After 30 years, Yabu Pushelberg has become the quiet darling of the design world.

by Kima Suqi. Portrait by Paola + Murray
Yabu Pushelberg has been a go-to in the world of luxury hospitality for decades. Yet despite its impressive roster of subtly glamorous interiors—from the Miami Beach Edition hotel’s moody lobby to the Four Seasons Hotel in Kuwait City—the firm has always flown just under the radar. Maybe that’s because of their Canadian modesty, or Pushelberg and Yabu are really just that nice, but the firm was often overshadowed in the era of rock-star designers. The lobby of the Four Seasons Hotel Kuwait has a custom disco-ball-like creation from Lavit. Opposite, from top: The foyer of the hotel’s bathroom; the lobby staircase.
and big-ego starchitects. Now that era of gimmicky design is over, and the world has finally caught up to Yabu Pushelberg. The duo, who met while interior design students at Ryerson University in Toronto and founded their firm more than 30 years ago, exude a refreshingly youthful energy. Perhaps it’s because they surround themselves with young people whose viewpoints they thrive on. In the firm’s New York offices they sit side by side—not in a glassed-in corner office but in the bull pen with everyone else.

That is, when they’re in town. The couple, who have four homes (in Toronto, Miami, New York City, and Amagansett, New York), took a collective 140 trips last year, visiting projects and clients, many of them repeats, all over the world. Las Alcobas Hotels owner Samuel Leizorek explains why he’s worked with them on five different properties: "Their projects age incredibly well. They have a unique way of creating layers and depth that remains relevant." Their work is almost exclusively commercial, although Yabu admits that the firm reluctantly accepts maybe one or two residential commissions a year.

On deck for 2016: several projects in London, including No. 1 Grosvenor Square, a residential development in the former Canadian consulate; the SLS Lux Brickell hotel in Miami and its Katsuya restaurant (opening this spring); Ian Schrager’s latest Edition hotel, in Times Square; and a restaurant by the couple’s longtime friend and client, Jean-Georges Vongerichten, that is scheduled to open in Manhattan’s Seaport District this spring. "Some people prefer to go to a restaurant that feels like a circus," says the chef. "I go to a restaurant to relax, and their work is beautiful and very clean. I feel a clean design ages better than Roocoo."