



# BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG CITY

With their obsessive approach to craft, these New York names are resetting the pace in interior design, says **Katrina Burroughs**

**T**he Big Apple, the city that never sleeps... and an energy-pulsing hotbed of design. New York is home to architects and designers, artists and craftspeople, with a unique visual lexicon that spans the style extremes, from art deco glamour to artisanal charm. It also hosts one of the most influential international design-industry events in the calendar, NYCxDESIGN, where original products and directional decorating concepts are showcased each May across the five boroughs. George Pushelberg's Tribeca-based studio Yabu Pushelberg won two awards at the fair this year – for the atmospheric interiors of the Times Square Edition hotel and the versatile seating composition of its El Raval bench for design company Man of Parts. Born in Canada but a self-identifying New Yorker after almost two decades there, Pushelberg describes a metropolis with a restless creativity: “New York doesn't like stasis. It's always evolving, searching, testing new things, new ideas and new styles. It's never 'stuck'.”

David Rockwell – founder and president of the Rockwell Group studio, which designed the restaurant, lounge and rooftop of the Moxy Chelsea hotel (where Yabu Pushelberg created the guest rooms) – also sees the city as an incubator of innovation. “New York is home to 8,000 design establishments, 53,000 design professionals and 10 of the most prominent design and architecture schools in the country – because of this, it is a launching pad for new products and thinking, all of it on constant ‘refresh’ mode,” he says.

Rockwell believes hotels such as the Moxy Chelsea, which officially opened in March, are significant spaces in New York's design scene. “Because most New Yorkers live in small apartments, they spend a lot of time in the city's ‘living rooms’ – bars, restaurants, hotels, performing arts centres, specialty stores and sidewalk benches,”

**Left: Yabu Pushelberg for Henge brass, bronze or silver Puddle side and coffee tables, from £4,062 and £7,296**

he explains. “This blurring of public and private life feeds back into a very vibrant, rich and tapestried design world.” Rockwell recently completed the apartments and amenity areas at 15 Hudson Yards (285 luxury homes in a 274m glass skyscraper designed by interdisciplinary studio Diller Scofidio + Renfro), including Cedric’s bar in The Shed arts centre, created as a “living space” for residents.

Interior designer Robert McKinley, the creative mind behind Wall Street bar The Mailroom, also sees the city’s shared spaces as centres for the cross-pollination and dissemination of ideas, pointing to trends that often

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begin in New York nightspots before finding their way into high-end homes. “These establishments are such a huge part of most New Yorker’s lives. It makes sense that elements – whether it be lighting or particular kinds of finishes – would then cross over into our homes.” The designer of stylish clubs and restaurants has launched limited edition tapestries with cult Brooklyn home brand Aelfie, founded by Aelfie Oudghiri.

For collectors of contemporary design, the big news this spring was the opening of Casa Perfect New York, gallerist David Alhadeff’s latest venture. Styled as a fantasy residence, the five-storey brownstone in the West Village, with a spectacular timber staircase by UK architect David Chipperfield, includes a black kitchen with backlit wine coolers that double as display cases. “When we talk about the commercial art world, New York remains, in my opinion, at the centre of the US, maybe even the world. I think there’s still something that happens in New York that doesn’t happen anywhere else,” says Alhadeff. Most of his clients are designers renowned for using artworks in their projects, such as Kelly Behun, Nicole Hollis and architect Peter Marino. Alhadeff also serves a committed group of collectors, a community poised to snap up each new edition.

“It’s all about the newness,” he says. “We sell 80 per cent of a work in the first weeks after a drop.” The designers who prompt this feeding frenzy include artist and ceramicist Reinaldo Sanguino, who creates vividly glazed porcelain benches, tables and wall plaques (like the Ceramic Wall Bubble 02 from Alhadeff’s The Future Perfect design gallery). “These are artists that are being looked at by museums. It’s the kind of work that becomes part of the institutional vocabulary,” says Alhadeff.

Most buyers who visit the city during NYCxDESIGN are not collectors or curators cruising for new acquisitions – they are looking for remarkable ideas for private homes. Design Week’s top venue for exceptional residential interiors, and a fixture in New York’s social calendar, is a 47-year-old pop-up charity exhibition called Kips Bay Decorator Show House. “It’s the centrepiece of the New



**Above: the second floor of a Brooklyn townhouse designed by Roman and Williams**

York design scene,” says interior designer Jamie Drake of Drake/Anderson, the showhouse’s vice chair.

