

PROFILE

William Clothier (left) with his friend and business partner Peter Grundberg at the Brody Studios.



CRESTORING

WILLIAM CLOTHIER, THE MAN  
BEHIND BUDAPEST'S BRODY BOOM

BY ANJA MUTIĆ  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ÁRPÁD KURUCZ



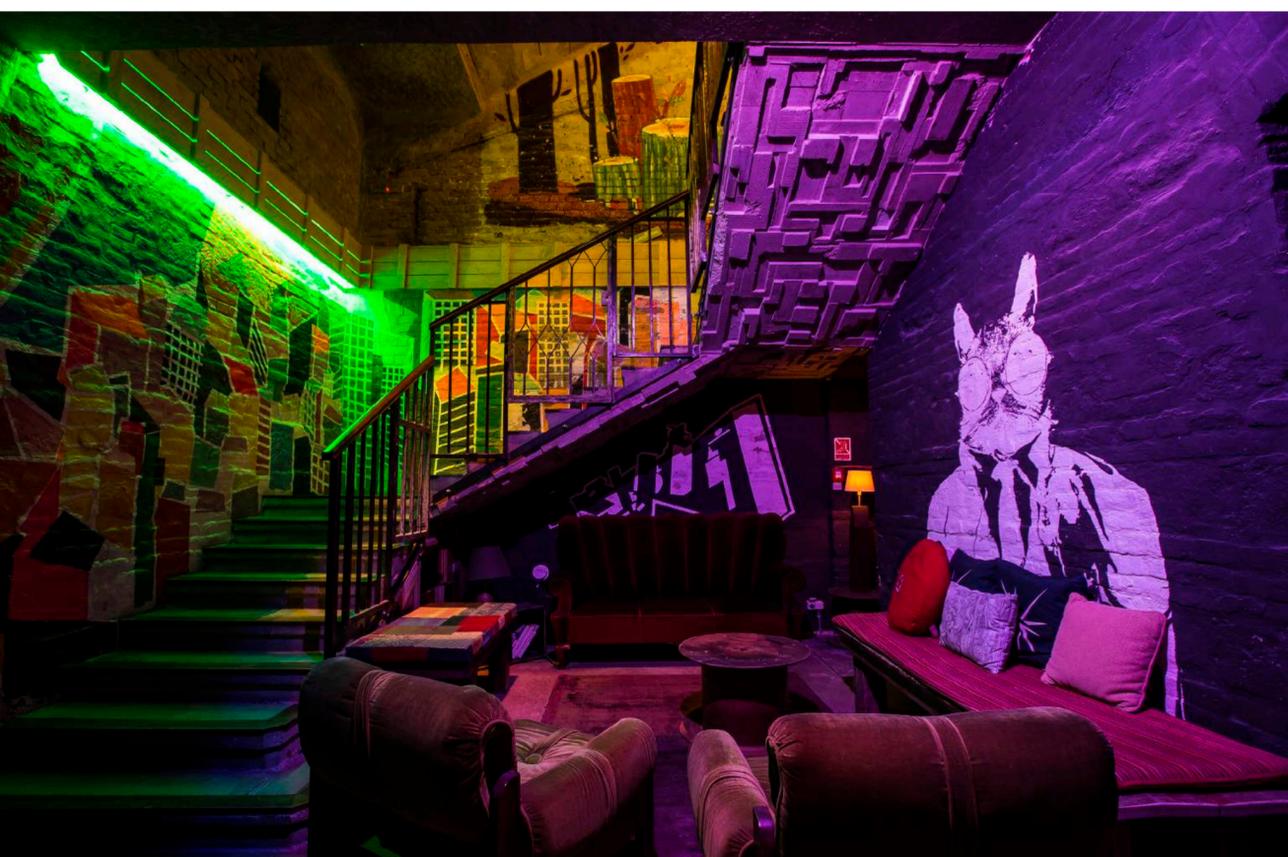


“FOR PEOPLE TO GET ON THEIR RIGHT PATH, sometimes it’s about the process of elimination,” explains William Clothier, one of the two men behind Budapest’s Brody House, a hospitality and lifestyle brand that over the last seven years has changed the cultural landscape of Hungary’s capital. In the early 2000s, Clothier met his friend and now business partner Peter Grundberg in London. The Brody brand was born six years later, in November 2009, when the two converted the top-floor apartment where they lived in Budapest into a three-bedroom guesthouse and arts club. Jazzie B of Soul II Soul played at their christening party; today Brody House is a quirky 11-room hotel with an international following. A couple of years later came Brody Studios, a members-only social and arts club, and then the serviced apartments, Brody 16, to be followed by the latest, the Brody Writer’s Villa, a 19th-century neoclassical villa in the Buda Hills that opened last May.

Clothier’s own life had quite a curvy path. After working in finance in New Zealand and then telecoms in London for a few years, he realized it was time to press a reboot button on his life. That led him out of London and off on a months-long road trip around Eastern Europe. He was completely footloose in the world, without commitments and living out of his car, but looking for a place to start a business. “The idea was to find a fast-flowing stream and get in it, because that’s easier than jumping into a pond and having to swim a lot,” he says. Clothier loved the idea he could drive from Budapest to Calais without getting his passport out once. He wanted to be part of the European unification, the coming together of European minds. Budapest was his fast-flowing stream; he was swept along.

Clothier, who laughingly places himself in the demographic age group 35–42, grew up in a village just outside Oxford, in the Cotswolds. The first school subject that really inspired him was sculpture. His art teacher was pushing him to go to the Royal Academy. “Even though I liked the idea, I was afraid I would pigeonhole myself into the artist’s life and I would be a starving artist for the rest of my life, maybe only famous when I’m dead,” Clothier chuckles. He also had keen interest in form and the psychology of space. His first instinct when entering a space has always been: “If I could do this, this, and that, it would be so much better.” Not surprisingly, aptitude tests in school showed he had very high ability in spatial conception, way above all his other skills. The usual route would have been to become an architect or a designer. Fast-forward: At Brody House, Clothier’s work today is about

