

SPRING 2010

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Inspired by AMY LAU

AMY LAU HAS A PASSION FOR DESIGN. Dressed in vintage Pucci pattern or Givenchy florals, with a mane of red hair, she name-checks a thousand designers a minute – a heady mix of 1950s Italian Modernists, prestigious auction rooms, galleries and modern museum pieces, contemporary artists and artisans; vintage lace boutiques, showrooms and couture houses that run up bespoke bedlinen designed for the scheme. All of these will be incorporated into one of her interiors.

Beneath the effervescent personality is a serious design curator. Amy Lau learned her specialist knowledge of mid-century Modernist designers on the Sotheby's graduate programme, gaining her Masters degree in Fine and Decorative Arts from the prestigious New York auction house, following a degree in Art History. She is co-founder and co-chair of the Museum of Arts and Design in New York, and co-director of the Design Council for the museum. "I'm very involved," she says. She also co-founded the Design Miami fair to run alongside Art Basel Miami as a forum for collecting, discussing, creating and exhibiting design.

She set up her interiors consultancy, Amy Lau Design, in New York in 2001. "I didn't use a lot of colour from 2001 to 2004. I was scared of colour. Then I broke out!" And some. Amy Lau's schemes are not just a jazzy façade; the riot of colour and pattern she brings to clients' homes is always based around key pieces of Modernist design or inspired by vintage treasures and then created bespoke for the scheme by artisans and couture studios, bringing a contemporary slant to an original 1950s' or 1960s' design.

Breathlessly, Amy Lau explains the etiquette for Kips Bay Showhouse, a fundraiser benefit for disadvantaged young people. "It's like the Oscars to the design world. It is the most prestigious thing you can do as a designer. It's invitation only, you wait ten years to be invited to participate... you might never get asked. Modernist designers are never chosen, but I got asked!"

Most other designers source things as any stylist would, borrowing from a collection, or on loan from a gallery. Amy Lau unleashes her fine artist and creates every aspect of the showhouse. For Kips Bay Showhouse 2007 Amy Lau took two original 1960s swivel chairs by Tommy Parzinger as a starting point, upholstered in vintage fabric Bark Cloth from the 1960s that Amy found in Palms Springs.

Picking out the turquoise blue and yellow colours of the graphic block-print upholstery, she designed a Rites of Spring scheme of furnishing fabrics, floor coverings, and wave-like lavish wall art. "I was just back from Big Sur, California, where I'd been studying the Josef Albers Color Theory on the interaction of colour. His 'Formulation' colour field painting inspired the fresh citron and soothing cobalt blue scheme." Cushions on the waves of the 1960s Milo Baughman Serpentine sofa re-covered in bouclé wool sport colours from the Californian ocean horizon in cotton, llama and spun mohair.

A white lacquer tubular dining set by Arne Jacobsen from 1971 dates the scene to an era of high optimism, brought down to earth by a side table of solid hunk of free-edge wood by Bauhaus designer Carl Aubock.



A chandelier of glass discs by Jeff Zimmermann, a Californian-trained glass blower, evokes Nouveau curves, while Amy designed the decorative wall mirror of blue and green enamelled petals around a lily pond; and a conceptual mobile of copper wire and dried crespedia like fungal mycelium, diffuses light from the skylight above.

In a final touch of the unexpected, hundreds of porcelain crustaceans by Texas ceramic artist Jennifer Prichard seem to have encrusted themselves onto the wall and ceiling like barnacles.

Amy Lau's installation for Kips Bay Showhouse created a big stir as she announced the new wave of colour which is just beginning to percolate into the design world's consciousness. "It was big news, it made the New York Times cover," she says. This optimism is a trademark of her schemes. One society client has brought Amy Lau back to design several houses for their family; and their favourite scheme is their informal beach house at Bridgehampton. "It's party central!" says Amy. "They entertain house parties every weekend."

The kitchen is a like a downtown bar, with bulbous glass swimming pool tiles and orb lighting above the bar like giant champagne bubbles to keep the party atmosphere buoyant. Each of the five bedrooms has a unique scheme all with a 1950s-1960s feel. The master bedroom's statement piece is a rug designed by Amy Lau, inspired by architect and furniture designer Giò Ponti, to set off the space pod light above the bed. The upbeat palette is aqua blue and the chartreuse yellow-green of a local flower that grows abundantly; while twisted driftwood reminds houseguests they're in the Hamptons.