“I love to walk through every year and try to see what is trending. This year it was wall treatments that continued onto ceilings, bathtubs used in novel ways and curvaceous sofas.” The show attracts students and stylists, A-listers and philanthropists. Recent visitors included Martha Stewart, Sigourney Weaver, David Koch and philanthropist/former Chanel president Arie Kopelman. “It is a joyous romp through 20 to 25 super-curated spaces, and everyone is aware that the added bonus to their involvement as a designer, sponsor or visitor is the support it gives to 10,000-plus kids in the Bronx,” says Drake.

Emerging talent is a New York speciality, and the new studio creating a stir is furniture-maker Kin & Company, founded by cousins Joe Vidich and Kira de Paola. Both trained as fine artists and cite Richard Serra, James Turrell and Olafur Eliasson as inspirations. “Donald Judd, whose SoHo studio was a block away from Joe’s childhood home, also had a profound influence on the future aesthetic of Kin & Company,” says de Paola. They launched their first collection in 2017, immediately winning an important accolade for emerging designers – a place on the “American Design Hot List” of *Sight Unseen*, the online magazine run by New Yorkers Jill Singer and Monica Khemsurov that specialises in discovering and supporting

independent designers. Kin’s USP is a constant exploration of their chosen material, metal. “We’re developing a body of research into oxidation and patinas as a distinct surface treatment,” says de Paola. “Akin to watercolouring, the process uses metal as a canvas, applying chemical catalysts to accelerate the natural oxidation of the material.”

New York designers have certainly captured the attention of European tastemakers, who are especially keen on the work of creatives from a single borough – Brooklyn. In September, at Paris’s foremost interiors trade fair, Maison & Objet, the 2019 Rising Talent Awards were focused exclusively on emerging US designers; at time of press, of the six shortlisted studios, five, including Kin & Company, were Brooklyn-based. British e-tailer Anna Garner’s exquisite online curation at The Garnered includes several Brooklyn ceramicists: Julianne Ahn, Amanda Moffat, John Born and Jason Miller. Garner is a frequent visitor to New York, hunting for makers to introduce to her discerning clientele of craft devotees. “I love the American work ethic,” she says, “and find the professionalism and approach even of small-scale artisans really impressive.” She lived and worked in the city for five years as fashion director of Henri Bendel, and has an intriguing theory about the flourishing of its artisans. “New York is a city of burnout,” she says. “Craft – either actively crafting for oneself, engaging in the movement or buying into that handmade ceramic or mouth-blown glass

#### BITES OF THE BIG APPLE



**Egg Collective Oscar dining table, from \$22,300**



**Robert McKinley x Aelfie Cloud Break tapestry, \$2,600**



**Mark Albrecht Studio Eclipse pendant light, from \$7,250**



**Calico Stela wallpaper, POA**



**Token Stela cabinet, \$15,000**

centrepiece – brings a slice of calm to this overcharged 24/7 city. It brings a momentary sense of escape.”

Another European superfan of US design, Staffan Tollgard, the Swedish founder of a London-based multidisciplinary design studio, says he has been visiting New York regularly for seven years because lighting brands such as Juniper, Rich Brilliant Willing and Mark Albrecht Studio (whose lighting is produced alongside furniture) have something new to say about luxury interiors. “Today luxury doesn’t have to be gold leaf and crystal,” he says. “It can be a beautifully handcrafted sideboard made from ethically sourced wood, produced in a limited edition from a small workshop in Brooklyn.” During Design Week, Tollgard met Will Kavesh, founder of Token, and discovered his collection of cabinets, tables and chairs (for example, the cantilevered, leather-upholstered Warren lounge chair). “He’s a great example of this phenomenon. He’s a trained sculptor, painter and engineer who is designing and making furniture that experiments with traditional forms and craft traditions.”

Kavesh’s workshop is in an old warehouse on the Red Hook pier, which extends from Brooklyn into the Upper New York Bay. Near neighbours include Gregory Buntain,

*“We strive to make work that will age gracefully and hopefully outlive us”*

whose remarkable furniture brand Fort Standard mixes “progressive design-thinking with an obsessive approach to craft”, and Nick and Rachel Cope, who six years ago set up luxury wallcovering studio Calico. Nick says they have been astounded by the blossoming of the metropolis’s design scene since they started. “It is hard to put into words the degree of change since we opened the doors to our studio in 2013,” he says. “The level of interest has massively increased – there are new independent studios popping up with great frequency and distinctive creative visions are emerging.” Calico’s show at NYCxDESIGN was a collaboration with Workstead, another fêted New York designer/maker – a new wallcovering collection called Relic that mixes metallic and matte materials to create a geological, layered look.

