

# *quantum leap*

Whether designing a Manhattan apartment building or an African spa, six-foot-tall, South African-born architect *Lindy Roy* has made a reputation as an original thinker who is not afraid to take risks. By Julia Reed. Photographed by Annie Leibovitz.

tall

**HIGH FLYER**

Lindy Roy, in her own coat and Marni dress, beside a model of her Wind River Lodge project, an extreme ski resort in Alaska's Chugach Mountains. Hair, Dai Michishita for Redken/Cutler NYC; makeup, Stéphane Marais; set design, Mary Howard. Fashion Editor: Phyllis Posnick.

**i**n the late nineties, when Lindy Roy lived in Houston and taught at the Rice School of Architecture, she drove a pickup truck, a 1986 black Chevrolet Silverado she had bought off a guy who had kitted it out with extra chrome and fancy hubcaps for his son. "It was great," she says. "And I just drove. I drove to the port; I drove everywhere. Sometimes I'd drive all night and go straight to the university to give my lecture."

The image of the six-foot-tall South African architect with the gorgeous head of corkscrew curls tearing up the freeways of east Texas is a striking one, especially as we are in the comparatively urbane confines of Pastis, in downtown Manhattan, where we have not driven but walked the half block from her Gansevoort Street studio. Roy, 43, is well known at the restaurant—when she opened her office in 2000, the original space was so deep in the bowels of the Meatpacking District that the stench, as well as the sight of bloodstained workers coming off their shifts, proved a tad off-putting to potential clients, and the corner tables at Pastis doubled as her conference room.

We are not eating at our own corner table but eating oysters and talking about New Orleans, where she spent a year teaching at Tulane before moving on to Rice. ("The dean was a woman from New York, and in her second year she hired three women from the Northeast, so we arrived dressed in black and moving at 100 miles an hour.") I have already spent the morning in her actual conference room looking at her projects, which include an extreme ski resort in Alaska where the patrons can sit at the bar and watch through one-way glass as the air-traffic controllers direct the helicopters in and out. There's a pool house in the Hamptons, part of the much-hyped Houses at Sagaponac development, with the pool partway outside the house and partway in, sealed off when need be by a firehouse garage door. (Although all the houses haven't yet been built—hers is scheduled for the next wave—the project is already a coffee-table book, and Roy's model was chosen as the cover.) There's a traveling Elvis exhibit, a commission she had less than a week to design, in which the interior of a tractor trailer is entirely wrapped in industrial rubber matting, the kind you wipe your feet on, which Roy calls the "techno" version of Graceland's ubiquitous shag carpeting. A series of art "galleries" was designed on a similarly tight schedule for gallerist Jeffrey Deitch's talked-about "Garden Party" art show last year, with "walls" made from military camouflage fabric that mirrored the different seasons—it delighted her, she says, to "play with a military material and make it very aesthetic."

Though each project couldn't be more different, they are all gutsy products of their environments—highly original, sometimes humorous, always handsome, often beautiful—very much like Roy herself. So by the time she gets around to telling me about her tricked-out black truck, I am not surprised in the least. Of course she would seek out a set of wheels that was as much a part of the Texas landscape as a mesquite tree or the annual

Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo (which she professed to love)—and that also happened to be both muscular and sexy.

Roy grew up in Cape Town, where her grandfather, who had come from Poland, pioneered the clothing industry, making everything from jeans to school uniforms. She says she loved watching the technological developments of the business, especially "a computer that was about the size of this room that showed the most efficient way of laying out patterns on fabric. I was fascinated by it." (These days, digital technology plays a significant role in Roy's studio.) What she didn't love, as a preteen at least, was the fact that she was taller, by far, than her classmates, and had hair so short she was often mistaken for a boy. "It was mortifying." As an adolescent, she remained taller than everyone, including the boys, in ballet class and was thoroughly self-conscious—until, she says, one day she just decided not to be. "I began to enjoy that it was one of the things that made me different. When you're taller than both your father and your older brother, you finally stop thinking about it as a problem and enjoy the fact that it bothers them."

