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Patrick Sutton talks design, artwork and revamping Baltimore's style in 2018

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Growing up, [Patrick Sutton](#) explored parts of the world with his family as part of his father's career as a travel writer. Horace Sutton was a syndicated columnist for the Saturday Review and wrote books best known for having "Footloose" in the title, detailing wanderings that totaled more than 100,000 miles a year.

It should be no surprise, then, that the interior design work of the son reflects the adventures of his father.

That is how Sutton describes — and credits — his style as one of Baltimore's most prolific and noted designers. His ideas, concepts and perspectives grace dozens of developments like offices, restaurants or even private homes in town and around the U.S. He moved to town in 1985 to accept what he thought was a short-term job. He never left.

Last year, Sutton's work on the Sagamore Pendry hotel in Fells Point earned a top three finalist spot in the prestigious "Golden Key Award for Excellence in Hospitality Design" in the best hotel luxury category. Along with Beatty Harvey Coco Architects, Sutton said his work on converting the old Rec Pier on Thames Street into a [unique 128-room boutique property](#) was singled out from 400 applicants.



COURTESY OF PATRICK SUTTON
Baltimore-based Interior Designer Patrick Sutton.

He said that at the end of that project, he was sitting on a marble stoop across from the Pendry hours before it officially opened in March 2017 taking stock of the \$60 million job. It surely will be the centerpiece of a book he is writing now on his career, to be called "Storied Interiors."

"This building does talk," Sutton said, of the brick and mortar bones of the 104-year-old pier. "It encourages you to go out and explore."

Over a bowl of oatmeal and cup of coffee at the Pendry last month, Sutton expanded on the approach to his work these days as he sets about trying to preserve Baltimore's past by decorating for its future.

Below are some of the highlights.

On his first steps in creating a design:

"You are crafting an experience. You want to go somewhere else and you need to be transformed. That's my job. To give people clarity of what they want to tell. Some of my restaurants that I've designed in Baltimore all have a story to tell: Pazo, Charleston, Cinghiale and Johnny's in Roland Park."

On how he creates that experience:

"The first thing I do is create a written narrative and everybody gets the vision and every decision ties back to it. I grew up the son of a storyteller and I have an ability to find the narrative, draw on it and engage it. If you find stories that are authentic to a location, the project is timeless. I don't believe in style or function, but if you understand where it is you're designing for, everything will never go out of style."

On the "story" of the Sagamore Pendry:

"I worked on this for four years. Kevin [Plank] gave me the keys to the car. There are two big stories in this hotel. One is Baltimore in its heyday, the city of industry and shopping. Blue collar. Gritty. The second is our place in history. When it came time to design based on the aesthetic of this town it was using steel, rivets, concrete and a muscular feeling, but also wealth. So you have a velvet sofa next to an industrial steel column. That is Baltimore."

On the use of original and local artwork in the Pendry to illustrate the city's heritage:

"When you first walk in the door to the hotel, you are met with all the lyrics of 'The Star-Spangled Banner.' The entire thing. It is part of our history. They are laser cut into steel with pin spots behind it to make it glitter. That is your introduction to the hotel. And you'll see that theme throughout the hotel. For instance, the motif in a bronze decor above the dining room shows an ancient Arabic pattern, but it has a giant flower and that represents fireworks. That's our bombs bursting in air. It's a subtle reference. A local muralist created this large painting in the dining room and it has symbols of Baltimore. We wanted the energy of the street in here. The Botero horse sculpture is also a focal point. We have created a tradition — it has become a popular place to pop the question. We've had about 20 marriage proposals there since last March."

On his current projects:

"Besides writing my book, I have worked with Alex Smith and the Atlas Restaurant Group on Tagliata, the former Fleet Street Kitchen, transforming it from a dark, brick former industrial warehouse into an old farm building in Tuscan concept. I layered in feminine touches like gauzy drapes and blush colored upholstery. Everybody looks good in that place. I also recently added drapes and a chandelier to the DJ booth at the Bygone."

About sitting on that stoop before the Sagamore Pendry hotel opened in March 2017:

"I live in Fells Point, so I would often walk down Thames Street and think that something was missing here. On that day, I sat there and watched the final touches being added for the opening. It was as if the long-missing appendage were sewn back onto the neighborhood. It was one of the most satisfying moments of my career."

Melody Simmons

Reporter

Baltimore Business Journal

