

John Jacob Zwiegelhaar, SA interior and architectural designer

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

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South African interior and architectural designer John Jacob Zwiegelhaar was recently named among the world's 100 greatest interior designers in the 24th edition of the [Andrew Martin International Interior Design Review](#). The annual publication has become a cultural catalogue of design, illustrating social and political movements as well as cultural lifestyles over the last 24 years.



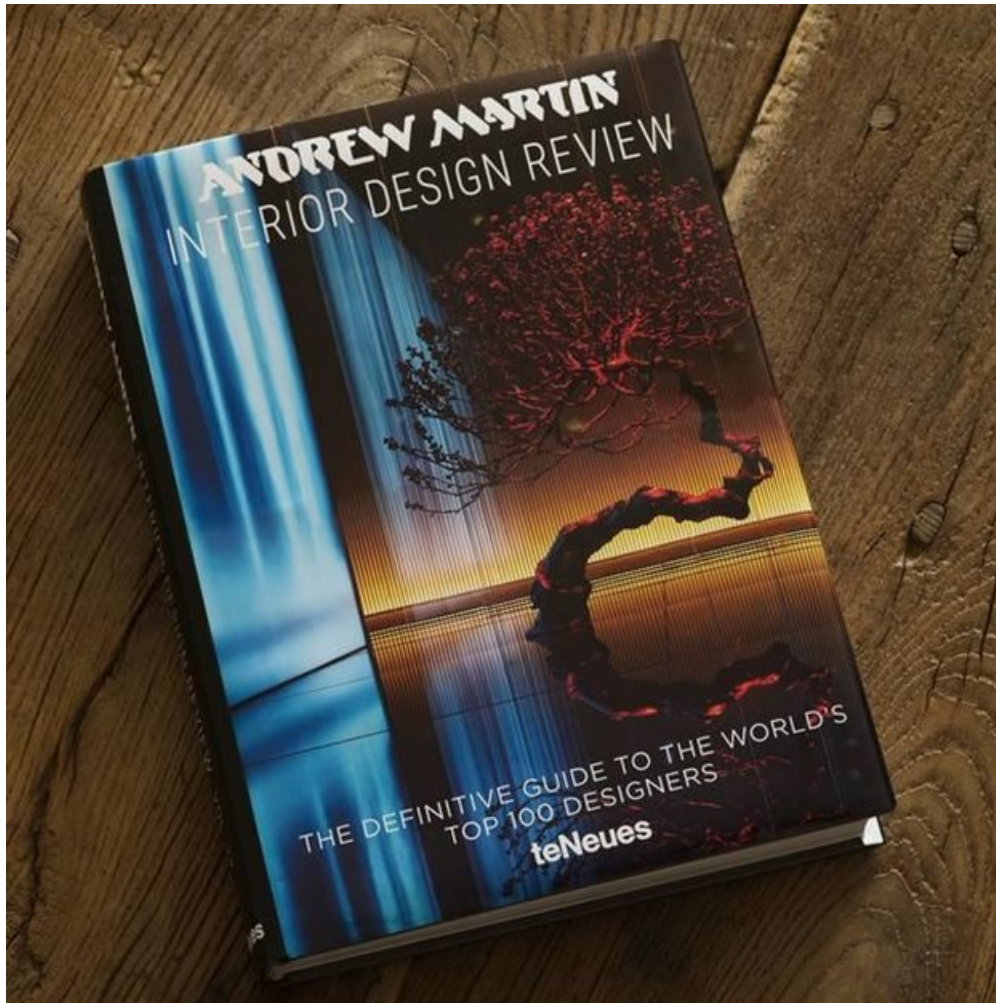
SA interior and architectural designer John Jacob

We go behind the mask with Zwiegelhaar to find out more about [his work](#), his love for the industry, and his favourite trend for 2021.

■ ***Congrats on being ranked among the world's 100 greatest interior designers in the latest volume of the Andrew Martin International Interior Design Review. How does it feel to be featured yet again in the 'bible of interior design'?***

Zwiegelhaar: So much time, money and energy go into making a house. When your client wants to achieve something unique and special, then the resources required ends up being so much more. There is something very rewarding to seeing your blood, sweat and tears documented in a series of images. It reminds you how far you have come just from the

projects you have completed the year before. Seeing the projects in the *Andrew Martin Interior Design Review* is rewarding in part for me, but more so for the owners of those homes.



■ ***What about your work do you think has made you stand out as deserving of this huge accolade?***

Zwiegelaar: I think my approach to houses, or any building for that matter, has always been holistic. There is no area of the process that I do not coordinate into the bigger picture. Architecture, landscaping, decorating, and lighting design all have to be harmonised into one potent idea. Projects lose their wow factor when people do the architectural component without the other components simultaneously.

■ ***You first made the list back in 2010, followed by 2017, 2018, and now 2020 - how has your work and the industry evolved since then?***

Zwiegelaar: I have always been very aware of the finer details being so important to create a sleek finished project. I guess my work continues to improve rather than evolve as I learn to detail things better. Time is the best teacher. It is not something you can avoid. Years of making mistakes and getting it right makes you so much more able to create beauty.



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■ ***We're well into 2021 now. Do you have any resolutions for the new year that you're striving towards?***

Zwiegelaar: It is probably a very strange thing to say but it's probably as strange as me saying I want to create the best projects of my career so far. It has been the same new year's resolution for almost 20 years.

■ ***Where do you live, work and play?***

Zwiegelaar: My office is in Bree Street in Cape Town. I work and I play in that space. I do not see my work and recreation separately. I love doing what I do. If I am on holiday, I'm opening up my mind to new design possibilities. Seeing new hotels, new museums, buildings, gardens, etc. I guess you can say I never stop working or playing, depending on how you want to see it.



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■ *What do you love about your industry?*

Zwiegelaar: The notion of what we find beautiful and how we choose to express ourselves in our home environments is always changing. I love this about my industry. It is just never the same.

■ *Who, in your opinion, is getting it right in your industry at the moment?*

Zwiegelaar: Over the past few years, I have found myself becoming less and less aware of who is doing what in design in South Africa. My focus has become quite insular, I think this has been exacerbated by my workload and lack of time.

■ *What are you working on currently?*

Zwiegelaar: My work for the year is mainly residential-based projects. I think Covid-19 has slowed the commercial side of design.



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■ **Where and when do you have your best ideas?**

Zwiegelaar: I used to get my best ideas when I travel, seeing amazing places, but at the risk of sounding arrogant, I have seen a lot now. My best ideas come when I am staring at a piece of paper coming up with a base concept for a house. Design has become like completing a puzzle. Every piece completed leads you to the next.

■ **What advice would you give to newcomers hoping to tackle the interior design space?**

Zwiegelaar: My advice to a newcomer is walk before you run. Manufacturing and construction is a minefield of technical details that you need to learn in order not to make expensive mistakes.



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■ **What's your favourite trend to watch out for this year?**

Zwiegelaar: My favourite trend for the year is the importance of the home and the importance of having an environment to come home to that makes you feel good. This has become a world focus as we experience lockdowns. This trend has created more opportunities to make amazing projects come to life as people reprioritise.

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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