

DISCOVERIES



1. AD100 DESIGNER JULIE HILLMAN STANDS IN THE SAMPLE LIBRARY OF HER MANHATTAN OFFICE; PENDANTS BY CB2. 2. PAINTED IN BENJAMIN MOORE'S WILLOW CREEK, THE LOUNGE TAKES THE PLACE OF A RECEPTION DESK; VERNER PANTON CHAIRS, ILMARI TAPIOVAARA SOFA, AND GABRIELA MACHADO PAINTING.

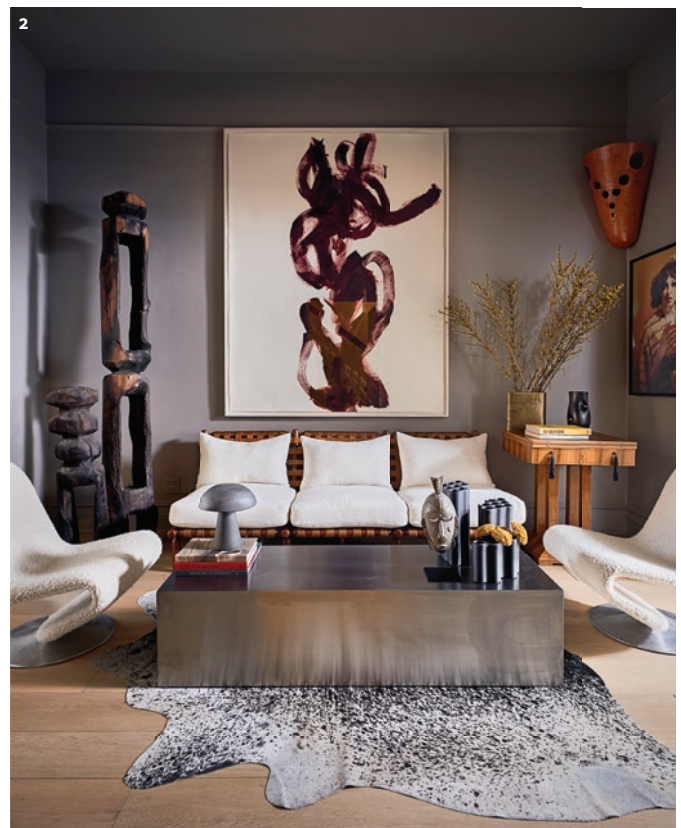
OPEN STUDIO

Calm, Cool, Collected

Designer *Julie Hillman* transforms her workspace in a Manhattan brownstone into a creative crucible

From the rear window of Julie Hillman's Manhattan office, the contours of her handsome town house home are nearly visible through a curtain of leaves. Living around the corner has its benefits, she admits—one reason the AD100 designer recently chose to renovate, not move, when the lease came due on her workspace in a timeworn Upper East Side brownstone. But there were other reasons too. She wanted an excellent sample room. She wanted her 10-person team to love coming in every day. And it was high time that their surroundings aligned more closely with the polished interiors they were making. For Hillman, crafting worldly settings for seen-it-all clients is a métier she inhabits totally, in mind and body; she wanted her colleagues to have the same chance.

Hillman is known for drawing golden threads through the sumptuous rooms she creates, weaving in pieces by Misha Kahn, Andrea Branzi, Faye Toogood, and other masters of contemporary design alongside West African sculpture, midcentury French furniture, and frequently dazzling auction finds, like the comely tasseled armchairs and tables she covets by her main man Carlo Bugatti. For serious art collectors, her deftly layered interiors provide a counterpoint to paintings



1. CHRISTINE JOHNSON ART; ALEX PRAGER STUDIO/LEHMANN MAUPIN, NEW YORK, SEOUL, AND LONDON. 2. MANOLO YLLERA, GABRIELA MACHADO/LUCIANA BRITO GALERIA, ESPEN EIBORG.

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1. HILLMAN'S PERSONAL OFFICE FEATURES VINTAGE ETIENNE HENRI MARTIN CHAIRS AND ARTWORKS BY (FROM LEFT) MERCEDES MATTER, JOSEPH KOSUTH, AND KATE ATKIN. 2. HER DESK IS A 1950S GEORGES ADDOR DESIGN. 3. THE SAMPLE LIBRARY'S MARBLE-TOP ISLAND.

and sculpture that might rotate in and out on a monthly basis. “Interiors need to hold their own before and after the art arrives,” Hillman says. “That’s the most important thing.”

Clients with an inquisitive eye find the near-head-to-toe neutral palette of her rooms remarkably easy to live with. Before segueing into interiors around 2002, the Chicago native pursued a fashion career, designing womenswear for a major US label. That early training still informs her highly intuitive approach.

While she couldn’t make over the pokey staircase between her office and the hair salon below, Hillman did solve problems that had long plagued the space, a lofty parlor floor she’s leased since 2012. After consulting her team, she scrapped the idea of a reception desk in favor of a snug, charcoal gray entry lounge, removed a rear partition to open up shared workspace, and built a central sample library, lining its walls with wicker baskets for fabric swatches and textiles. The Calacatta Viola marble counter running down the middle like an epic kitchen island hides flat files for stone, tile, and glass. Above it, track and pendant lights—one warmer, one cooler—allow textiles to be viewed in different conditions.

No sight line in the newly configured enfilade is without well-chosen antiques and objects, nodding to Hillman’s gifts for placement and scale. Ceramics are a favorite: Glancing at the vintage Andre Bloch vessels behind her desk, she confides, “I bought these for a project—I was praying the clients wouldn’t like them.” (No such luck. These are on the way out, and she’s hunting down a second pair for herself.) This fall, bespoke table settings and lamps that Hillman designed for Ginori 1735 debut at Design Miami/ Paris.

When clients stop in for meetings, they might review plans around her vintage Georges Addor desk or gather near the fireplace, whose Federal-period marble mantel made its way from her home via storage. “I love that I have a piece from the house in here,” says Hillman, casting her eye over a room that’s a measure of all she’s accomplished. “I’m such a collector—and in my own space I’m really able to flex that muscle. Maybe there’s no logical place for something, but we’ll figure it out. Whether it’s a Warhol, a Wool, or a piece by an unknown artist—that’s always my thing. I find a place.”

juliehillman.com —SARAH MEDFORD



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