

# HOUSE & GARDEN®

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## THE DESIGN ISSUE

JOHN JACOB · KELLY HOPPEN · PETER MARINO  
KIM STEPHEN · DONALD NXUMALO · ROGER BALLEEN  
KELLY WEARSTLER · HUBERT ZANDBERG  
MARY MAUREL · OTOBONG NKANGA · TIAAN NAGEL





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# The Wearstler Effect



With her high-octane decorating and personal style, Kelly Wearstler has built an empire by refusing to blend in

TEXT HANNAH MARTIN PHOTOGRAPHS TREVOR TONDRO



TOP DOWN THE LOBBY OF THE SANTA MONICA PROPER HOTEL FEATURES COLLECTABLE DESIGN PIECES; KELLY'S LATEST BOOK, *EVOCATIVE STYLE*



Maintaining that balance is crucial to Kelly's design empire. The secret weapon? Kelly herself, and her super-supply of personal style that she endlessly recalibrates for clients.

After arriving in LA, by way of Boston and New York, where she studied graphic design and architecture, Kelly (who grew up in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina) planned to get a job working for an interior designer. But when a friend of a friend needed a few rooms in a Venice house decorated, she took on the gig. 'Before I knew it, I had started my own practice,' she recalls. Soon after launching her firm, in 1995, she met Brad, who brought her on to tackle his hotel projects, as well as his Hollywood Hills house. First came the Avalon. But it was the Viceroy Santa Monica, completed in 2002, that earned Kelly her stripes. Inspired by the decorative pastiche of LA bungalows, she put her own twist on Hollywood Regency, lining walls with mirrors, installing slick chequerboard floors, and deploying stark-white wingback chairs poolside. Kelly recalls her team's

apprehension: 'They were like, whoa, we've never seen anything like this. But it turned out to be iconic.'

That same 'Just trust me' approach extended to her residential projects. (She's completed some 25 private homes.) Clients come to her for something unconventional, and she delivers, often injecting the decor with splatter-painted walls, sheets of polished agate applied floor to ceiling, and bespoke furniture and fabrics. The goal is to reflect the personalities of the residents through her own lens, such as conjuring up a one-of-a-kind fabric to upholster a sofa or creating rugs inspired by a homeowner's abstract paintings.

Not surprisingly, manufacturers began approaching Kelly for product collaborations. In the autumn of 2008 she unveiled decorative objects at luxury department store Bergdorf Goodman, an inaugural fabric line with Lee Jofa, and a collection of floor coverings with The Rug Company. The last included the veined tracery carpet that Kelly has in her own bedroom. She's still developing collections with both brands, in addition to tiles with Ann Sacks, vessels with Georg Jensen, lighting with Visual Comfort, and her own furniture and accessories.

'The cross-pollination is what inspires me most,' says Kelly, fuelled by the 360-degree nature of her business. 'Take a painterly fabric for Lee Jofa called 'District', for example. The print wraps her fifth design book, *Evocative Style*, that was published in October last year, as well as a pair of chairs featured inside.

Kelly, who now works with a team of 50, rises early to make time for it all: client meetings, site visits, and designing at the studio, plus exercising and spending time with her family, all while leaving time to get inspired. (Fans can follow her Instagram account, @kellywearstler, which boasts over 700 000 followers.) Though she's always open to new assignments, turning her studio into a design machine is not on the agenda. 'I could grow; take on more work,' she admits. 'But then I start losing the intimate relationship I have with my projects and my clients.' She would rather keep it personal. ■

**Kelly Wearstler** @kellywearstler.com

RIGHT 'CASCADIA' AND 'MINERAL' WALLPAPERS FOR LEE JOFA; 'FAIRFAX' CHAIR BY KELLY UPHOLSTERED IN 'DISTRICT' FABRIC FOR LEE JOFA



'They were like, whoa, we've never seen anything like this. But it turned out iconic'

KELLY WEARSTLER

ABOVE, TOP DOWN 'CHANNELS' AND 'ARCHETYPE' CARPETS FOR THE RUG COMPANY

RIGHT KELLY'S OAK ALMOND CREENZA

BELOW, CLOCKWISE, FROM FAR RIGHT CRESCENT WEAVE AND ZENITH OUTDOOR FABRICS FOR LEE JOFA; 'LIAISON' MOSAIC TILES FOR ANN SACKS

