

# Art Department



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Page 70: Arawaka and Opposite: China, in the front of the house, in the parlor of their Canton Hill home.

Pages 80 and 81: Original pocket books appreciate the front and back panels, not one to adhere to period details. Kowalka hung a fabric brass light fixture, at left, from the ornate ceiling medallion. A print of a painting hangs by Felix Gonzalez-Torres upside down over the fireplace. "The burner got the book in the wrong place, and I just left it there," says Kowalka. She designed the twenty-five pound table lamp, which requires shaping and adjusting to maintain its shape.

Opposite: China's bathroom, which serves as her studio when she's not away at art school, spans the front of the house. "It's very fortunate to have so much light and space," she says.

Pages 84-85: The assemblage on the front of drawers in Kowalka's bedroom perfectly captures the designer's originality. The leather chair was part of her 2011 collection inspired by Bauhaus. She found the oil painting on ebony and the decorative boxes in Copenhagen, where they are used to package conch shells. A bundle of glass paper holds a photograph, "Beauty of China,"

Pages 86 and 87: At left, in her kitchen, Kowalka emphasized the volume of the space—and the volume of the appliances. Kowalka made the red cabinet on the right, from a fabrication brought back from India. She had the wall mirror made by a woman's cooperative in Colombia. There, "it's the only place I have seen that knitted together a perfect union of Spanish and Japanese aesthetics," she says.

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## The Drama King

Carl Hancock Rux, Fort Greene

When Carl Hancock Rux's favorite salvage dealer closed up shop, he was so bereft that he showed up on the store's final day with a lit candle. "I almost shed a few tears," he says. An admitted interiors junkie, the Obie Award-winning playwright, novelist, poet, essayist, musician, actor, and radio host has a soft spot for "old things." "Pieces with history offer insight as to how people lived in a way that a book can't," he says. It's doubtful that Peggy Guggenheim ever stood at her shop sink, but Rux loves that it is now in his kitchen. Jacqueline Kennedy once worked at his dining room table, albeit when it was ensconced in New York's Society for Ethical Culture.

Rux's theatrical gifts are on full display in the Italianate brownstone he shares with his partner, Patrick Symon, a lawyer and gifted gardener and floral stylist. He describes his aesthetic as Gertrude Stein with an obsession with African art. "I imagine Picasso stopping by to check out a new piece Stein has bought," he says. He jokes, but Rux is constantly setting a scene. His guilty pleasure in the neighborhood is a drink at the dive bar Alibi, where there was once a player piano. "When I think about it, the bar would have been a watering hole where Henry Miller, John Steinbeck, Gertrude Stein, and Marianne Moore would meet. That place is loaded with history," he says.

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## The Perfect Canvas

Karin Schaefer & Diane Crespo, Brooklyn Heights

Tucked away in the master bedroom of a classic six-city real estate parlance for a prewar apartment of as many rooms, Karin Schaefer sits in front of an easel making the paintings that have earned her multiple residencies at the Josef and Ann Albers Foundation. Her pieces, made with minuscule paint strokes, are reflective of the rest of the space she shares with filmmaker Diane Crespo and their son, Kaya. Atmospheric, serene, and meticulous, the couple's home, like Schaefer's art, is a series of color fields floating on a neutral canvas.

"Karin is the neatnik," says Crespo. Not that Schaefer lacks a playful side; in fact, she and Crespo lead decidedly lighthearted double lives. As the founders of Acorn, a toy store so entrancing it soothes even the most frazzled city nerves, the pair have created a retail space that looks like what Schaefer might have designed for her six-year-old self. "I grew up in England, Holland, and Germany, where wooden and felted toys were common," says Schaefer, a former Waldorf teacher. Nature, too, was a heavy influence. Schaefer tries to bring as much of it into the apartment as possible, in a way that Crespo gleefully describes as obsessive. "At the beginning of each summer, she announces that we are only collecting a certain color rock. Last year, it was brown," Crespo laughs.

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