

BRING YOUR STYLE HOME

SUMMER 2020

# domino

## FINDING *That* LIGHT

Welcome to Kelly Wearstler's World  
(We're all just living in it)



# 252

Bright Ideas  
for Your  
Best Summer  
at Home

# REBEL

# HEART

A master at creating immersive, mood-boosting spaces, trailblazing designer Kelly Wearstler has always leaned into instinct and forged her own path. Now her perspective on the power of home is more relevant than ever.

*Photography by Magdalena Wosinska Words by Christene Barberich*



# IF YOU'RE LUCKY, YOU HAVE A MEMORY OF A ROOM

that seemed to breathe life. Where the walls receded and scents, sounds, and shadows were brilliantly amplified. Maybe that's why we dream so often of our childhood homes long after we've moved on, or why climbing a spiral staircase to some other place can fill us with a sense of magic and possibility. It's as though a space can have a life force all its own—something designer Kelly Wearstler knows well.

If, by some rare chance, you aren't familiar with Wearstler by name, you'd almost certainly recognize her spaces, as well as the much-emulated design eras she inadvertently inspired. Among her toolbox of trademarks: peacock green and brass, painterly geometric prints, warm marble, slick lacquer, standout vintage from Ettore Sottsass to Tobia Scarpa, and—always—the earthy naturalism of her West Coast home base mixed with the reflective shine of futurist

worlds yet to be discovered. For more than two decades, her eye and curiosity have led her way ahead of current trends. She's a brave soul who honors her impulses and channels them into stunning living mosaics we never want to leave. And luckily, through her work, she's transferred some of that defiant spirit to us, too. "It's about staying true to who you are and what you believe in," says Wearstler. "Because if you don't, you're never going to find your style or your voice."

Turns out, trusting her gut—and heart—have paid off. Since launching her studio, Kelly Wearstler Interior Design, in 1995, Wearstler's veritable empire now encompasses furniture, textiles, lighting, and wallpaper collections—not to mention it popularized the notion of the modern decorative accessory, allowing anyone to get a part of Wearstler's world in the form of mini brass lips and crystal glass-encrusted boxes. There's the flock of destination hotels, including the Avalon and Maison 140 in Beverly Hills and Viceroy properties from Palm Springs to Miami (the Santa Monica location, a spin on Hollywood Regency complete with mirrored walls and lemon-hued wingbacks, became an instant hit when it opened in 2002). Her high-profile homes and projects routinely land magazine covers, and we can thank Wearstler for being one of the first to turn early design collabs with brands like Lee Jofa, the Rug Company, and Ann Sacks into major industry buzz.

Yet possibly the biggest piece of Wearstler's impact as a design visionary is subtler: helping us to create and experience real moments, and teaching us how to truly live in a beautiful space—not just look at it. Her latest hotel, the Proper in downtown Los Angeles, is the most recent example where Wearstler's principles come to life. The building, a Renaissance Revival landmark from the 1920s, sets the stage for nods to Mexican modernism (hand-painted tile, leathered stone), cozy textiles, vintage furniture scores, and other details brought in from nearby art stars, like the custom mural by local artist Abel Macias and the decorative stained-glass screen fabricated by Judson Studios, a company

## MIDAS TOUCH

At the Santa Monica Proper (shown throughout), even oatmeal and tan look fresh in Wearstler's hands.

All Swatches throughout by Kelly Wearstler for Lee Jofa [kravet.com](http://kravet.com).

**Opposite page:** Custom Floor Lamp and Armchair by Kelly Wearstler; Custom Grasscloth Wall Covering [twenty2.net](http://twenty2.net).



Styling by Monica Rose; Makeup by Kindra Mann.





that dates back to 1897. The effect is something altogether rare, feeling fully immersed in an environment while also being transported to some other time and place. “For me, it’s all about finding the best that a city has to offer,” says Wearstler in regard to the Proper and how she approaches a concept. “I get to bring the whole community into each new place.”

