

# Regional Focus: New York

Like Paris and Milan, New York City is a mecca for style-conscious consumers seeking the latest couture, cuisine and consumer products. When it comes to their homes, however, New Yorkers are forgoing style-of-the-day furnishings to invest in quality pieces with timeless designs.

## Uptown Girl

Photographed for fashion magazines almost as frequently as shelter books, Celerie Kemble is the brainy, Harvard-educated designer known for her innate sense of style, as well as her down-to-earth take on life in New York's fast lane. The daughter of Mimi McMakin of Palm Beach's Kemble Interiors Inc., she grew up in the thick of the high-end design business, trailing her stylish mother everywhere, from construction sites to antique stores.

Since getting into the design business herself in 1997, Kemble has been included on *House Beautiful's* "Top Designers" list for several years running and named one of the "50 Tastemakers for the Future of Design" by the now-shuttered *House and Garden*. The reason: Kemble's interiors don't follow the old rules and skillfully skirt the tyranny of decorating shoulds. She finds inspiration in the ever-changing world of New York fashion and believes design is an expression of individuality, whim and imagination—not a product of trends or rules.

"My decorating ethic is less about my style than the refinement and execution of my clients' personal tastes," Kemble explained. "They tend to be younger, more adventuresome, but savvy consumers, nonetheless. If you had to pin me down to a formula, I'd say my work is most characterized by a colorful vitality, design irreverence and a focus on sheer comfort. These elements hold whether the work is channeling a more modern, vintage or traditional aesthetic."



Celerie Kemble of Kemble Interiors Inc.



*"The main thing clients are telling me is that they want a cleaner look, even if it's traditional,"* said Colleen Borek, Director of Communications for the American Society of Interior Designers' New York Metro and owner of Colleen Grace Designs, a residential interior design firm. "They want

less clutter and fewer accessories—one important piece of artwork, as opposed to a cluster with six pieces of artwork. But they still want high-styled elegance."



Photo by John Denberry

Benjamin Huntington of the American Society of Interior Designers' New York Metro Chapter and MH Studio LLC.

Benjamin Huntington's clients seek clean-lined classic designs with modern elements.

## (Upper) East Side Story

As founder of MH Studio LLC and President of the American Society of Interior Designers' New York Metro Chapter, Benjamin Huntington has seen many changes, over the years, in the way his clients—primarily young, married couples residing on New York's Upper East Side—relate to, live in and decorate their homes.

In the last 10 years, for instance, Huntington said he has seen husbands becoming more involved in the interior design of their homes. "It used to be just financial involvement, but they really do want to become involved," he explained. "They're interested. They want to understand the design process to make sure they get the maximum benefit from it."

"People—especially in my client base—are much more interested in creating a complete home environment. They spend more time at home. They're making sure that they have an opportunity to spend time with their family. There's a greater sense of wanting to have all of the spaces be more family-friendly, family-usable."

Which may be why clients who once gravitated toward ultra-contemporary styles are now seeking out classic designs instead. "Clients are beginning to realize that the excesses of the '80s and early '90s and the post-modern style of the '90s—that ultra-stark, contemporary look—are quite hard to maintain and not particularly kid-friendly," Huntington said.

"So what clients are beginning to ask for are classic or timeless designs that incorporate elements of contemporary designs—clean lines and less frills and tassels—but with a classical spin. So you'll still see crown moldings and high baseboards with a cap molding to give it a classical feel, but in a more clean-lined way."

"The same is true of fabrics. Clients are looking for less fussy patterns, less busy patterns. So, you're looking at larger patterns, stronger colors, but not necessarily brighter colors—greater saturation."



Generally created for a young clientele, Celerie Kemble's interiors are unencumbered by rules and fixed formulas.



Craig Van Den Brulle of Craig Van Den Brulle.

Craig Van Den Brulle offers his own contemporary home furnishings collection, as well as an extensive array of vintage and 20th Century pieces.

## New Store, New Look

After operating Capitol Furnishings in New York's Nolita district for 10 years, Craig Van Den Brulle moved his business into a 3,000-square-foot retail space one block away in October 2007 and renamed it Craig Van Den Brulle.

"The name change better reflects the direction that we are going in," said Van Den Brulle. "It's a more extensive line of pieces that we're creating, with a large-scale collection of 20th Century pieces."

One of the reasons Van Den Brulle cited for moving to a new retail space was to be able to showcase his own collection of contemporary furnishings with Mid-20th Century styling. "At the moment, I'm mostly doing acrylic pieces," he explained. "We are expanding into some metal and mirrored furniture, and we want to keep going. The new store allows customers to come in and move around the pieces, to really experience them." The store also offers an extensive line of 20th Century collectibles, including pieces from Tommi Parzinger, Gio Ponti, Barovier and Venini.

And as homes in New York become larger, furniture scale becomes less of an issue for Van Den Brulle's clients, most of whom are architects and interior designers. "Spaces are getting much larger, and I think large-scale furniture can actually sell," said Van Den Brulle. "A lot of people in New York also have second homes, and if they're not doing something for their space in New York City, it's for their Hamptons home or Connecticut home."

But Van Den Brulle's customers are not limited to the United States. "We ship all over the world," he said. "We have designers coming in from Italy and France. The world is certainly getting smaller, which is a wonderful thing. The dollar is weak, and it really pays for Europeans to come here and get great deals."



