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Lady of the House

Designer Amy Lau turns a boxy East End pad into a modern showplace

| By Melissa Feldman |



CHAIRWOMAN Amy Lau in her NYC office with some of her favorite things.



GEOMETRY CLASS

Grasscloth by twenty 2 on the walls; sidetable by Eboniste.

"I'm not a typical D&D gal," Amy Lau says, referring to the Decoration & Design Building, on Third Avenue, where most designers shop for of-the-moment accessories and furnishings. Instead, the redheaded interior designer prefers to create her own look, enlisting a secret arsenal of artisans, craftspeople and manufacturers.

The Arizona transplant's early days in New York were spent getting a master's in the fine and decorative arts program at Sotheby's; she then served as director at the Aero Studio and the Lin/Weinberg Gallery, which specializes in mid-century modern design. "Back then I was dating the dean of the School of the Arts at Columbia University and making appearances at every art opening and fair around town," she says, explaining her headlong entrance into the upper echelon of the design world. Later, recognizing the need for a new platform for design, she and the like-minded Ambra Medda founded the hit bi-annual Design Miami/ fair, which coincides with Art Basel in Switzerland (June) and Miami Beach (December) each year.

In her stark white office, located in the brand-saturated Starr-St-Lehigh, on the West Side Highway, Lau conjures up sometimes crazy but mostly cozy modernist interiors for New York creative types, including Elie Tahari and musical couple Elvis Costello and Diana Krall. "Diana loves natural themes and the organic wood shapes of George Nakashima," Lau says. "Elvis lives for bold, bright, intense patterns. So integrating their styles was challenging."

Danish modern looks as sexy online as it does in reality and so does Lau, which is how she came to work with fast-talking telecom mogul Michael Hirtenstein. He spotted Lau and her work on the Web and continued...



BLUE PERIODS

Above: The basement lounge has its own entrance, the bar is covered in Oval from Heath Ceramics' Dimensional Collection, and the vintage lighting is from Rewire.

Below: Hirtenstein's bedroom has a rug inspired by the Hotel Parco dei Principi in Sorrento and designed by Italian legend Gio Ponti, and nightstands from BDDW.



...continued hired her to transform his Bridgehampton house into "part boutique hotel, part party pad."

Hirtenstein admits he's become a "design junkie" but says he favors comfortable function over form. The 45-year-old divorced dad wanted a pleasure palace where he and his weekend guests could play, and his home's proximity to the Atlantic Golf Club and the Bridgehampton Polo Club's fields gives the impression of an endless backyard where the sun is rarely obscured.

Lau calls the motif "a warm nod to mid-century modern combined with an element of fun," and adds that Hirtenstein's love of wood, ceramic and glass inspired her shopping list of ornamental objects.

A serene Mediterranean color palette of turquoise, clear blue and bright green shows up throughout the 7,100-square-foot space. Lau was especially clever in her use of bold graphics and the color green upstairs in the guest rooms, whose geometric wallpaper, Chlorophyll by twenty2, set against the repeated-square pattern of the headboards, makes the space a mod salute to Doris Duke's Shangri La.

The first floor is anchored by the living room, where Lau replaced, lacquered and lightened the oversize windows to bring the outdoors continued...



HEAVEN & EARTH TONES

Above: The white buffet in the living room is accentuated with a vintage driftwood lamp, and artwork from Studio 101 is mounted on Natural Splendor wallcovering in Celadon by Stark. *Below:* The vintage Hans Wegner Papa Bear chair and ottoman are upholstered in Brasilia in Anis by Manuel Canovas. The driftwood sculptures are from Ralph Pucci International.



...continued in. Quirky driftwood sculptures, handmade pillows and a rug by textile artist Judy Ross accentuate the room's casual elegance. Lau handpicked the furniture, selecting iconic pieces including a vintage Hans Wegner Papa Bear chair and ottoman and swivel chairs by Vladimir Kagan. The main seating includes a Knowland sofa by Dunbar upholstered in a plush bouclé in Water Blue from Kravet. A David Weeks chandelier hangs from the double-high ceiling, and the rustic stone fireplace was incorporated in the final design scheme. "Michael's character is bright, bold and playful, and he likes to entertain," Lau explains. "All these things are reflected in this environment."

The hotel theme comes into play in the master suite with a vibrantly patterned rug inspired by the Hotel Parco dei Principi in Sorrento. Spa amenities include a stainless steel Jacuzzi and a steam room in the master bath. A spiderlike Serge Mouille five-armed sconce hangs above the bed, and the walls echo the blue motif in Benjamin Moore Birds Egg.

Because it has six guest bedrooms and suites plus a master, the house feels both spacious and intimate. A basement bar, living room, dining room kitchen and gym and seven bathrooms complete the plan. The bar has its own entrance, and when in full swing, it operates like a lounge, complete with bartenders, a pool table and a sound system. With a blue-lacquered ceiling, ceramic tile and vintage lighting, it's the perfect underground escape from the trashy Hamptons scene.

The house was complete just before the 2008 summer season began, allowing for a final walk-through to make sure every detail was in place. It was; even the Iittala wineglasses Hirtenstein didn't love at first remained on the shelf. "Over time, my clients learn to relax and trust me," Lau says. "I give them intrinsic value and a lifestyle that's truly their own, not made up." **M**