These days, though, as COVID-19 continues to impact our relationships and work, it’s our personal spaces that have never been more vital in our everyday lives. “They’re such a reflection of who we are, and right now we’re connecting with our homes in a way we never have before,” says Wearstler from Beverly Hills, where she lives with her husband, real-estate developer Brad Korzen, and their teenage sons, Oliver and Elliott. That deep appreciation and respect for the power our spaces can generate functions as a foundation of sorts for everything Wearstler touches. Her instinct for creating palpable moods and moments affirms the idea we can all transcend the ordinary simply by stepping through a sunflower yellow-framed doorway.

Cultivating her visual language has helped Wearstler put an indelible stamp on the interiors world, as well as our homes and dreams of what could be. She helped challenge the idea that in order for something to be long-lasting or a solid investment, it has to look “safe.” On the contrary. From her early days as a one-woman show, Wearstler’s daring devotion to experimenting has given the rest of us courage to take more chances with our spaces (and lives), too—one brushstroke of bold teal paint or graffiti-inspired wallpaper at a time. “It’s about taking risks and not feeling like you have to do what everyone else does,” says the designer. That rebellious spirit might come not simply from loving her work but loving it *hard*, and being super hands on rather than just calling the shots. “I know every doorknob, hinge, and door slide that goes into a project,” she says. Not surprising, her dedication has landed her in the pantheon of other “decorator” icons like Dorothy Draper and David Hicks, who also launched enduring trends far beyond the walls of their individual projects. “I have such a passion for design and everything that falls under that umbrella,” says Wearstler. “Art, fashion, landscaping, architecture—there are so many facets to the work, and I’m constantly learning from all these incredible talents, whether it’s a client or an artist or a contractor or a painter. I absolutely live for it.”

Wearstler can trace that interest back to her early days growing up in South Carolina, where she would scour auctions and flea markets with her mother. “I would go with my wad of saved-up babysitting money and come home with something really special, whether it was an unusual piece of jewelry or a beautiful skirt,” she says. Her signature “vibe trays” (tidbits of treasure, materials, and elements she collects to conjure a mood that is then translated into a space) are a small-scale version of Wearstler’s lifelong knack for distilling forms and ideas into a cohesive theme, and bringing both established and emerging talent with her into the experience. She regularly taps up-and-coming artists and designers to share her projects and platform with—including recent recruits Katie Stout, Misha Kahn, and Netherlands-based studio Odd Matter. It’s a worthy contrast given she has masterminded homes for the likes of Gwen Stefani and Cameron Diaz.

#### COOL AND COLLECTED

Wearstler’s hotels have sparked an art house-style hospitality movement, where storied objects, vintage books, and artwork come with a compelling narrative.

**Opposite page:** Tulu Rug [jamrug.com](http://jamrug.com); Soriana Lounge Chairs and Ottoman by Tobia & Afra Scarpa for Cassina [pamono.com](http://pamono.com); Grasscloth Wall Covering [astek.com](http://astek.com); Vintage Stool.



## “IT’S ABOUT staying true to who you are and what you believe in.”



If that sounds out of reach, you’re not alone in thinking so. Interior design can come at a high price and often feel unrelatable—especially now, when millions of Americans have filed for unemployment as a result of business shutdowns and layoffs due to COVID-19. Wearstler acknowledges the lofty image of her industry, but also that it doesn’t have to be that way. “I remember when I first started here in L.A., just going into an art gallery or the Pacific Design Center was so intimidating,” she says of her early days hustling to get her own shop off the ground. “I was literally

terrified to go in there. I look back on that, and it taught me how important it is to be humble and kind and a good listener. [When I meet a new client], I don’t come in and say, ‘This is how it should be.’ This is their home; they’re going to live there, and I want to give them a beautiful space to enjoy.”

Luckily, as Wearstler attests, there are ways to go about refreshing your home that don’t actually cost a thing. For her and so many of the rest of us, that means embracing our own form of minimalism in an effort to let go of any excess stuff crowding our corners and consciousness, while being intentional with resources. “One of the most important things we can do now that we’re spending more time at home is just paring down,” she says. In true Kondo fashion, Wearstler urges us to “start fresh with the things you love and that make you happy. I think that’s what a lot of people are doing, looking at: ‘What’s going to make me efficient?’ Being functional means having less stuff and more beauty in a room.”