At eighteen, she enrolled in architecture school, lured by "the clichés—you know, it integrated art and math, all the things I thought the world was about." After three years, she yearned to leave South Africa, as much to escape the considerable tensions of the time—she had grown up during apartheid and was at university during the final state of emergency—as to see the world beyond. "New York was definitely a draw but also a huge abstraction," she says. "We used to get *Interview* magazine six months late. Somebody would smuggle it in, and I always remember the ads for Odeon on the back page." When she finally arrived, on a tourist's visa, "it was instantly home." She found a job working for an architect who

had an office in the Carnegie Hall building. "I had no experience—I didn't even know what a foot was, since I had learned the metric system. But I had this accent that sounded incredibly competent." Eventually it became clear to her parents that she wasn't returning home, so she got back to business and enrolled in Columbia's school of architecture.

When she graduated in 1990, "in the midst of a horrible recession," she felt totally set up, she says, by her degree. "I was on such a high and ready to get stuff done, and all that was out there were these awful, banal office jobs." After slightly more rewarding stints with Frank Israel in Los Angeles and Peter Eisenman in New York, she decided to teach. "Architecture is one of the few disciplines in which you can teach without a Ph.D., and it's also a way of supporting yourself while you're writing, thinking, developing ideas, and hopefully finding clients." Her first stop was New Orleans, "the only place I've been that reminds me so much of South Africa—the kind of complexity and density and layers and layers of what seems to be and what really is. It just completely grabbed me, and I stayed there a year and thought, I had better get out of here because otherwise I will never leave. There is just this soft thing—well, was—that I found so compelling." And then there was the food, which she lapses into a Deep South accent to rave about: "Oh, man, fried oysters, crawfish—goddamn."

In her teens, taller than everyone, she was thoroughly self-conscious, until one day she just decided not to be. "I began to enjoy being different"

**R**obert Rubin, an investor (not the former Treasury secretary) and architecture enthusiast committed to both adventure and ideas, read about the spa and commissioned her to design an extreme ski resort, the Wind River Lodge, in southern Alaska. "I saw the Botswana project and realized she was conversant with ideas of play and ideas of risk." Roy's challenge was to combine the two, making the idea of freedom and relaxation in the hotel work with the control and safety priorities of a dangerous sport. The answer was a control tower that also contains the bar where patrons watch the controllers. "Symbolically, boom, you get it. You can chill out and have a wild time because we're taking care of you," she says. The design for the resort, posted on the company's Web site, has generated so much buzz that it may well come to fruition. In the meantime, Rubin hired her to build an observation deck at his Bridgehampton golf club. "It's a combination terrace and observation tower built onto a trailer, basically. There is nothing pretentious about her archi-

It was in Houston that she got her first commission, a resort spa in the Okavango Delta in Botswana for some friends who owned a safari company. The site is predominantly wetlands—the most solid ground is islands formed by abandoned termite mounds—so Roy designed seven open-air guest "cottages" with thatched roofs that appear to spiral out into the wetlands and are connected to the larger spa facility, bar, and dining room by a network of buoyant walkways with solar-powered fiber-optic cables woven into the guardrails to light the way by night. Floating free is a crocodile-resistant motorized lap pool. "It made sense to build the entire project on stilts floating on water. You're building on a pristine wetland; the project has to be removed." Not everybody got it. "When people saw the plans, they were like, What the hell? I thought I was never going to get a real client after that."

The spa has never been built, largely because of local politics, but her fear of never working again was a tad misplaced. In *The New York Times*, influential architecture critic Herbert Muschamp loved the floating aspect ("Here, bodies don't have the water all to themselves; buildings get to splash around too"), as well as the juxtaposition of her materials: thatch and aluminum, fiberglass and indigenous woods. "This is not Adventureland," he wrote, "but an adventure into ideas."

**TALL ORDER**

Roy at her P.S. 1 installation, "subWave," in Queens, 2001 (NEAR RIGHT), and at the San Camp in Makgadikgadi Pans National Park, Botswana, 2006 (FAR RIGHT).



itecture. It's light and ludic." Roy is also eminently practical. Take the pool house, of which Rubin pronounces

himself a fan. "It's cool, but being able to swim inside and outside in the Hamptons is also a sensible thing. People use their houses year-round." Indeed, Roy says, it started with the fact that "OK, you're not near the beach, you have to have a pool—let's make the pool come into your house. Also, these were small lots. The idea was to have a house that would open up in as many directions on the site as possible so the kids wouldn't be on top of the parents. The most efficient form in a double-story house that would open in two directions is an S; it opens this way and that. We took three S-shaped frames in one direction and then three perpendicular. The plan's just dead simple." Simple, maybe, but impressive enough that Terry Riley, director of the Miami Art Museum, acquired the model of it for the Museum of Modern Art when he was a curator there. "I thought it was extremely emblematic of her work. A lot of her designs have a sense of complexity that reminds me of a Russian doll—spaces nest inside other spaces. Certainly that project did. It's also extraordinarily fluid."