Margot Guralnick, a New York-based architecture and interiors editor, welcomes the New York craft revival. “I think in the face of an uncertain world – one filled with political upheaval and environmental disaster – we all have come to value the tried and true, the honest, the well-made, the trend-free and built-to-last,” she says. Among Guralnick’s best-rated are husband-and-wife design dynamos Roman and Williams, “whose work celebrates the impeccably handmade”. Last year, the couple opened their own emporium, Roman and Williams Guild, which specialises in homewares (from the striking floating Slab bed to the walnut Coffee Hub table) “with an impeccable wabi-sabi aura”. A similar focus on craftsmanship, fused inextricably with creativity, can be found at BDDW; its exquisite furniture (such as the Bronze bureau) designed and developed by Tyler Hays, who founded the company in the late ’90s, has a timeless aesthetic that has garnered an international fanbase. So much so that BDDW opened an outpost in 2014 in the world’s mecca of design, Milan.

In a place like New York, it is a brave commentator who names a single hotspot. Many young designers, driven by the stick of rents and the carrot of space, are moving upstate, starting a new chapter in the story of New York creatives. But within the metropolitan area, Tribeca, the “Triangle Below Canal Street” in lower Manhattan, might be the place to watch. This year, Yabu Pushelberg moved there from SoHo (where it set up in 2002) to take over three floors of a period building and better showcase new work such as its Puddle tables – a series of brass, bronze or silver side and coffee tables with gleaming tops reminiscent of metallic pools of water – created for Milanese brand Henge.



**Above: Pappas Miron Design’s room at this year’s Kips Bay Decorator Show House**

Egg Collective, a design firm with a showroom and workshop established in 2011 by Stephanie Beamer, Crystal Ellis and Hillary Petrie, moved its showroom from West SoHo to Tribeca this May. The space on Hudson Street is a study in serenity, with curving walls. The aesthetic is gentle and harmonious, and their work is similarly a timeless, quiet type of design. Gems include the Oscar and Kenny dining tables and the curvy Isla coffee table, with pink Rojo Alicante top. But the idea that the New York scene is trending is not generally welcomed – because the Egg women are all about longevity rather than novelty. “We believe that the act of creation carries responsibility,” says Ellis. “So we strive to make work that will stand the test of time, age gracefully and hopefully outlive us.” Far from reflecting the frenetic pace of the city where its creations are conceived, the collective, like several others, represents an ethos more associated with slow living. In fast and furious NYC, that’s truly groundbreaking. ♦

#### **MADE IN MANHATTAN**

**Aelfie**, aelfie.com. **Amanda Moffat**, see The Garnered. **BDDW**, bddw.cm. **Calico Wallpaper**, calicowallpaper.com. **Casa Perfect New York**, by appt only, see The Future Perfect. **Drake/Anderson**, drakeanderson.com. **Egg Collective**, eggcollective.com. **Fort Standard**, fortstandard.com. **The Future Perfect**, thefutureperfect.com. **The Garnered**, thegarnered.com. **Global Luxury London**, globalluxurylondon.com. **Henge**, henge07.com and see Global Luxury London. **Jason Miller**, see The Garnered. **John Born**, see The Garnered. **Julianne Ahn**, see The Garnered. **Juniper**, see Tollgard Design Group. **Kin & Company**, kinandcompany.com. **Kips Bay Decorator Show House**, kipsbaydecoratorshowhouse.org; next edition May 2020. **Mark Albrecht Studio**, markalbrechtstudio.com. **Reinaldo Sanguino**, see The Future Perfect. **Rich Brilliant Willing**, see Tollgard Design Group. **Robert McKinley**, robertmckinley.com and see Aelfie. **Rockwell Group**, rockwellgroup.com. **Roman and Williams Guild**, rwguild.com. **Sight Unseen**, sightunseen.com. **Token**, see Tollgard Design Group. **Tollgard Design Group**, tollgard.com. **Workstead**, workstead.com. **Yabu Pushelberg**, yabupushelberg.com and see Henge.