



# FLIGHTS OF FANCY

New York designer Kelly Behun's artful spaces embrace the fantastical.

Text by WENDY JACOB

**I**n some homes, the artwork is so precious it's practically cordoned off. In the hands of designer Kelly Behun, though, art has the opposite effect—you yearn to touch it, and it makes the whole room feel more tactile and sensual. The New York designer possesses a creator's spirit; she consulted with artisans on the rope and hand-dyeing techniques for the oversized macramé plant hangers in her Long Island weekend home. In 2016, she collaborated with Artec to design a model penthouse at 402 Park Avenue in New York, architect Rafael Viñoly's 96-story skyscraper, the tallest residential building in the western hemisphere.

Kelly's kooky artistic ambitions led her down an unconventional career path. In the '90s, she walked away from a finance job on Wall Street and eventually secured an internship with hotel impresario Ian Schrager. The career move was the right call, and he was the right mentor. She was soon on the payroll and soaking up design brilliance from luminaries such as Philippe Starck and André Putman. Since then, Kelly has demonstrated a laser eye for astute design, without losing her trademark touch of quirk.

After founding Kelly Behun Studio, she has cherry-picked high-end projects and consistently displayed a knack for employing statement furniture and lighting in livable spaces. Her artisanal line of home accessories, *A Kook Millie*, debuted at Barneys New York in 2006 (also available online and through retailers). "Kook is a word I use when I'm trying to convey that a room might need something a bit 'off' or unexpected," says Kelly. "It rather nicely sums up my design philosophy: elegant but with a bit of kook."



## Q&A

**HOUSE & HOME:** You've known for highlighting art in your projects: why is it so important in a space?

**KELLY BEHUN:** Art is an integral part of my design process and a great source of inspiration. Living with art in your home allows you to make an emotional connection to your surroundings that feels life-enhancing.

**HM:** Are you a collector?

**KB:** I'm an enthusiastic collector of ceramics. I have pieces by Monty J — whom I also represent — Takuro Kuwata, Cody Hoyt, Shiroe Imai, Makoto Kagehishima and Masao Kato. My aspiration is to add Betty Woodman to that list.



## ART MATTERS

KELLY'S A KOOK MILIEU LINE IS QUIRKY AND SCULPTURAL.



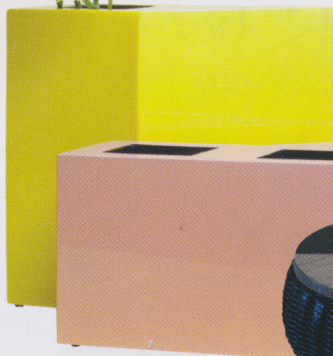
Marbled Concrete **side table** with Antiqued Brass base, approx. \$2,339. Through Barneys New York.



\*Marbled Concrete **bookends**, approx. \$733. Through Barneys New York.



Lacquer **vases**, approx. \$1,380/set. Through Barneys New York.



Marquetry Wood-Top **end table** with Wicker Base, approx. \$1,481. Through Kelly Behun Studio.



Concrete Pattern **Lazy Suzi**, approx. \$733. Through Barneys New York.

For a bedroom in her 432 Park Avenue project, Kelly collaborated with Calico Wallpaper to create a metallic wall covering based on Japanese Kintsugi pottery. "I worked with them to get that specific blue," she says. "We were trying to simulate the night sky, which I've noticed never goes totally black — it's a saturated blue that's very pretty."



**H&H:** How did you approach the model penthouse design for 432 Park Avenue?

**KB:** The views are gobsmacking — the building is 96 storeys tall — and that's not a word I use every day. When you have such a powerful location that's informed by the views and nature, you feel connected to the outside and it strongly influences the colour and textures inside. Don't even try to upstage the views or distract from them. In life, you need to pick your battles, and in this battle with the views I happily surrendered on day one.

**H&H:** Are there any hotel design secrets you borrow for residential projects?

**KB:** Yes! Years ago, while working for Ian Schrager, I was on the team that did the Delano South Beach hotel in Miami. That Philippe Starck project was absolutely groundbreaking in hotel design and contained a veritable trove of wonderful and

inspiring ideas, a few of which I fully own up to nicking over the years. Philippe did some simple outdoor lighting that looked like traditional indoor floor lamps with classic lampshades. I used that idea in my own backyard and wish to formally thank him for that stroke of brilliance!

**H&H:** Where's your favourite spot to escape to?

**KB:** Long Island, N.Y. Everyone waxes on about the light, but it really is kind of magical. Our house design was about things being organic, tactile, soft and elegant. We have lots of gatherings there and my teenage sons like having their friends over. I always wanted to have the house where kids congregate because, growing up outside of Pittsburgh, we had that kind of house. I wanted to recreate it.

**H&H:** Do you have a design motto?

**KB:** Fear not, it's just a chair.

Photography by Richard Powers (bedroom)/Marcela Cussolin (bookends, vase, side table, lazy Susan)/Lauren Coleman (end table)