"Product development is my favourite new thing," says Amy. She has created wallpaper for a Maya Romanoff collection; hand glazed hexagonal bathroom tiles inspired by the horizon of Mediterranean sea and sky for an installation she was invited to design for the Kohler bathroom flagship showroom, dip-dye towels for the Kohler bathroom, and couture bedlinens and soft furnishings which she has designed for each of her schemes. The hexagonal bathroom tiles are now produced by Heath ceramics for her product line, available along with furniture and enamelled mirrors which were showcased in the Kips Bay 2007 Showhouse.

If she hasn't curated an interior scheme from auction rooms for a collector of Modernist furniture, she takes one original piece of art or craft as a starting point – as she did for the summertime theme of the Kips Bay Showhouse in 2007 – and has most of the pieces made for the interior scheme. A rug or cushions are inspired by a painting or piece of decorative furniture, or a glass pendant light that looks 1960s is made to work alongside a vintage piece in the scheme.

Designing an apartment for the artist Barbara Gross, the scheme recalls the 1980s. Amy Lau searched Pucci fashions on ebay as a source of inspiration for the vivid colour palette of pink, azure blue and black in the soft furnishings and cushions. Two of the artist's paintings were translated into designs for rugs by rug artist Zoe Luyendijk, hand tufted in multi-textured silk, hemp and banana leaves, as heirlooms for Gross's daughter and granddaughter. The walls in the sitting room are black lacquer as a dramatic background for the fine art.





"I totally channelled her," says Amy. "I spent time with her until I knew how much pattern she could take." The bedspread is a restful pale eau de nil silk, the wallpaper is a tangle of twigs and blossom that covers every surface, walls, ceiling and doors. "I looked forever until I found it. I *knew* it was the one. She freaked when she saw it."

An apartment Amy designed – or curated – for a collector in Central Park West features a sensuously sculpted gleaming polished walnut drinks cabinet by Phillip Lloyd Powell, the seminal American woodworker cabinet maker from Pennsylvania who worked ceaselessly with his side-angled plane until he passed away in 2008 at the grand old age of ninety.

The bodily curves of the Lloyd Powell drinks cabinet, won at Sotheby's auction, contrast with the lean lines and angles of a 1950s walnut dining table and chairs, another auction gem. The collection of mid-century furniture in a living room looking out over a 21st century New York skyline, lends the apartment a stillness, untouched by the hectic pace of millennial modern life.

The subdued beige theme stays true to the era of the furnishings but not so true to the spirit of the artist who co-exists with the curator within Amy Lau. Breaking out, she dismantled a glass curtain from the Arts and Crafts movement and mounted it on the wall of the Central Park West apartment as an art installation of offset glass tiles. Again in the bedroom, tiled table tops are hung as wall art reminiscent of Kandinsky's squares and circles.



Central Park West Apartment

Amy's enthusiasm for collectable pieces is infectious, and she has a mission to educate collectors on the intrinsic value and the place in history of the pieces they select. In an apartment in New York's downtown Chelsea, knowing her clients were avid collectors of glass, Amy Lau crafted the interior design around vintage glass pieces.

Searching for a colourful piece by Vistosi, the Italian Murano glass and lighting designer, she found an original 1950s lightshade of translucent glass discs, like celestial sideplates, as an uplifting centrepiece above the dining table.

An original headboard of framed fused-glass tiles continues the glass-art theme. Amy Lau had the glass pendant lighting designed bespoke for the bedroom by contemporary glass craftsmen echoing Arts and Crafts style, while pillows and couture bedding were hand designed to pick up the blue, ochre and putty-green colour theme.

The downtown apartment is dotted with collectable objets which keep the mood light. The 1960s style pod lamps mounted on the sitting room wall are a witty retro-comment above the Serpentine sofa by furniture designer Vladimir Kagan and his characteristically tri-symmetric three-leg table.

Amy was later asked to do the interiors for a rented penthouse in Greenwich Village that the clients only intended to live in for two or three years. "It was important that the modern pieces we chose retained their value to sell at auction later." "It had to be done on a budget, but I still pulled a few couture moments," she laughs. She is now working on an interior scheme for the family's townhouse.



Downtown Apartment



"I'm really responsive to furniture. I have a collection of favourites I can't throw out," says Amy. But she understands when clients want to move on. "I like that, when clients call me a couple of years down the line when they're 'recycling' pieces in their collection and tell me the piece we got for \$2,000 just fetched \$12,000 at auction."

"I love Modernist, and abstraction. I'm always feeding my eye with visits to designers and fairs. I am also influenced by nature and the seasons." Amy grew up in Arizona, playing in nature, riding her horse bareback to the local shop, and being inspired by her grandmother who assembled natural found objects into artefacts.

