

STYLECOMPASS



AMY LAU

Amy Lau photographed by James Weber in vintage Givenchy floral silk gown from Resurrection, New York

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by Patricia Dobashi

In the spirit of full disclosure: I am completely smitten by Amy Lau.

"It happens all of the time," says Lau's assistant, Candida St. John. "Everybody seems to fall in love with Amy."

The popular New York designer considers herself blessed by the multitude of fond relationships she easily develops with colleagues and clients alike. "I interview my potential clients as carefully as they interview me because I know that if we agree to work together, it could well mean two years of us being very close," Amy explains. "Inevitably, my clients become 'family.' I confess, it's not unusual for my eyes to mist over when a client tells me something about him or herself that touches my heart."



CHELSEA LOFT. Design by Amy Lau.



Vintage Pierre Cardin silk trapeze dress
Photo by James Weber

The vivacious Arizona native arrived in Manhattan in 1994 to matriculate at the Sotheby Art Institute's American Fine & Decorative Art Master's program. "Of course I loved the idea of being able to study on the Continent or in London," says Lau, "but my main interest has always been American connoisseurship, and the best place in the world to study this is at Sotheby's, New York. The training offered there is highly focused on how to scrupulously judge objects, be they antiques, vintage or modern. I'm a big believer in the 'good, better, best' system and constantly strive for the most thorough study of an object. From its initial construction to its finishing, it's all about determining value and the longevity of the object."

Intrinsic value is always an essential element that catches Lau's curatorial eye. She expounds, "Let's say, for example, I have a client who someday wants to change or recycle an object – I like to make sure that whatever they want to trade has retained its value, and hopefully, is worth even more than



what they originally paid. Vetting an object is what I was trained to do, and it's been my privilege to work amongst clients, colleagues, and experts who share an appreciation for true pieces."

As a child living in Paradise Valley (near Phoenix), Arizona, Lau remembers her grade school teacher asking her students where they thought they would live upon growing up.

"It's interesting," says Amy, "I remember raising my hand, saying that I would be in a high-rise building with big glass windows so I could watch the thriving city beneath me. Paradise Valley didn't have many multi-floored buildings then, so

where I got this vision, I'll never know. But when I came to New York, I immediately knew I had stumbled onto my destiny. I love it here even though it's light years away from the me who would ride bareback on my horse, White Eagle – my best pal, who would wait for me outside the local grocery store where I would buy an icee for the ride home."



The first of four children in an especially close knit family, Amy speaks of the love she has for her very patriotic parents who carefully decorate everything in the Lau household – save the parsley – in red, white, and blue for the Fourth of July. “Not coming home for Independence Day in our family is tantamount to other people missing Christmas. We Laus are home together for every holiday – at the very least.”

Amy credits her artistic talents to her grandmother, who was an artist and a collector of natural history. Says Lau, “When I was younger I didn't even know what a designer was but my grandmother was an amazing and inspiring artist. I grew up watching her collect unusual objets d'art. I am a designer today because of her.”

Amy Lau's New York family includes her dog, a rare Spinone Italiano, recognized by the A.K.C. as Bruno Brunelli, but affectionately called “Goofy” by everyone else. He is the

jumbo yet gentle mascot of Amy Lau Designs that scratches at his mistress's door as she is being interviewed for this story. Searching for the perfect dog as intently as she searches for that perfect decorative piece, Amy discovered no Spinone has ever been known to bite a person yet another dog.

“I realized that this would be the ideal dog for New York and the busy Chelsea district in which I live and work,” she says. “I drove for five consecutive days back and forth to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, where Goofy's breeder lives. That's a five-hour drive each way – but getting Goof was worth every minute endured on the road. Goofy's eighty-five pounds now. I've had him since he could fit into my hand.”

On Amy's desk are design plans for her current projects that include a nature inspired product line for Heath Ceramics for whom she is developing multi-layered, specialized glazes on hexagonal tiles for a commissioned bathroom vignette at the Kohler Design Center in Wisconsin.



CHELSEA LOFT, Design by Amy Lau.



Photo: Elie Tahari

Lau's interior design works include a four-unit, 15,000 sq. ft. penthouse apartment in Tribeca that combines the latest in design and technology. It is a spectacular, state of the art project, and an exciting collaborative venture for Amy, who is creating a custom bar with Parisian designer, Patrick Jouin. Also part of the team is Enzo Enea, a Swiss based landscape architect who is designing an outdoor, 5,500 sq. ft. terrace, and New York designer, Jim Zivic, who is installing leather walls.

Another stunning project is a Greenwich Village townhouse decorated with bespoke wallpaper, embroidery, and art nouveau influences. Not to be overshadowed by the glamour of the aforementioned projects is an ultra



chic apartment in the Essex House that Amy describes as, "Auntie Mame's artist retreat." And if that is not enough to keep her design firm brimming with activity In New York, Amy is also working on a 13,000 sq. ft. private residence in Chicago that includes a ballroom, theatre, and library.