At its heart, that may well be the key to Wearstler’s design philosophy—the invisible thread she spins between the simple and the grand. How perhaps the value of real richness is so much more about a sense of self than any over-the-top price-tag item. In fact, despite her penchant for custom patchwork leather chairs that can float in the \$10,000 range, she continues to nourish her visual senses with regular trips to the flea markets and thrift stores. And despite her meteoric success, Wearstler still gleans loads of lessons from early jobs where budgets were tight. “My first clients lived in a little bungalow in Venice, and they asked me to design their dining room,” she says. “The budget was really small, but I would get up every day at 5 a.m. and go to the flea markets, sometimes three or four times. I’d fill up my little cart and haul it back to my car. I busted my ass. But you can’t look at it like, ‘Oh, my God, I’m working so hard and not making any money.’ I just wanted to create something special for them.”

### CALIFORNIA DREAMING

“I always knew I would somehow end up in California; it was this subconscious dream,” says Wearstler, who cites Los Angeles as a major inspiration in her work.

Opposite page: Custom Sofa by Kelly Wearstler.



## VINTAGE APPEAL

A Wearstler project isn’t complete without standout vintage, layering in what she describes as “old soul, new spirit.” She sources from antiques shops, auction houses, dealers, and websites like Istdibs. Here are the five iconic designers topping her wish list.

### 1. Mario Botta

His work is very architectural and has a real ‘80s vibe, but is still super-elevated. I brought his table lamps into a residential space and gorgeous modern Memphis dining chairs to the Santa Monica Proper.

### 2. Pierre Chareau

The French architect and designer had such a unique vision for materiality and sculptural architecture and furniture. I also included his lighting in a few projects, such as the Dragonfly sconces in the San Francisco Proper’s Villon restaurant.

### 3. Josef Hoffmann

I have always been a huge fan of the Wiener Werkstätte movement, and Hoffmann is one of my all-time design heroes. His work artfully blends simplicity with luxurious craftsmanship. I featured his skirted chandelier light pendants in the Villon.

### 4. Tobia Scarpa

I love his pieces because of their warmth and low profile. There is always a beautiful pairing of upholstery with metal or wood that’s sensual and so inviting. His Soriana lounge chairs are at the Grotto at the Santa Monica Proper—and I have a set of Foglio wall sconces in my dining room at home.

### 5. Ettore Sottsass

The Memphis period is such an inspiration, and Sottsass was incredible with his silhouettes, playful colors, and irreverent but sophisticated voice. I’ve used many of his pieces in my projects—the Tartar Memphis console and Ultrafragola mirror are two of my favorites.

# A FEW OF HER FAVORITE THINGS

From the book on her nightstand to the trip that's keeping her inspired.

**Pattern** Every project is unique, and I like to use patterns that are specifically designed for the client. For an Austin residence, we're doing a wispy, grasslike graphic on a hand-painted wall covering that feels really delicate and light.

**Material** Woods that have a lot of grain and a tactile finish, either wire-brushed or sandblasted, bring such depth and dimension into a space.

**Book** I love artist biographies. Diving into remarkable, personal, creative journeys is ever inspiring, like my latest read: *Duchamp: A Biography* by Calvin Tompkins.

**Natural Object** There are so many new stones discovered every year in quarries around the world. The anomalies in the patterning and colors are so beautiful.

**Place** Visiting Kyoto and Tokyo recently and seeing all the diverse architecture and centuries-old temples next to contemporary buildings—as well as experiencing the creative energy in both cities—was fascinating.

**Color Combo** For the new Austin Proper hotel, we used pigment-charged, organic colors—hot ginger, burnt cinnamon, sienna, chestnut—combined with vintage pieces upholstered in big country and bluebell blues. There's a welcoming comfort in those bold and complementary hues.