Her fluid approach, she says, stems from her having grown up in Africa. "It influenced me enormously. My thinking has no horizons. I am used to space. I can take risks." Ironically, some of the risks she has been taking lately (continued on page 401)

**LINDY'S PICKS**

She's designed her style to be both urban and easygoing.



**HER FITNESS REGIMEN**  
Morning workouts outdoors in lower Manhattan.



**BEAUTY BEAT**  
"Anything hydrating!"  
Clarins Relax Body Treatment Oil, \$46.  
Malin + Goetz Lip Moisturizer, \$12.

**FOR THE BEACH**  
Eres strapless maillot, \$417.



**HER SHADES**  
"I like them quite large." Oliver Peoples sunglasses, \$350.



**HER FAVORITE FOOTWEAR**  
Frye boots, \$180.



**WHAT SHE CARRIES**  
Marni red Balloon bag, \$1,620.

Clockwise from top left: ANURUW MOORE; Courtesy of Lindy Roy; still life: CHRISTOPHER COPPOLA; exterior: Panoramic Images/Getty Images; Details, see in This Issue.

wash of a movie with a star or a concept. With her, it's always little moments that add up to something."

In Hollywood, every story has three acts. In the first, we meet the main character and see all the trappings and particulars of his/her life. In the second, we get entangled in the mumbo-jumbo of the life in question. This is where we fall for them and root for them when that inevitable crisis occurs—the one that will be resolved, for better or worse, in act three. In the life of Alli Shearmur, act three is just about to begin. Perhaps it opens in her office on the Paramount lot, where I meet her on that chilly Friday afternoon two days after she had stepped down. She is wearing a black Alaïa dress—A-line and to the knee, topped with a smidgen of a bolero—and a thoughtful expression. "The people here have been nothing but lovely, and I had a great creative experience," she says. "The truth is the company changed, and it was different from the one I joined. But it's not going to prevent me from making movies. I love making movies. I've always approached my job with an entrepreneurially creative spirit. As I'm considering options, I have to bear that in mind. It will be something that will be entrepreneurial." I ask her how she feels about being separated from projects that she developed. "It's very hard," she answers. "There are so many movies in process. *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* and *Zodiac* [both directed by David Fincher]. An Owen Wilson comedy. Kim Peirce's film about Iraq. You still love them and secretly worry about them, but you feel that your experiences together have given you the knowledge of their strengths. I know that they're fine and well, and I continue to love them from afar." (Says her sister Jodi, "Alli has an unbelievable ability to have life insights. She gets rid of the extraneous facts.")

Or perhaps act three opens in that SUV, when the light is beautiful, the sky sheltering yet magnificent. "This is a fantastic opportunity for her to play to her strengths," says her husband. "She's so wonderful with talent and with material, and that is where her passion lies. Sometimes the individual doesn't see what's directly in front of them and needs to be pushed to see the obvious."

When Shearmur gives notes to a screenwriter struggling with the third act, her advice is this: "Whenever you encounter a third-act problem, the trick is most likely

lies in act one." What this means, in the life of Alli, is that whatever comes next will inevitably have something to do with her taste, her style, her zing. "Nobody knows what to expect in Hollywood anymore," explains Tager. "Every major star that used to have a consistent string of hits has had something not click. Alli has the ability to deviate from standard expectations. This is what will help to define the most exciting movies of the next few years." She pauses. "All you can have, in truth, as a producer is the confidence of your instincts." ☐

## QUANTUM LEAP

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have been within exceptionally narrow confines. For the QT, a 140-room Times Square hotel that opened in 2005, she had the task of transforming a small fifteen-story office building into a chic André Balazs hotel for travelers on a budget. The eight-foot-wide rooms are efficiently designed (some feature bunk beds for those traveling with children; all feature everything within reach, including rolling work tables), but her ever-present sense of fun is in ample evidence. In an homage to the Times Square of yesteryear, the palette is distinctly fleshy, and the "fabrics" include such faux skins as creamy ostrich and pink leather. The lobby area is so small that the pool is a part of a private spa area in the day, when the bar is closed, and part of the entertainment at night. Bargoers can see through to the swimmers—there are even bleachers for a closer look. "It's become this major party space," she tells me. "I was there not long ago for a drink, and it's hot."