Guests lounge at Brody Studios, where the exposed structure creates a cozy atmosphere that nods to the building’s heritage.



conceptualizing how spaces will be used, and how people’s experience will be formed as they use the space.

When Clothier arrived in Budapest 12 years ago, he was propelled by his own design and creative aspirations: “It was really my curiosity that led me to Budapest, and into restoring properties.” The city provided a great stage on which to do so. He felt Budapest could have done with some help fixing it up and getting it lively again. That’s where the Brody brand came in, as it has helped put Budapest’s best foot forward while creating a lifestyle that is alluring to both locals and visitors. More than anything, it became a platform for creative minds to interact and share their ideas and projects.

Interestingly, Clothier and Grundberg never planned to create a hospitality brand, or a social club. It was born out of trying to bring a community together, and to promote and support creative positive thinking. Now that they have given Budapest a local lifestyle brand to be proud of on the international stage, Clothier isn’t sitting still. “I am constantly dissatisfied,” he laughs, quoting contemporary dancer Martha Graham who wrote in a letter to her friend Agnes de Mille: “[There is] no satisfaction whatever at any time. There is only ... a blessed unrest that keeps us marching and makes us more alive than the others.” This “blessed unrest” is really what moves Clothier forward. At Brody, as their story evolves, Clothier and Grundberg are always improving the existing buildings. “I see buildings as organisms, which are growing, changing, breathing—they have a heartbeat, and the people in them are part of the heartbeat.”

There’s more in store for Clothier, who describes himself as the man who likes to have a plan. Next up is the revival of a palace built in the 1870s for Europe’s most successful racehorse, Kincsem, along with her owner and his lover—a wacky story they want to bring back to life. The Brody brand is here to stay in Budapest, but Clothier and Grundberg have a global eye, and what they create next is likely to create impact beyond Budapest.

Clothier uses unique artwork, textures, and lighting to create different experiences in different parts of Brody Studios.



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