



Material World

Interior designer Samuel Amoia is sculpting his domain with a steady hand

Written by Frances Dodds

Photographed by William Abranowicz

Sitting Pretty From left: pillows from artisan in Guatemala City; lamp by **BILLY COTTON**; salt and plaster drum by **AMOIA STUDIO**; books on table: *Reproducing Scholten & Baijings* by Louise Schouwenberg; *The Gardener's Garden* and *Ettore Sottsass* by Philippe Thomé, phaidon.com.

Samuel Amoia is sitting in his living room in New York's Chelsea neighborhood, thinking about texture: the coolness and grandeur of marble, the rustle of a silk skirt in motion, the weight and warmth of mahogany, the unexpected smoothness of sea glass in your palm. "There are certain things," he says, "that never go out of style, because there's a history to them—luxurious, sumptuous materials; beautiful, raw materials. There's a reverence." What he's really talking about are the stories we've sewn from the fabric of the world around us—that we've absorbed tangibly into our memories and passed on for centuries. Texture, he believes, is the very fiber of experience. And when it comes to design, it's the difference between transient and timeless.

Backlit by the window in the late-afternoon light, Amoia, 33, pushes one hand through his heavy dark hair and drums the fingers of his other against his knee, crossing and uncrossing his legs from time to time, reconfiguring his body with his thoughts. It's easy to see why the many media outlets to feature him recently—*Architectural Digest* and *Vogue* among them—have been sure to include a picture of him alongside his design work. It's true that he is very good looking, but there's something else too: a kind of chiseled energy, an exacting momentum.

But back to texture. Amoia is pointing out the Italian Carrara marble in his kitchen and bathroom, rapping a knuckle against the doorframes and radiators stripped to their original zinc. He picks up a throw pillow he found in Guatemala City and tosses it back on the couch, flips over a plaster side table from his acclaimed capsule collection, AMMA Studio, to show how light it is. AMMA was the precursor to his latest project, Amoia Studio, an endeavor he and his youngest brother, Dominic, are calling "sculptural furniture." This description makes sense when you see the pieces: varying styles of drum tables and consoles encrusted with minerals and gemstones—malachite, tourmaline, amethyst, jasper, moonstone, calcite and so on. Indeed, the Amoia brothers are trafficking so many crystals it's a wonder they haven't been raided by the local oracle club.

This winter, the new collection will go on display at the Upper East Side's illustrious DeLorenzo Gallery, a dealer specializing in rarified decorative arts. At DeLorenzo, Amoia will join the ranks of the 20th-century masters: Jean Dupas, Eileen Gray, Isamu Noguchi, Armand Albert Rateau, Alberto Giacometti, Frank Lloyd Wright. There are many exceptional things about Amoia, but in this crowd his most striking feature is simply that he's still breathing. He will be the first living designer featured by the gallery.

Adriana Friedman, DeLorenzo's director, had been searching for someone gifted enough to make the cut for years. "I've had many talented designers and architects walk through the gallery," she says. "But I think he is

a blossoming visionary. He's out there competing with Jacques Grange and Peter Marino."

Amoia's place among the roundups of "designers on the rise" was not always a given. He was 16 when his family moved from upstate New York to Miami, where he began working as a bellboy at the Delano hotel, which led to a series of hospitality jobs for hoteliers Ian Schrager and André Balazs—and eventually landed him in New York at the Standard hotel's Boom Boom Room. At 25, he was taking a few design courses at the Fashion Institute of Technology, and mentioned this to a Standard regular who said, "You should meet my friend." The friend turned out to be Stephen Sills, one of New York's most legendary designers, who counts Vera Wang, Anna Wintour and Tina Turner among his clients. Three weeks after they met, Sills asked Amoia to lunch and offered him a job. Sills was confident in what he saw in Amoia, even if Amoia hadn't yet realized it himself. "Sam has an original point of view," Sills says. "He's not bogged down with the past."

"Stephen is very introverted—an oddball," Amoia says. "But we clicked. He really took me under his wing, and I was a sponge. There are many great designers today, but they're all kind of doing the same thing, or following a trend... Stephen is a true artist. I know I will never be as

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Indigo Dreams Left: custom mirror by the designer. Above: Italian Carrara marble in the bathroom. Below, from left: painting by ALEX FIDELL; teal rug from Africa; custom chair by the designer; nesting stools, lamp and screen by ITZ'ANA HOME BY SAMUEL AMOIA, itsanahome.com; Aird Porcelain Tall Vase, \$500, CALVIN KLEIN HOME, calvinklein.com; arrangement by KAT FLOWER, katflower.com.





great of a designer as he is; it's really his calling. But it made me think, 'Okay, this is what he does. How can I take my own interests, my own passions, and make it mine?'"

The eventual endgame to this line of questioning was Samuel Amoia Associates, a design firm that launched in 2013 in New York, with a satellite office in Miami. He's since accumulated a wide range of projects, from high-end residential properties in New York and Miami Beach to varied commercial commissions like Indochine in Miami, the S10 Training in Tribeca, Dos Caminos on Park Avenue, the Elle Décor showhouse at Art Basel, the recently completed Itz'ana Hotel and Residences in Belize and even the DeLorenzo Gallery's new Madison Avenue space.

Considering the sudden and steep nature of his ascension, one might think Amoia would feel overwhelmed by the deluge of resources now available to him, but he says it's actually the opposite. "Before going out on my own, my only interior-design job was with Stephen, and his clients are all billionaires and collectors," he says. "There was this level of thinking like, Okay, sure, \$700,000 for a cabinet that will be in one of 40 rooms in their fifth home. Now I have to be more restrained, but it's fun because that's my aesthetic. I'm into materials, and I'm a firm believer in under-design. It's constantly pulling back, pulling back."

Through Amoia's window comes the sound of kids walking home from school; his dogs, Bruno and Pig, seem ready for a walk. The final stop on his apartment tour is the bedroom, and here he pauses. "I like having a kind of monastic living space," he says. "Originally I only wanted a bed, but..." He gestures to the rest of the room as if to say, "life is more complicated than that." Texture here shows up in baseball caps stowed in African bowls, a cerused wood credenza custom-built for the wardrobes of two, a tropical folding screen hiding the dogs' toys, a painting leaning against the wall waiting to be hung, but positioned just so. ■

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A Table for Two From top: custom table by the designer. On table: Réaction Poétique Tray, \$490, **JAIME HAYON FOR CASSINA**, cassina.com; Rise Stoneware Tall Vase in Midnight, \$900, **CALVIN KLEIN HOME**; arrangement by **KAT FLOWER**, katflower.com. Books: *Map: Exploring the World*, phaidon.com; *Valentino: Mirabilia Romae*, assouline.com.

Sackett Highball Glasses, \$30 each, and carafe, \$75, **RALPH LAUREN HOME**, ralphlauren.com; Helena carafe, \$22, **CANVAS HOME**, canvashomestore.com; **PARTIDA BLANCO** Tequila, \$42, partidatequila.com; **WOODFORD RESERVE** Sweet Mash Redux, \$50, woodfordreserve.com.