Likewise, an apartment house going up on Manhattan's West Twenty-third Street, next to the High Line—the old elevated railway being converted to a park that will extend from the Javits Center to the Meatpacking District—is in the narrowest space in which it is still possible to erect a multistory building. There are several different layouts of apartments within the building, and to differentiate them, perforated stainless-steel balustrades (made of the same stuff that lines washing machines) skim over the all-glass facade. "We look for things that add value for the developer and also make a distinctive look," she says. "Here the balustrades provide some understanding that this is your home and not just window number five." Says Muschamp, "She always deals with 'What are the essentials?' When she

makes some kind of formal variation, it's not merely decorative."

Perhaps the best example of getting down to essentials is the VHouse she designed for a nonprofit Houston developer as a prototype for low-income housing in Houston's historically black Fifth Ward. A modern variation on the South's traditional "shotgun" house, hers is a long, narrow, one-story structure defined by a single long hallway that leads from the front to the back door, with communal areas near the front of the plan. Made mostly of galvanized metal, the house features a front porch whose roof extends out to the streetlight—"The idea was to reclaim the streets," she says—and that also pulls the breezes in, aided by a series of ceiling fans inside. So attuned is the design to the environment, there is even a bug zapper in the back. When I remark that these houses, which Muschamp calls "humanist habitation," and which can be built for less than \$100,000, would be perfect for the decimated Mississippi Gulf Coast and as far more livable replacements for the blighted housing projects of New Orleans, she vehemently agrees and immediately schedules a trip to her former hometown.

Delving into the social problems of New Orleans is another example of what one curator has dubbed Roy's "forward-thinking, futuristic optimism." She certainly has no fear of working in extreme environments—she seems, in fact, fearless in general. It is a useful quality, especially on a construction site—architecture remains very much a man's profession. "Construction is the mobilization of competing forces, and the architect is in the middle," Roy says. "It's like warfare, but I love it. One of my fantasies is to walk past a construction site and get all the whistles and the 'Hey, baby's and then to show up later and say, 'OK, boys, let's get down to it.'"

"Being tall is certainly helpful," says Terry Riley, referring to the challenges facing her as a female architect. "But so is being smart and sophisticated and worldly." And though her height is imposing, her enthusiasms are so evident and her personality so playful that she is as accessible as her designs. She loves clothes, particularly, lately, Marni, but she is also drawn to the ethereal butterfly-print skirts currently on display in Alexander McQueen's window, around the corner from her office. At night, she says, she'll do long (continued on page 402)

(continued from page 401) and slinky, but mostly she is drawn to "a cinch-waist, full-skirt look with a belted trench for day and a more sculpted, flowing coat for night." At lunch, she has belted a suede Marni jacket over a full Marni print skirt made of a high-tech fabric that is extraordinarily light for its volume. "I love beautifully made things—the designers vary season to season. I love Comme des Garçons for the wit; I love Ann Demeulemeester." She is sporting the latter's knee-high, rubber-soled black leather boots, but she is not averse to heels, though she says she has a hard time navigating in anything higher than three inches. And as with the materials she uses in her designs, she likes to mix it up. Her eyeglasses, remarkably subtle for an architect, are made of horn and titanium; she wears a chunky ring of resin and topaz. Inside her nylon Marine helmet bag from the Army-Navy store (everyone in her office has one to tote plans around in) is a leather bag by Alek Wek.

Though her designs and her outlook are thoroughly modern, she lives in two floors of a nineteenth-century brick town house with a roof terrace, and adores it. "It has 20 amps of electricity instead of the usual 200, but it's worth it." She also loves her neighbors near the Christopher Street pier—the transvestites who leave the bars as she is on her way to work. "The trannies see my outline from a distance and start totally trash-talking me, like I was on their turf," she tells me, laughing. "Then, as they get closer, they realize I'm a woman, and it's like 'Hey, baby, where'd you get those shoes?' or 'Cool shades.' It's all part of life in the city." It's also a variation on her childhood humiliation, but this time she is terribly amused by it. Roy is a good sport, in every sense of the word. "She's sporty," says her patron Rubin. "She's a sporty architect." ☐

## THE ILLUSIONIST

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she has become a fan of Rachel Roy, who she feels combines the best of Vera Wang and Donna Karan with the classic style of Audrey Hepburn. When she buys clothes, she never tries them on. "I hate it," she says. "I literally look at the size and I buy it. If they don't fit, too bad." The only thing she steers clear of are baggy clothes "because they tend to hide your shape." She'll wear anything tight—turtle-necks, jeans, belts. "To be honest with you," she says, "there are no

parts of my body I don't love. If I could walk around the streets naked, I would, but I'd get arrested!"

