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*How to “Dress” a Room With Interior Designer Kara Mann*

*Todd Plummer | Living | March 19, 2015 - 06:45PM*

**A chat with the creative director of Art Production Fund’s annual gala.**



**Kara Mann**

*Photo: Courtesy of Ungano & Agriodimas*

**K**ara Mann began her career as a stylist, so it makes sense that now as an interior designer she takes inspiration from the world of fashion. “Well, I don’t think in terms of ‘fashion’ and ‘interiors.’ It’s more about all-around style,” she told us. “The two are intertwined. Someone who is in fashion will probably have a fashionable home, and someone who has a fashionable home will probably be interested in dressing well.” Three style-minded projects on her eponymous company’s docket are proof of her aesthetic sensibilities. First is a private residence project in Dubai, where each room is inspired by a different Alexander McQueen dress. Second, Mann has been tapped to redesign the Hotel Chelsea. (She hinted to us that renovations might be complete next year but was otherwise tight-lipped about the famously secretive project.) And lastly, she will team up with the Art Production Fund at the end of this month to creative-direct its annual gala, this year honoring Haim Steinbach and Proenza Schouler’s Jack McCollough and Lazaro Hernandez.

We met up with Mann to discuss how “dressing” a room relates to dressing a person, which luxury brands make the best home furnishings, and the importance of properly dimmed party lighting.

**Where do your interests in fashion and interior design come from?**

My mom used to say I would draw rooms, make clay models of rooms, so obviously it was something in me. I’ve always been inspired by fashion because it moves so fast and it’s edgier, so people are more inclined to take risks.

**Before moving to New York, you were in Chicago and Miami. What makes this city different from other places you’ve lived?**

You can find anything, get anything, and see anything you want to see. There’s just a different look to people here. People get dressed here and there is style everywhere you look. Other places, the stylish people tend to stick out a bit more because there just aren’t that many of them.

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*“It has to function but still be gorgeous.”*

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## **Is how you “dress” a person the same way you “dress” a room?**

No matter what, it should always be about that client. When I do interiors, I like to get to know my client. If I’m doing their home, you consider how they live, if they entertain, if they have kids. It has to function but still be gorgeous. And I feel that way about fashion, too. I want to be able to wear my shoes, even if they are 5-inch platforms. They look amazing, but there is still a little bit of function to it.

## **Are there any specific ways you like to incorporate fashion into design?**

I love the home products from luxury labels like Hermès and Bottega Veneta.

## **Those ranges don’t get a lot of attention from the fashion media, so I’m curious about your opinion: Are those brands’ lines on par with what their ready-to-wear customer expects?**

Definitely. When Tom Ford designed Gucci, he had the most amazing home collection—I remember for one client I bought this fire screen and tool set that was chrome and glass and so sexy. I think those kind of things are great talking pieces. It’s another way to collect luxury goods. If you’re into collecting Hermès bags, Hermès also does the most exquisite linens. Even Prada makes beautiful objects, like board games. Those are my go-to’s. Missoni is great, too!

## **I heard you’re working on a project in Dubai inspired by Alexander McQueen.**

Well, I have this client in Dubai, it’s her private residence. And when we met to discuss the project, she looked at me, dead seriously, and said, “Less is not more. More is just better.” So a few weeks later I remember sitting in my office and flipping through the Savage Beauty book, looking at all these incredible McQueen dresses and thinking, This is where I have to start. That’s how fashion inspires me—the materiality and palettes are just different from interiors. It was almost easier to have something so literal guide you through it. And the client was blown away.

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***“It’s all in how you interpret the details.”***

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## **So how did you integrate McQueen into the residence?**

There is this one dress, with a full gray skirt and crows holding up this light blue top. We did wood paneling and a wall covering that related to that skirt. But you have to remember that upholstering a chair versus making a dress are two different textures and weights, so the interior might not be as ethereal as those beautiful dresses, but the intention was there for sure. And it's rarely literal. What I'm reading in the fabric might be beautiful gold embroidery, which I might interpret as a gold candlestick. It's all in how you interpret the details.

## **And now you're working with the Art Production Fund.**

Yes! I met Yvonne [Force Villareal, APF cofounder] last year at Art Basel Miami. She and Doreen [Remen, Force Villareal's cofounder] are the ladies that do it all—career, family, and they go out all the time! I love working with powerful women. For me as a creative person, to be surrounded by creative people like that is key. Those days when you think you can't get out of bed, you think, There are people like Yvonne and Doreen out there doing it. So that motivation is great.

## **Specifically, you're handling the creative direction of Art Production Fund's annual gala at the end of this month honoring Jack and Lazaro of Proenza Schouler. How is designing a party different from designing a permanent space?**

It can just be so much more fun. It's at night, it's a moment in time, it doesn't have to last forever. You can have so much more fun with it. And it's all about everyone looking good and dimming the lights properly. Very important! The theme is "Gangs of New York," and we found this amazing space, an old men's club in the Financial District, and wanted to make it edgier and breathe some life into it. It was important to use influences from Proenza's Spring collection, so there are a lot of fringe and mesh moments. We tried to take what they are doing and make it feel more like art installation and less like decoration. I wanted it to feel like "living on the fringe" and the world of artists and how artists come together. The space is very old New York, so it needed a layer of what Proenza has done with their line and a little bit of rock 'n' roll.

*Culture / Living: Kara Mann Interior Designer Interview - Art Production Fund Creative Director*