**Playlist** Hip-hop at 6 a.m.—Drake, Wiz Khalifa, and Rae Sremmurd.



**INTO THE FOLD**  
Carving out nooks and bringing in lots of textural elements gives the Santa Monica Proper a warm, lived-in feeling, like so many of Wearstler's singular spaces.

Bringing a unique perspective and maximizing the potential of a space couldn't be more important now, while we're rooted at home like never before. "I want to look at different rooms in a different way," Wearstler says, regarding how she views her own home as she conducts business remotely along with much of the country. "I can work at my dining room table or I can go and have a conference call in my living room, so it's about being comfortable and seeing how you can make it better. Instead of spending a lot of money on a pair of shoes, you might decide you'd rather have

that incredible set of bedding or find a really cool chair to make your living room more exciting. You know, instead of just buying random things."

Whether it's her self-starter beginnings or her insatiable work ethic, perhaps the most important thing Wearstler has taught us is that it pays off when we bet on ourselves—when you take the leaps that feel right for you. Not just what someone is telling you to like or buy or hang on your wall. (Who better than Wearstler to host a MasterClass this spring—the first interior designer to appear in the series—as she candidly guided viewers through the basics and encouraged people to "create your story." The role of mentor is one she wears well since serving as a judge on Bravo's *Top Design* in 2007, where her personal style episode "looks" translated to TV gold.) At a time when we might feel choked by a litany of rules and affirmations jamming our social feeds, Wearstler's once-unorthodox clashing of eras, mediums, and styles is the rebellious energy we've been yearning for, as we go about reclaiming our homes and what we want to make happen there. "It's my job to really get into a [client's] psyche and listen to them," she explains. "I always ask them what they collect. For example, a client in Seattle had a huge collection of musical manuscripts, which informed the music room we designed. Some clients are incredible chefs, so we'll look at the details that will support that, like a steam oven or walk-in refrigerator. It's first about how they want to live." When Wearstler is interviewing potential hires for her studio, it's also the anomalous portfolios that stand out. "It shows me that this person has fortitude and can think for themselves," she says.

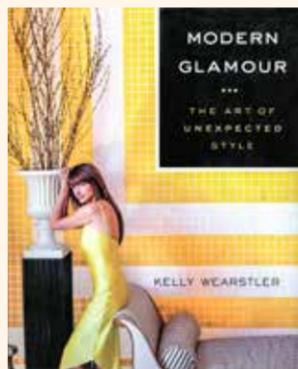
That ability to spot the outlier, whether it's a 1930s scone or a future design star, is symbolic. As other designers might get trapped in a certain style or period, Wearstler sees change and evolution as an essential part of the job. "My clients are the ones who push me in new directions. They enlighten me; they teach me something. If you look at my work now compared to 10, 15 years ago, it's really different, because I like using new visual materials and new types of architecture," she says. "It keeps me falling in love with new things, and that's what life is about—falling in love."



Vintage Chairs from the 142 Series by Eugenio Gerli for Tecno [Istdibs.com](http://Istdibs.com); Vintage Teak Barrel Chairs by Illums Bolighus [Istdibs.com](http://Istdibs.com) upholstered in Serrano Stripe Fabric [kellywearstler.com](http://kellywearstler.com); Custom Dining Tables and Sconces [morganpeck.net](http://morganpeck.net); Copper Planter [innergardens.com](http://innergardens.com). On Wearstler: Jumpsuit [janashiastore.com](http://janashiastore.com).

# TIME OF HER LIFE

Twenty-five years after her studio first opened, Wearstler has launched countless covetable collections, designed era-defining hotels, and brought her signature style to projects ranging from a dreamy chocolatier to the perfect stationery. Welcome to Kelly's world.



'04



'05



'99

**1995** Opens Kelly Wearstler Interior Design studio on La Brea in West Hollywood—the neighborhood where her current space is still based.

**1999** Designs her first-ever hotel: the Avalon in Beverly Hills (below), an oasis of seafoam blues and original mid-century details.