I suggest to Dwana that it's unusual to be so happy with your body as a dancer—the whole profession seems geared toward disorders of dysmorphia. She agrees: "I think it's a huge accomplishment. And I'm very healthy. The average 33-year-old here looks worn-out and run-down. I'm hopping around, hopping for the train. People look at me like, 'Is she just excited?'" Dwana shakes her head and smiles at the answer that is its own reward. "No," she says. "I'm alive." ☐

## SILICONE VALLEYS

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a patient's breast width, shoulder width, hip width, height and weight. "I do presizing with a calculator," says Hirmand, who notes that she does not "guarantee a cup size" but works within a range of what's realistic and reasonable. The difference between, say, 175 and 250 cc's can be hard to visualize, so Downey has "a whole wardrobe of bras and a whole stack of T-shirts and tank tops" in her office, plus a full-length mirror, so patients can get a clear, head-to-toe picture of what they will look like postop.

And then there's the question of silicone versus saline. Which is better? It depends on the woman. Doctors agree that silicone is the best choice for women who have very little soft tissue, or are very thin. Saline, which requires a smaller incision than silicone, is a good option for those who already have an adequate cushion of skin, fat, and muscle to cover the implant. Otherwise, "you might see or feel the edges," says Guy. Gerald Pitman, M.D., attending plastic surgeon at New York University Medical Center, uses saline in women who are "a B and they want to be a C, or a C and they want to be a bigger C."

If a saline implant breaks, the saltwater is absorbed into the body (which is not harmful) and the implant visibly deflates inside the chest (and must be removed). If a silicone implant breaks, it's what Guy calls "a silent rupture. The woman doesn't necessarily know. She can't feel it and won't necessarily see it in a mammogram." (There is no conclusive evidence linking silicone with cancer, neurological disease, or connective-tissue disorders, nor is there evidence of elevated silicone in the breast milk of mothers with implants that would be harmful to infants.)

The new-and-improved silicone implants feature a more durable outer polymer shell that better resists inevitable wear and tear, and the gel inside is more cohesive, so it sticks together better. "When you cut through it, nothing spills or leaks out," says Walden. "It won't leak into tissue, therefore causing much less risk of local tissue complications."

Capsular contracture—the hardening of the tissue, or capsule, that forms around the implant—can result from either saline or silicone. "You have to accept when you have implants that there's a possibility they'll get firm," Pitman says soberly. "The body responds to the placement of any foreign body with a capsule, and it can get hard. There's no way of predicting to whom it can happen."

It's a risk legions of women are apparently happy to take. "It's a very high-level satisfaction operation, highest compared to any other [invasive cosmetic] procedure," says Toronto plastic surgeon Trevor Born, M.D. Just ask Petra. All she can think about is the delicate, spaghetti-strap sundresses she's preordering for spring, and all she can say about her new breasts is, "Love 'em, love 'em, love 'em. Wish I'd done them sooner. Everybody says that." ☐

For more information about saline and silicone breast implants, visit [breastimplantsafety.org](http://breastimplantsafety.org), a joint Web site from the ASPS and ASAPS (The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery).

## THE FAT AND THE FURIOUS

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Still, looming omnipresent over our discussion is the dilemma of pie. Traditional American piecrust, flaky, crisp, and tender, is a true wonder of the baking world. It requires a fat that does not melt at or just below room temperature. Here's how it works: With your fingers, you break up cold shortening or lard or butter into chunks the size of walnuts or giant olives and drop them into a bowl of flour (a pastry blender or food processor can also be used, though neither works as well). Then you scoop up the flour and fat with both hands, flatten the pieces of fat between your thumb and index finger, and let them fall back into the flour. After eight or ten scoopings, you stir in a little cold water and press everything together into a ball. When you roll it out, the hoped-for result is a sheet of dough shot through with a multitude of thin, flat pieces of fat that, during baking, melt away, leaving