a picture when I was in that empty 19,000 square-foot box, and I thought, "Holy smokes, that is a big box." That was overwhelming. I had no idea where to start.

**Q: So what's so wrong with the L.A.'s restaurant design scene?**

**A:** We definitely have enough chefs here, great kitchens. There are a lot of restaurants that have amazing food. But design-wise, it is nothing really daring.

**Q: Any projects you really hate?**

**A:** The Argyle. I don't know what they thought they did with it. They redid the lobby and everything. 1920s art deco is beautiful. They could have (kept) the essence of the art deco, but make it very contemporary, sleek, beautiful. They screwed it up. The Hyatt - that could have been much more inviting and special and opened up to Sunset Boulevard. Then, the Millennium thing that they built on Sunset. You drive into the garage, and then you go up this elevator, and then you look at this freakin' courtyard out of concrete, and some flags are dangling down. Quite frankly, it is a dead chicken.

**Q: So what do you like?**

**A:** Katana. I like it because it feels to me urban. It is in the middle of the city. You have a patio, and you can look down at the busy street. I like the rawness, the cage in the middle that a lot of people don't like. Dodd Mitchell did it. I think he designed something very beautiful there. I happen to like Dolce. It has a very warm feeling to me.

**Q: What projects are you working on?**

**A:** I have Wilshire (Restaurant in Santa Monica) coming up. I have the Huntley Hotel, and the restaurant on top, Toppers. Then I have Sushi on Sunset, an icon, which is completely getting gutted, rebuilt. I have an old historic building on Hollywood Boulevard, which I will be operator as well as designer, which is the old Fox Theatre. That will be not really a convention center, but you can rent it out for big parties. We have Citizen Smith, which is in Hollywood. That's really a neighborhood bar where we can have jazz evenings, great simple food.

**Q: You want to move into retail. What's that all about?**

**A:** Lifestyle books, which we are working on. It's nice to give people a book that shows them to do something, to teach something on how to make homes really livable and comfortable. That means furniture designs, colors, textures, developing those and making them available to you. My furniture design will go into retail (stores.) In the next year, year and a half, it might go. We are working on it. It looks very good: furniture, candles, smaller pieces, bedding.

# Schoos Views

Designer Thomas Schoos started by selling his creations on the street. Now he's among the city's most sought-after interior designers.

By RACHEL BROWN  
Staff Reporter

**D**ESIGNER Thomas Schoos' first hotel project, the Huntley Hotel in Santa Monica, is wrapping up renovations this month. The revamped lobby is typical Schoos - a wall covered in lacquered piranhas that draws on the seaside environment but twists on the theme by whitewashing the carcasses. Schoos, who heads West Hollywood's Thomas Schoos Design Inc. with partner Michael Berman, concedes that his style may not be for everyone, but the self-described radical isn't about to restrain himself. And given his track record, why would he? In the space of 10 years, the German native has gone from selling his artwork on the street to designing houses, plus restaurants that include O-Bar and Koi. On the drawing board: a series of lifestyle products, including books and furniture, that will be available at retail stores.

**Question: You are very outspoken with your tastes. Do you fit into the local design scene?**

**Answer:** L.A. is very conservative. It is very beige, and I think life is too short to be quiet. That doesn't mean you have to be a wastebasket and trash everything around. As a designer, you should be flamboyant, you should be able to hang a purple cow from the ceiling. For instance, at the Huntley, I dropped African fertility stools in the middle of the lobby. People said, "Oh, you cannot do it." Did you know that everybody looks at them, and then they go closer, and then they talk about it.

**Q: What characterizes a Thomas Schoos design?**

**A:** Most people tell me that they feel it, which is something that I like very much. I am very good laying out rooms of scales and volumes. I take raw materials and I keep the consistency of nature in it, but I apply it differently. Like one wall in Koi is inexpensive four-by-four lumber that I just cut like a loaf of bread. Some are two inches, some are six inches, and I just applied that to one wall all in different thicknesses. It's a refined

tree product that came somewhat back to life.

**Q: What was it like when you first moved here?**

**A:** I hated L.A. After 14 hours in a plane, a friend schlepped me to Huntington Beach. I am driving there, I am seeing all the oil refineries, and I am like, are you kidding me? I walked into the water, and it was freakin' cold. Then, I looked at it, and I said, it is brown. Oil refineries. Muddy water. I said I am out of here. Really, I purchased a ticket the same night. Then, we drove down to Point Dume, and that trip was fabulous. I loved it out there. Still, the water was cold and murky, but I said OK.

**Q: How did you get started in the business?**

**A:** When you are freakin' broke, every nickel counts. I had all my artwork. I said I am putting it outside on the street corner, and that was in the Valley on Teesdale Avenue and Moorpark. That was hand-painted tables, hand-painted huge mirror frames. I put it outside on a Saturday morning. I was sitting there with blue overalls, and I was actually painting, and people stopped. At the end of the first night, I had 6,000 bucks in my pocket. One day a gentleman came over, and he said I like your stuff. We became really good friends. He said, "You should have your own store." We borrowed 20,000 bucks to open Thomas Schoos on Melrose.

**Q: How did that morph into design?**

**A:** One day, (actress) Jada Pinkett Smith walked in (to the store). She said can you bring stuff over to the house, there is nothing in the house. I walked inside, started babbling around and she said, "Would you like to do our house?" That was my first big client. That was six and a half years ago. We did more things for them, other people heard about us, and it really started building the business up.

**Q: What is your approach to designing the interiors of homes?**

**A:** One of my clients - we became very good friends - he