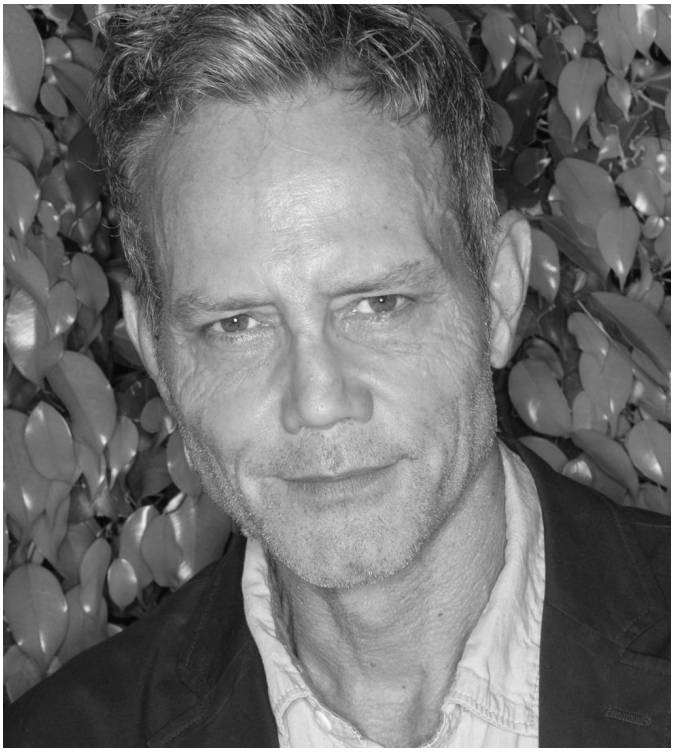
CALLIN FORTIS OCTOBER 21, 2026

Hidden Gems: Meet Callin Fortis of Bigtime Design Studios

CALLIN FORTIS — EDITORIAL INTERVIEW

Founder & Chief Creative Officer | Bigtime Design Studios



Today, we'd like to introduce you to Callin Fortis. Callin, we appreciate you taking the time to share your story with us today. Where does your story begin?

Callin Fortis is the Founder and Chief Creative Officer of Bigtime Design Studios, the Miami-based boutique hospitality design firm behind some of the most celebrated restaurants, hotels, nightlife destinations, and cruise ships of the past three decades.

Fortis brings more than 40 years of experience across architecture, interior design, advertising, hospitality ownership, operations, and strategic brand development—a rare combination that defines his firm's work. His training came from the best of both worlds: celebrated architects who mentored him across four decades and the legendary Madison Avenue ad men who preceded him. As the developer and architect of the crobar brand, the most legendary nightlife brand of its time and one that set the tone for everything we now call

modern nightlife, he brings an operator's instinct to every drawing board: his spaces do not simply look stunning; they perform.

His career began, fittingly, in the family business of selling a good time. The son of a McCann-Erickson Worldwide president, he started out as a self-described wannabe Mad Man, learning the art of desire at a Chicago advertising agency before bringing that showman's instinct to the built environment.

Today, Fortis is widely regarded as one of the most influential hospitality designers of his generation, named to Top 100 People to Watch lists and honored with dozens of national and international awards, including multiple NEWH TopID and Golden Palm Awards, the Outstanding Property Award, the German Design Award, and recognition from the International Interior Design Awards, the Restaurant & Bar Design Awards, and Boutique Design, which named Bigtime Design Studios the Most Influential Hospitality Design Firm.

His portfolio spans Carnival Cruise Line's newest ships, Brightline's stations, Runway 84, Boatyard, Bagatelle Dubai, the Postcard Inn, Marriott Autograph's Union at the Press Hotel, the Mondrian with Marcel Wanders, and the legendary Cameo Theatre and Gatecrasher.

Fortis calls his approach **Marchitecture**—the seamless fusion of design, fashion, music, branding, and creativity into high-concept, high-style public environments.

"It is the big things that create the impression and the little things that create the memories," he says.

By that standard, he is not in the design business at all. He is in the memory business.

RFP / QUALIFICATIONS VERSION (Abbreviated)

Callin Fortis, Founder and Chief Creative Officer, Bigtime Design Studios

Callin Fortis brings more than 40 years of experience across architecture, interior design, advertising, hospitality development, and brand strategy. Mentored by celebrated architects and the legendary Madison Avenue ad men who preceded him, he is the developer and architect of the crobar brand, the most legendary nightlife brand of its time and a standard-setter for modern nightlife.

Named to Top 100 People to Watch lists, his honors include multiple NEWH TopID and Golden Palm Awards, the Outstanding Property Award, the German Design Award, and recognition from the International Interior Design Awards, the Restaurant & Bar Design Awards, and Boutique Design (Most Influential Hospitality Design Firm).