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Happy Anniversary, ICFF

As the International Contemporary Furniture Fair celebrates its 20th annual edition this month, thousands of contemporary retailers, architects, interior designers and manufacturers will flock to New York City May 17-20 to attend this must-see event for all things modern.

"ICFF has always found the right mix of new designers and established designers, international resources and domestic resources," said Phil Robinson, ICFF Show Director. "We're very focused on new—whether it's exhibitors or product. This commitment is what has helped us grow the show as we have."

With fresh ideas and product coming from both North American exhibitors (slightly more than 50 percent) and international exhibitors, George Little Management's ICFF continues to flourish in New York, a city renowned for the latest fashion and furnishings trends. "Certainly, the core of the contemporary market is based in New York City," said Robinson. "More and more, New York, within North America, is being identified as the design capital. When you look at the cultural elements and the design elements of New York, it's the perfect place for it."

New York's location also makes it a prime spot for the fair. "You have to look at where the product is sold," explained Robinson. "The coastal cities—New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles—are where the most contemporary product is sold. Ultimately, that's part of the appeal, too. The interest in contemporary design is expanding."



Phil Robinson, Show Director for the International Contemporary Furniture Fair.



dkVOGUE's New York showroom carries only Danish furniture and represents about 26 different Danish manufacturers.

## Little Denmark

"New York is really where the action always is—this is where the competition is," Richard Moses, New York General Manager for dkVOGUE, responded when asked about the Sarasota, FL-based company's decision to open a showroom in New York. "Competition can only help a business, and whatever furniture is out there—Danish, Spanish, Italian, Swedish—you're going to find it in New York."

Launched about two years ago at 138 W. 25th St., the approximately 3,000-square-foot showroom is filled with classic furniture pieces by major Danish designers, such as Arne Jacobsen, Hans Wegner and Poul Kjaerholm, as well as newer pieces by younger Danish designers. "The manufacturers that we represent—about 26 different Danish manufacturers—are the most important and well-established manufacturers in Denmark," Moses said.

"There's always been an interest in Danish furniture," he continued. "A lot of the designs were really radical when they were created in the '50s and '60s. Some of those designs now are more relevant than when they were first designed."

dkVOGUE's clientele comprises both contract and retail customers. "New York is such a huge market, you want to try to reach as many ends of it as you can," Moses explained, adding that the company's customers are "design-savvy. These are people who usually come here, and they know the pieces. They can point and say, 'This piece and that piece are by so-and-so.' They know their furniture. They're people who realize that they're buying a piece not for fashion, but for the long-term. They see these pieces as investments because a lot of them get more valuable as they get older."

Photo by Annie Schleier



Jonathan Adler of Jonathan Adler.

Jonathan Adler believes modernist forms, bold colors and snappy graphics are the antidote to dull, depressing, colorless homes. In this setting, he paired a needlepoint pillow of his own design with a strong upholstery and rug pattern from designer David Hicks.

styles. So to make an impression and feel new, visual juxtapositions need to be jarring.

"I consider myself a maximalist designer and, as a maximalist, I combine styles with abandon and a sense of fun," he continued. "Maximalism is life-affirming. Minimalism is gloomy. We're only here for a short time, and I want to look back at my life and remember the zest of an orange lacquer cocktail table, the fun of a powder room wallpapered in a lime-green brocade pattern, or the excess of a giant vase filled with hundreds of peacock feathers. It's the over-the-top things that stay with us and mean something."

Ralph Pucci Intl. carries collections by Patrick Naggar, and David Weeks. Shown here are a Naggar sofa and a Weeks chair.



"When you grow up in New York, design is really evident in the home," said Kris Fuchs, co-founder and principal of SUITE New York, a modern design showroom and furniture store in Midtown Manhattan. "Over the past 20 or 30 years, people have been appreciating it more and more. They recognize and love quality. New Yorkers—if

they could only own one piece—would rather stretch their money for the quality of a beautiful Hans Wegner or Arne Jacobsen piece."



SUITE New York offers its contract and residential customers modern classic furnishings, primarily from European manufacturers.

Patron of the Arts

Ralph Pucci is perhaps best known for revolutionizing the mannequin business. Under Pucci's artistic leadership, Ralph Pucci Intl., which was founded in the 1950s by his parents, broke out of the rigid old forms and created the first action figures the industry had ever seen. A Pucci mannequin did headstands and dives—a far cry from those demure, ladylike poses to which the fashion world had grown accustomed.

While Ralph Pucci Intl. continues to design and manufacture new mannequin collections twice a year, it also has emerged as a special resource for some of the most sophisticated home furnishings to be found in New York City. Tucked away in a spacious loft on West 18th St., the gallery brings together the work of innovative designers, who produce limited-edition furniture, lighting, floorcoverings, graphics and fine art, some of which are museum-worthy.

Currently, the gallery is showcasing a home furnishings collection by Philippe Hiquily; sculpture by Jean Claude Farhi; ceramic vessels by Abigail Simpson; and lighting and upholstery by David Weeks. "The furniture you find at Ralph Pucci is classic, timeless and well-crafted—something that will be cherished over time," Pucci said. "The designers that I represent range from the best young up-and-comers to the greatest designers of the 20th Century. That's what keeps it fresh, modern and unexpected."