One of Lau's latest achievements is her design for Elie Tahari's flagship store that opened in East Hampton in 2007. The store is conceptually unique and vastly different in its design and furniture than found in most other retail fashion establishments. From the outside, the store fits right in with other

shops on East Hampton's Main Street, but upon entering the front doors, visitors ascend into a singular vision of custom décor and craftsmanship. Amy says, "Elie is an inspiration in fashion merchandizing because he's committed to giving his customers the finest in art and design."



Lau's influence also extends to Miami, where she co-founded Design Miami with friend, Ambera Medda. A highly scrutinized invitational for top designers, Amy has served as Chair of Design Miami's vetting board and is proud of the stellar roster of international dealers who show their work during the same week that fine artists display at Art Basel.

Charity and fundraising interests of Amy's include the Kips Bay Boys and Girls Club, and the Lennox Hill Neighborhood House; she also serves as Vice Chair of the New York ASPCA.

Lau has been named one of *House Beautiful's* "Young Designers to Watch," and *Metropolitan Homes'* "Who's Next" Young Designer Series; and nominated for the Rising Star

Award in the Interior Design category by Fashion Group International for 2008.

Asked about her similarity to Debra Messing of television's, "Will and Grace," Amy laughs. "Yes, I admit that does happen. In fact, I was on a photo shoot for *Elle Décor* when all of a sudden the photographer and everyone on the shoot started calling

me 'Debra.' It was so comical to me."

Self-effacing, delightful, loving, spectacularly talented and successful; an extremely accomplished and prolific designer, respected connoisseur – and TV star look-a-like -- I say, forget Raymond. Everyone loves Amy Lau.

what direction is your style compass pointed to?

FASHION: I'm all about clothing in bright colors and upbeat patterns. So I wear Max Studio by my dear friends Leon and Ame Max, plus Marni, Catherine Malandrino, Trina Turk, Cynthia Rowley, Prada and Elie Tahari.

FABRICS: Velvet ikats from Istanbul's Grand Bazaar are an obsession. Also ombre silks, op patterns from the 60's and 70's, and crewelwork from Erica Wilson. I've rediscovered natural-fiber weaves laced with metallic threads, so I would die to go through the Larsen archives and commission something extraordinary.

ENTERTAINING: Since my rooftop deck is the same size as my apartment, I have lots of friends over for

dinner alfresco. We play soft music and light tiny glowing candles so Chelsea's historic townhouses and church towers look amazing.

COLOR: I use expressive and unexpected combinations found in paintings by the likes of Albers, Rothko, and the abstract expressionist Morris Louis.

TRAVEL: To be nurtured and inspired I've run to Dzerba in Tunisia, Oia in Greece, Panara in the Aeolian Islands, Bodrum in Turkey, and Ibiza. You wouldn't think a freckled, fair-skinned redhead would adore the Mediterranean as I do.

FLORAL: I am obsessed with cacti and succulents since I am from

Arizona. (Lucky for me they require no green thumb.)

ART: As a co-creator of Design Miami, that fair will always have a place in my heart.

BOOK: *The Devil in the White City* by Erik Larson; *Perfume* by Patrick Suskind.

MUSIC CD: I find the Hôtel Costes Collection of CD's by Stéphane Pom-pougnac incredibly sexy and relaxing.

MUSEUM: Vitra Design Museum for its archives that make me weep and Museum für Gegenwartskunst in Basel for the architecture by Herzog & de Meuron Architekten. The Bardo Mu-

seum in Tunis for their impressive Roman mosaic collection and lastly the Musée des Arts Decoratifs in Paris.

RESTAURANT: I've always gone to The Shed in Santa Fe for Christmas red-and-green chili sauce.

HOTEL: Hotel Dar Dhiafa, in Djerba, is a boutique gem that oozes authenticity and Tunisian charm with its chic asymmetrical rooms, rustic Berger furniture, and courtyards smothered in bougainvelia.

GIFT: The collectors' set of Planet Earth and Planet Blue DVD's always astound me and are a beautiful gift for those you love.

SHOPS: Printed Matter in Chelsea.





Amy Lau's
Quick Picks
from *Istdibs*



- 1 Ico Parisi Ebonized Wood Chair – J.F. Chen 2 Modernist Chandelier by Sciolari – Tom Thomas.
3 Pair of Cabinets by Andre Sornay – Van Den Akker 4 Set of 218 modular candleholders by Nagel
– Modern Times 5 Leather and Rosewood Chair and Ottoman by Oscar Niemeyer – NohoModern
6 Modernist Rug – Doris Lealie Blau

Vintage Pucci ochre sailor dress. Photo by James Weber