**2002** Makes Hollywood Regency cool again with her unique twist on the more-is-more style at the Viceroy Santa Monica.

**2002** Weds real-estate developer Brad Korzen and gives birth to their first son, Oliver. (Elliott comes along a year later.) "Getting married and having my boys are the most pivotal moments in my life," says Wearstler (top right). "We are a super-close family, and they are at the heart of everything I do."

**2004** Publishes first book, *Modern Glamour* (left), which hits the *Los Angeles Times* best-seller list.

**2005** Reimagines the BG restaurant at Bergdorf Goodman (below)—her debut project in Manhattan—incorporating hooded mustard-hued Bergère chairs and sunburst lighting that soon become Wearstler signatures.

'02



**2007** Appears as a judge on Bravo's *Top Design*, alongside Todd Oldham and Jonathan Adler. Viewers tune in just to see her fashion-forward outfits, which are chronicled with awe by style blogs.

**2007** Citing her "trademark Hollywood glamour," *Time* honors Wearstler with a spot on the annual Time 100 list, while *Vogue* names her one of its Top Ten Best Dressed.



'07

**2007** Opens her own home furnishings boutique inside Bergdorf Goodman that sells, among other accessories, her now-iconic objets d'art, such as the brass Classic Legs (above), Mini Lips, and gemstone-studded Bauble Boxes. *Classic Legs* \$1,495 [kellywearstler.com](http://kellywearstler.com)

**2008** The "queen of Hollywood Regency" appears on her first *Domino* cover (below), where she reveals the "no construction, complete decoration renovation" of the guesthouse on her Beverly Hills property.

'08



Images courtesy of Kelly Wearstler

'08



**2008** Launches collection with the Rug Company (above) that's inspired by Art Deco and forms found in nature. *Channels Indigo Rug* by Kelly Wearstler for the Rug Company from \$4,800 [therugcompany.com](http://therugcompany.com)

**2009** *The New Yorker* dubs Wearstler "the presiding grande dame of West Coast interior design."

**2011** Unveils a contemporary fashion line exclusively at Bergdorf Goodman, featuring whimsical prints and structural jewelry.

**2011** The Kelly Wearstler flagship boutique, filled with Wearstler's home furnishings, clothing, and sought-after accessories, opens on Melrose in West Hollywood.

**2013** Teams up with Paperless Post on a collection of invitations with gold detailing, agate patterns, and free-form motifs.

**2014** Wearstler's "favorite indulgence" is dark chocolate. So naturally, she collaborates on a very chic project with L.A. chocolatier Compartés (below).

'14



'18

**2016** Offers a bridal registry on her website, where couples can pick from avant-garde, classic, and modern styles to make a dream home.

**2016** Designs ceramic and marble stone tiles for Ann Sacks, some with Wearstler's own hand-painted prints.

**2017** With Korzen, Wearstler launches the San Francisco Proper, featuring Beaux Arts-meets-Bloomsbury interiors, with more hotel locations opening in Santa Monica, Austin, and downtown L.A.

**2018** Releases a collection of sculptural pieces (above), building on the success of her first extensive furniture line in 2015. *Ardent Club Chair* from \$4,965 [kellywearstler.com](http://kellywearstler.com)

**2019** Collaborates with Georg Jensen on a series of mirror-polished stainless steel centerpieces (below) inspired by the waves outside her Malibu home. *Frequency Bowl* from \$99 [georgjensen.com](http://georgjensen.com)



'19

101



'20

**2019** Pens her fifth book, *Kelly Wearstler: Evocative Style*, which is swathed in her popular District print and features never-before-seen projects.

**2020** As part of a long-standing partnership with Lee Jofa, Wearstler designs a line of wall coverings, fabrics, and trims in scribble-style checkerboard and other painterly motifs (above). *Kelly Wearstler V Collection* by Kelly Wearstler for Lee Jofa [kravet.com](http://kravet.com)

**2020** Her Instagram account (@kellywearstler) hits a milestone of 1 million followers.

**2020** Brings her decades of experience to MasterClass, teaching an interior design course for all levels, focused on pattern, lighting, and finding your own style.