His work spans Carnival Cruise Line's newest ships, Brightline stations, Runway 84, Boatyard, Bagatelle Dubai, the Postcard Inn, Marriott Autograph's Union at the Press Hotel, the Mondrian with Marcel Wanders, Cameo Theatre, and Gatecrasher.

His Marchitecture approach fuses design, fashion, music, branding, and creativity into high-concept public environments built to perform as beautifully as they photograph.

“It is the big things that create the impression and the little things that create the memories.”

Alright, so let’s dig a little deeper into the story. Has it been an easy path overall? If not, what were the challenges you’ve had to overcome?

Every career has a chapter that tests whether you actually meant it. Mine arrived all at once.

COVID shut the hospitality world down overnight, and in the silence that followed, I stood in the rubble of everything I had built and made a decision. I restarted Bigtime Design Studios with my longtime creative partner, Lance Ossman, and began again from zero, with nothing left to prove and everything left to build.

I have never believed in giving up, and I have never bowed to fear. Fear is a poor compass. It points, always, toward the safe bet, and the safe bet has never made anything worth remembering.

Safe bets do not beget success. They do not beget greatness. They beget more of what already exists—a paler copy of a copy.

What I have learned, each time the ground has shifted beneath me, is that the direction you most fear to face is precisely where the opportunity waits. Turn toward it. Walk into it. There, past the edge of comfort, live the ideas no one else was brave enough to chase.

That is the birthplace of forward thinking—of concepts that are not merely beautiful but scalable, not merely inspiring but executable. Anyone can dream. The art is dreaming something that can be built, and then building it.

There is a clarity that comes from beginning again. You stop negotiating with fear. You stop hedging your wonder. You learn, finally, what you are made of, and you return to the work.

That is where the magic lives. Never in the safe choice. Always in the brave one.

Short answer? Make fear and the unknown your partners and BFFs. It may not work every time, but it will always feel adventurous and exciting.

As you know, we’re big fans of Bigtime Design Studios. For our readers who might not be as familiar, what can you tell them about the brand?

Bigtime Design Studios is a Miami-based boutique hospitality design firm working across hotels, restaurants, nightlife, cruise ships, and transportation. But that list of categories undersells what the firm actually does.

Bigtime does not decorate rooms. It builds worlds.

Every project begins before a single wall goes up, with strategy, identity, concept development, and naming—the full architecture of a brand. The design follows the story, never the other way around.

A restaurant is not a dining room. It is a point of view you can walk into. A hotel is not a building with beds. It is a memory waiting to happen.

The firm's approach, Marchitecture, fuses design, fashion, music, branding, and creativity into single, seamless environments. It is a philosophy born of nightlife, where a room lives or dies in a single evening, and there is no second opening night.

That operator's instinct runs through everything Bigtime touches, from Carnival's newest ships to Brightline's stations to the restaurants and hotels that anchor neighborhoods. The spaces do not simply photograph beautifully, though they do. They perform.

Every space begins as a story. Not a mood board, not a materials palette—a story, with a beginning that draws you in, a middle that holds you, and an ending you carry home with you.

This is the storyteller's magic, and it is the firm's true medium.

A great story makes you feel something before you understand why, and great design works the same way.

The curve of a banquette, the glow of a bar, the way a ceiling lifts or a corridor turns—these are sentences. Light is punctuation. Texture is tone of voice.

Translated into design, storytelling becomes choreography. The guest moves through a narrative the designers wrote long before the first sketch, feeling it in the body before naming it in the mind.

Because, in the end, the firm is not in the design business at all. It is in the memory business.

It is the big things that create the impression and the little things that create the memories, and Bigtime designs for both.

As in life, it's typically not the "what" we do; it's the "why" we do what we do! Say that three times, and you've got yourself a tongue twister.

Risk-taking is a topic that people have widely differing views on. We'd love to hear your thoughts.

There is risk in every project, and anyone who tells you otherwise is selling something.

The client's capital is at risk. Their reputation is at risk. Our reputation is at risk.

And beneath all of that sits the purest risk of all: the thing we are making does not exist yet. It lives in drawings and models and in our heads, and we are asking people to believe in it with real money before a single wall goes up.

We deal with risk the way a sailor deals with the sea—with respect, never with fear.

Fear makes you timid, and timid design is the riskiest move of all, because nobody remembers it, and nobody returns to it.

We price risk honestly. We plan for it. We bring an operator's instinct to every drawing board, which means we understand the business the design has to serve, not just the beauty it has to achieve.

A room that cannot perform is a beautiful liability.

And then, having done all of that, we take the risk anyway.

Because the alternative is the safe bet, and the safe bet has never created anything worth remembering.

Every room that ever mattered was a risk somebody was brave enough to take. Our job is to make sure it is a risk worth taking, and then to take it all the way and remain fearless.

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