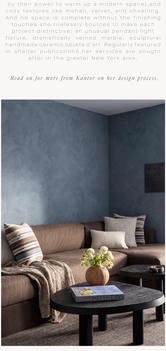
PATTERSON FLYNN

And now a word from our favorite designer:

TARA KANTOR TAKES OVER

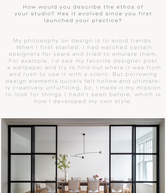
New York-based designer Tara Kantor likes to describe her aesthetic as "livable but luxurious." Her signature style is a blend of clean, modern, inspired neutrals, lots of curves (she swears by their power to warm up a modern space), and cozy textures like mohair, velvet, and shearling. And no space is complete without the finishing touches she tirelessly sources to make each project distinctive: an unusual pendant light fixture, dramatically veined marble, sculptural handmade ceramic objects d'art. Regularly featured in shelter publications, her services are sought after in the greater New York area.

Read on for more from Kantor on her design process.



How would you describe the ethos of your studio? Has it evolved since you first launched your practice?

My philosophy on design is to avoid trends. When I first started, I had watched certain designers for years and tried to emulate them. For example, I'd see my favorite designer post a wallpaper and try to find out where it was from and rush to use it with a client. But borrowing design elements quickly felt fake and ultimately creatively unfulfilling. So, I made it my mission to look for things I hadn't seen before, which is how I developed my own style.



What values guide your work — both creatively and operationally?

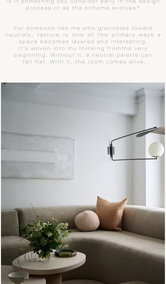
I work very hard to truly understand each client, aesthetically and functionally. I want to know how they actually live, how they move through their home, how they entertain, the people that inhabit the space. Only once I have that full picture do I begin making creative decisions. Design has to be beautiful, but it also has to work for each specific person in their specific home.

When someone walks into a space you've designed, how do you hope they feel?

I hope they feel like everything is beautiful, but nothing is too precious. I try to design spaces that are luxurious but livable. I also hope they don't see a trendy space or something that looks exactly like their friend's home, but rather a fresh, considered take on it.

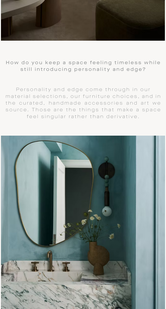
What one does texture play in your projects? Is it something you consider early in the design process or as the scheme evolves?

For someone like me who gravitates toward neutrals, texture is one of the primary ways a space becomes layered and interesting. It's woven into my thinking from very beginning. Without it, a neutral palette can fall flat. With it, the room comes alive.



How do you keep a space feeling timeless while still introducing personality and edge?

Personality and edge come through in our material selections, our furniture choices, and in the curated, handmade accessories and art we source. Those are the things that make a space feel singular rather than derivative.

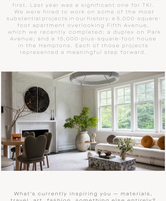


When designing a room from the ground up, how do you think about the foundation elements — like rugs, flooring, or architectural details?

We believe a room is best designed when all decisions are made simultaneously. If you approach it any other way, you become married to a certain element, and every subsequent choice is constrained by it. We want each decision to inform and elevate the next and that's only possible when you're looking at the full picture from the start.

Is there a project that felt like a turning point for your studio? What made it significant?

My business has grown at a steady and intentional pace. We started with individual rooms, then moved into construction and full-home renovations which were more modest in scale at first. Last year was a significant one for TKI. We were hired to work on some of the most substantial projects in our history: a 5,000-square-foot apartment overlooking Fifth Avenue, which we recently completed; a duplex on Park Avenue, which we are finishing; and a house in the Hamptons. Each of those projects represented a meaningful step forward.



What's currently inspiring you — materials, travel, art, fashion, something else entirely?

I'll start with what's not inspiring me: Instagram. Everything looks the same. So I'm relying much more on my mind's eye, looking at what I see on Instagram or Pinterest and imagine how I might develop it further, or transform the concept into something more original.

AI rendering tools have been extraordinary in that pursuit. They've allowed me to take what exists in my imagination and translate it into images that are elevating my projects in ways I couldn't have anticipated.

Designers naturally have strong visual minds; we can see a finished space before it exists. But even for us, AI renders are remarkably inspiring. They've become an integral part of how I work and how I communicate ideas.

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