

HENRY



NEXT GENERATION
DESIGNERS WITH STYLE
AND SUBSTANCE

NATURAL LEADERS



BY ROBYN WISE

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THREE STANDOUTS FROM THE CITY'S NEXT GENERATION OF INTERIOR DESIGNERS RISE TO THE TOP WITH STYLE AND SUBSTANCE

At a time when empathy and interconnection—in every facet of civilization—is increasingly urgent, it seems fitting to celebrate when nice guys finish first. San Francisco interior designers Kelly Hohla, Eche Martinez, and Regan Baker have risen to the top of the industry not only for the quality of their work, but for the quality of their character. Each has founded their own successful firm, created superb residences across the Bay Area and beyond, and been honored with the SFDC's Designer of Distinction Award, bestowed by a jury of peers. But it's as much their support of the Bay Area design ecosystem, their collaborative spirit, and their commitment to giving back that have seen these three young designers emerge at the head of their class, with class.

respectful and appreciative. "Designer Regan Baker, whose elegantly relaxed interiors for a Pacific Heights home were recently featured on *Elle Décor.com* (the designer's own website charmingly notes her "goal in life to be a nice person") says, "My whole approach is service driven and intended to assure clients we have empathy for who they are." Eche Martinez, known for creating urbane spaces with edge and a sophisticated use of color, practices a philosophy of "listening well and staying humble." He points out, "Colleagues in other U.S. markets often tell me they're shocked at the level of congeniality in the Bay Area design community, and that it actually seems genuine. I think it's a defining trait of the local scene that comes from our regional mindset of acceptance and connection."

The designer diva is the first stereotype this group has rendered obsolete. Balancing high design with humor, and craft with congeniality, all are recognized in the industry for their graciousness. Kelly Hohla, whose namesake firm has designed residences in San Francisco, New York, Tahoe, and Hawaii, is admired and appreciated by the trade for her professionalism and dedication to the community. "Kelly continually inspires us with her deep respect for our staff and our family of local makers, as well as with her exemplary working style and ability to adapt product in the most interesting ways," observes Erik Hughes, founder of showroom De Sousa Hughes. Adds Rhonda Hirata, vice president of marketing at the SFDC, "When we launched our pro bono project to create the interiors for Ronald McDonald House at Stanford, Kelly signed on immediately to design not one, but four rooms. On a site visit one day, I found her painting walls while in her third trimester!"

Another factor behind each designer's success is being attuned to—and helping to evolve—a new, more collaborative designer-client dynamic. Today, those relationships are characterized by greater informality and a more equal footing than the old-school idea of decorator dictating to homeowner. "Most of my clients don't want to see an inflexible presentation and be told, "This is your house," says Hohla. "They want to be part of the team and be able to contribute." She notes of a recent client, "It was important to them to build a 'future team'—their team moving forward—so that everyone worked well together and could have open, honest conversations without ego involved." Hohla has clients who even like to involve their children in the process as an opportunity for them to practice creativity and critical thinking. "One client's five-year-old had strong feelings about color in her room—she wanted to create her own color scheme from what we presented. So she selected the elements she liked best, and we combined them," Hohla says. Baker experiences a similar increase in client engagement. "The younger they are, the more involved homeowners want to be," she explains. "We are very open to that and find it fun."

Hohla, named a 2018 Next Wave designer by *House Beautiful*, notes, "When people hire us, we become part of each others' lives for several years, and hopefully for the long term. So we want to be mutually

PORTRAIT OF KELLY HOHLA BY AUBRIE PICK

(left) Kelly Hohla in a Peninsula home designed by her firm. Holly Hunt chairs through Kneederler Fauchère; custom coffee table by Hohla in collaboration with Tuell & Reynolds through De Sousa Hughes and Fox Marble (following pages) A crisp master bedroom by Hohla in a Jackson Hole residence. Holly Hunt bed through Kneederler Fauchère; custom floating nightstands by Tod Von Mertens through De Sousa Hughes; green velvet on chairs through Pindler. Styling for Kelly Hohla by Lauren Michael Goodman. Hair and Makeup for Kelly Hohla by Beauty by Jasmine.



ROOM PHOTO BY PAUL DYER