

[DESIGNERS TO WATCH]

Fashion Photography and Art Inspire One New York Designer's Stylish Rooms



Keita Turner decks out spaces with painterly palettes and sartorial flair.

BY COURTNEY LICHTERMAN



Former fashion designer [KEITA TURNER](#) has a talent for colorful, layered interiors. Top: A bold accent wall — as well as art by the client, her family and artists Onaway Millar and Carren Clarke-McAdoo, among others — sets a lively tone in a Brooklyn co-op. [THEODORE ALEXANDER](#) side tables bookend the blue velvet sofa, while chairs painted and decoupaged by the client surround an [ART DECO](#) dining table. Photos by Kelly Marshall

[NOVEMBER 28, 2021] New York-based interior designer [KEITA TURNER](#) may have left the fashion industry more than 20 years ago, but her passion for it still informs her work.

Turner, who was born in Houston and raised in St. Louis, earned a BFA in apparel from the Rhode Island School of Design. When prompted, she describes her rooms as “a combination of my love of fashion and classic, timeless interiors,” adding, “I get a lot of mood and color inspiration from editorial fashion photography.”

In her 20s, she designed her own New York apartment to be an oasis from the cutthroat world of catwalks and collections. Full of Scandinavian and Danish modern pieces borrowed from her parents, it caught the eye of a party guest, who hired Turner to design a local shop she was opening. Turner enjoyed the work so much that she left her job in fashion and opened an interiors firm.

Many, many projects later, Turner, who is also a founding member of [THE BLACK ARTISTS AND DESIGNERS GUILD](#) (BADG), has created a wide variety of spaces, including corporate offices, retail outlets and residential interiors. Her aim is to “design environments that uplift the human spirit.” We sat down with her to discuss her icons and influences and the importance of staying true to her clients.

Where do you find inspiration?

Art galleries and museums, like Long Gallery Harlem and, of course, the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I was at an event recently and heard [BUNNY WILLIAMS](#) speak. She said to get out from behind your computer every other week and go explore. I’m trying to do that!

Who is your favorite furniture designer?

I adore the whimsical world of [MISHA KAHN](#), who also went to RISD. I would love the right project and free-spirited client for his work.



Across from the sofa in the Brooklyn apartment, an [ATLAS INDUSTRIES](#) walnut and blackened-steel bookcase holds sculptures of Sojourner Truth, Phillis Wheatley and Paul Robeson by artist Ruth Inge Hardison. Turner refurbished the client's existing storage cubes and vintage sewing chair with custom upholstery. Photo by Kelly Marshall

Who is your favorite artist?

I own artworks by [KY ANDERSON](#), Ann West, Piero Spadaro, Hayley Perry, [HENRI GAUDIER-BRZESKA](#), Jordi Bonàs, [PIERRE TAL-COAT](#) and Jean Saudé [a printmaker who produced some of [EDOUARD BENEDICTUS](#)'s compositions]. I also have some of my own artwork in my collection.

I love [DERRICK ADAMS](#) and [MAURIZIO CATTELAN](#). Cattelan is the Italian artist who did the golden toilet and the banana with the duct tape.

And I love the work of my mother, B. Toler Turner. She really is my inspiration. She's a painter and sculptor, she draws, she does printmaking — everything.

What are your favorite design periods or styles?

I'm a fan of styles from the twentieth century, like [ART NOUVEAU](#), [ART DECO](#), [BAUHAUS](#), [FRENCH MODERNE](#), [MODERNISM](#) and [POSTMODERNISM](#), as well as mid-century [DANISH](#) and [SCANDINAVIAN](#) design.

One reason is their connection to the history and the changing politics of their times. Also, some of these twentieth-century movements and the Western artists associated with them were influenced by [AFRICAN](#) and non-Western design, though without much attribution or contextualization until recent years.

Who is your personal style icon?

I admire people with effortless, timeless elegance, like Carolyn Bessette-Kennedy and Diahann Carroll. I also really like Lupita Nyong'o! She's very daring in terms of fashion.





For the 2019 Alden Parkes showhouse, Turner created a plush, golden living room, accenting the velvet sofas and chairs with [CURREY & COMPANY](#) floor and table lamps. Photo by Brad Bunyea

What is your favorite historic building?

This isn't perhaps what you were looking for, but I love [BERGDORF GOODMAN!](#)

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would that be?

I eventually want to move to Georgia, to build out a farm down there, but I'd also enjoy living in Montecito, California. I love the architecture, the palatial homes and the Pacific Coast Highway.

What is your dream project?

I love the idea of doing at least one hospitality project, like a boutique hotel, preferably under my ownership — something similar to [BLACKBERRY FARM](#) in Tennessee — or creating an artists' retreat with cottages and studios.

Another dream project would be to design a fashion boutique on [MADISON AVENUE](#) or elsewhere.



In the living room of a brick colonial home in Washington, D.C., an apricot [KRAVET](#) sofa and a persimmon [BARBARA BARRY](#) for [BAKER FURNITURE COMPANY](#) lounge chair play off the pale lemon walls. A Barbara Barry for Baker [SLIPPER CHAIR](#) and pair of [MAHOGANY ARMCHAIRS](#) round out the seating. Photo by Edgar Scott

What is the most underappreciated design idea?

Automated shades! My plants are like my babies, and they need their sunlight. If I forget to open the shades, they won't get it.

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What's one thing you've done that shouldn't have worked but did?

We used a cheerful but dramatic Ogden fretwork wallpaper from [THIBAUT](#) for a client's stairwell and second-floor landing, and the client also had a fretwork rug that we used for the living room, although I initially had other options in mind for flooring.

I don't often repeat motifs within the same space unless we've dramatically changed the scale, but at the same time, it's important that our clients' preferences and authentic voices show up in the spaces we design. To that end, I introduced Asian and Arabesque fretwork motifs throughout the house, in the bedding, ceiling fixtures, side tables, console tables and even the dining table. And it worked!

What accomplishment are you most proud of?

How many repeat clients I have, because that means I'm doing something right. It really is these relationships that I value most. ■



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