The autumnal scheme for the Kent Lake retreat was kindled by a leaf she picked up while strolling in the grounds with the owner. The warm tones of the wood grain of the grand piano evokes the grandeur of New England in the fall. She sourced an original light fitting of coppery leaf-like metal. The twig-shape metal fire screen designed by Amy Lau is now in her product line. The architecture is contemporary – open plan with an open step staircase; a sheer sliding glass wall to the gardens. But the furniture pays homage to the fifties era which calls to her time and again.

Growing up far from the metropolis of New York's galleries, Amy's dream even as a child was to live in a high-rise looking down at the city bustle. Amy's beloved dog Goofy, a gentle giant of an 85-pound Spinone Italiano, has now replaced her horse as a constant companion, living with her in her Chelsea loft and design studio. Her sourcing extends from Sotheby's auction rooms to the edgy studio spaces of contemporary artists and artisans. She curates artists' pieces into the New York design world's showhouse installations where her imagination is allowed to run wild.

For the Kips Bay Showhouse 2009 she leapt outside the box again. "Most people have a room, I chose the stairwell. I was working with Maya Romanoff on a wallpaper collection. My favourite magnolia trees are in blossom at that time of year, so we made magnolia flowers out of the wallpaper, each flower embedded with embroidery and we decorated the walls of the stairway with these 3D flowers. We needed four flights of scaffolding to install it. I wanted to show that you can see wallpaper differently – wallpaper doesn't have to be a two dimensional wall treatment."

It's not all about antiques and million dollar reserves. Amy set the scene for the Museum of Arts and Design Paperball with 6000 red paper laser cut butterflies, and made dozens of paper aeroplane shapes inspired by a turquoise and lilac and khaki green triangular design on a tabletop by Giò Ponti for an installation at the Sollo Rago auction rooms to promote interest in a sale of high end Italian design by Franco Albini, Marco Zanuso, Studio Ponti.



Museum of Arts and Design Paperball

Amy Lau's wildest scheme ever was a theatrical set for Metropolitan Home's Showtime. Taking the theme of the 1989 Peter Greenaway film *The Cook The Thief His Wife and Her Lover* (food, colour, sex, murder, torture and cannibalism are the theme of this brutally uncompromising modern fable), it's a pastiche of a dinner party that turns into a bloodbath.

She re-sculpted the remit as a curated art exhibition, inviting several artists to work with her and commissioning artwork for the installation. The topsy-turvy glass and wire chandelier, 'Drink Another' by Gregoire Abrial (a Paris artist designer of quirky things for the home), looked as though it had been knocked askew by the turbulence of a murder scene.

'Blood Splatters' on the walls were painted by KB Jones, and 'Blood Trajectories', the String Art installation of dripping blood in the corners of the room inspired by forensic techniques, was by Susan Weinthaler, a graduate of Central St Martins School of Art and Design in London. A blood splattered painting with bullet holes, 'Day Dreams', was embroidered art work by Nava Lubelski, the painted steel art work 'Love Blood (in a box)' was by Carolina Sardi, 'Dexter's Psyche' bloody headspace artwork was by artist Andrea Dezzo, and the resin art sculptures 'Black Skulls' were by Dustin Yellin.

Continuing the gruesome theme, the 'dismembered' forks and 'beheaded' spoons were by Brooklyn artist Steve Butcher, while the 'Hematolagnia' blood stained dinner plates were by Brooklyn artist Nadeige Choplet, 'Coronal Section' was a delicate sculptural glass wall hanging by glass fabrication and performance artist Jane D'Arensborg, and a fine spun cobwebby window treatment was woven by artist Angelica Bergamini.



The 'Beast' console tables created by Brooklyn furniture designer Stephen Antonson have paws – or are they cloven hoofs?... and the 'Quasi cabinet' - or should that be queasy?, with chunks bitten out of it, was by Aranda/Lasch. Amy Lau herself designed the 'Bloody Comfortable' chairs, splattered in 'blood' hand embroidered by Leah Picker and with a wooden white lacquer frame upholstered by Martin Albert in leather. The chairs are now in the Spring Gallery, Brooklyn, and are part of the Amy Lau limited edition collection of bespoke furnishings.

"My dream is I would love, love, love, love, love to have a retail store of my own... a total environment, a showcase for artists, a think tank for design," says Amy. "I'd mix it up with vintage pieces, couture, and products from my own collection, and we'd change it around seasonally. It's on my five year plan."

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