

# Designing women

BY GEORGETTE GOUVEIA

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Not a day goes by that we at Westfair don't hear about some new or established designer of interiors, clothing and accessories, especially jewelry. What do they all have in common? They're mostly women. It only makes sense. According to zippia.com, women make up 82.7% of clothing designers in the United States, 82.1% of jewelry designers and 79% of interior designers. These fields are related to what have traditionally been women's spheres. But not all design industries are equal. While about two-thirds of graphics designers are women, they do not dominate the upper echelons of the profession. The number of female furniture designers has been declining from a high of 58.45% in 2017 to 40.38% in 2021. And women make up only 23.3% of architects in this country, suggesting that a woman's design place is still in the home, not outside of it.

Then, too, money is harder to come by in woman-owned businesses, with women entrepreneurs receiving only 3% of venture capital funding, according to Bloomingdale's.

"There has always been great female talent in the design field. What there hasn't always been is appreciation for their contributions, until recently," said Elissa Auther, deputy director of curatorial affairs and William and Mildred Lasdon chief curator at The Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) <https://madmuseum.org/> in Manhattan. "Historically, MAD has been ahead of the game with its long tradition of elevating and supporting the contributions of women designers – including women of color – through innovative exhibitions and programs and forward-thinking collecting practices. We're particularly keen to illuminate the continuities of pioneering female designers – like Mariska Karasz, Dorothy Leibes and Eva Zeisel – and their contemporary heirs, including Lindsey Adelman, Vivian Beer and Hella Jongerius."

MAD is not the only institution seeking to increase exposure for women designers. Through April 24, Bloomingdale's 59th Street, Manhattan flagship celebrates "50



Studio AK brings a den in a pre-World War II home in Scarsdale into the 21st-century for the young homeowners. *Courtesy Studio AK.*



A mahogany tallboy restored by Leigh Fludd-Smith, a partner in Orchid & Elm, Croton-on-Hudson. *Courtesy Orchid & Elm.*

Female Founders" in its Carousel pop-up of items curated by actress, producer and entrepreneur Tika Sumpter.

"I wanted a variety of businesses that showcased various sectors in fashion, mothering, homewares, jewelry, furniture and food," she said.

<https://www.bloomingdales.com/c/editorial/carousel/female-founders/> "I'm excited about all the brands, but the ones that come to mind right now are Kim Hill Design, Furbish Studio, Lord & Lord Designs, The Spice Suite and Maven Table."

As Sumpter demonstrates,



women keep persisting and they're not only continuing to make inroads in design overall; they're changing the way design is perceived – transforming the lives of others, particularly women, in the process. Kimeze, <https://kimeze.us/> launched in 2021 by sisters Clare and Christina Kimeze, is billed as "the world's first glasses and sunglasses brand designed for those with dominant black and brown features." (The spring collection goes global on Net-A-Porter's and Moda's sites after Friday, March 17.) Leila Shams combines shapewear and swimwear in her Los Angeles-based TA3 company's Plungey swimsuit. <https://westfaironline.com/exclusives/swimwear-thats-slim-wear/>

And Tarrytown weaver, knitter and dyer Anne-Marie Kavulla's work <https://www.wagmag.com/anne-marie-kavulla-weaves-family-and-career/> has evolved into a company, Pirtti in Dobbs Ferry, <https://pirtti.com/pages/story-making-plant-dyed-goods-that-can-be-mended-over-dyed-and-composted>. Pirtti, which is hosting a free "Mending Bar + Open

Studio" from 5 to 7 p.m. Wednesday, March 22, "partners with like-minded women-owned businesses to produce beautiful products that help the planet and don't take from it," said a spokeswoman. Kavulla is just one of the designing women who make Women's History Month something to celebrate.

## Interior design

Stephanie Purzycki, a Fairfield resident, is CEO of The Finish, <https://thefinish.co/> a Southport design firm (and store) that pairs you with a designer for projects big or small billed at an hourly rate. Among her latest projects are the interiors for the Greenwich Medical Spa's recreated Greenwich flagship, a two-story, 6,000-square-foot space that includes a lounge, coffee bar, workspace and Body Center, scheduled to open April 19 with a grand opening June 1 from 5 to 8 p.m.

"Design concepts for the new GMS Greenwich MedSpa are purposefully rooted in nature to provide a calm, soothing environ-



Orchid & Elm partners at the Croton-on-Hudson boutique's opening last year. From left: Leigh Fludd-Smith, Rose Marie Melda, Diandra Sklar and Lorraine DeMaio. *Courtesy Orchid & Elm.*

ment that enhances the patient's experience," Purzycki said. "Beautiful, textured wallpaper from Omexco was chosen for the reception area to add visual interest and sophistication upon arrival and to provide a GMS signature look. We curated mural wallcoverings from Drop it Modern with soft figurative female line drawings that embrace the elegance and power of women."

Anna Baraness and Kristin Tarsi are partners in Studio AK in Manhattan, bringing more than 25 years of international design experience to projects in the metro area and throughout the East Coast.

At a 5,000-square-foot colonial in Scarsdale, the pair were tasked with the interior design and material selection in the home's key spaces, including the entry, stair, upper hall and den, for a young family. Among the first projects was modernizing the den, the pair said in a statement:

"The existing crafted oak paneling and its built-ins are carried into the 21st century with a high gloss finish of Benjamin Moore's Yorktowne Green. Vintage furnishings from the prewar era mingle with contemporary furnishings to honor the home's historic charm, blending past and present. The custom-designed sofa mirrors the glossy wood paneling with calmer, teal velvet upholstery accented with Jayson Home and Hackner Home pillows. The carefully selected materials, including wool and indoor/outdoor synthetic fabrics, layer additional texture with high durability to keep up with a growing family. A pillow chair and



Left, Two hearts come together in Lolovivi's United in Love sterling silver black diamond ring. \$340. *Courtesy Lolovivi.*

Right, In Ronnie Taubenfeld Jewelry's Glow necklace, an abalone fragment from the shores of New Zealand shimmers on an oxidized sterling silver loop. *Courtesy Ronnie Taubenfeld Jewelry.*

ottoman sourced from 1stDibs are reupholstered in Kravet fabric for the utmost comfort. The near CB2 floor lamp designates a calm reading nook.

"Centering the room, a Maiden Home coffee table and pale leather ottomans sit atop a Loloi area rug, preserving the home's original leather floor tiles. Above a contemporary lighting fixture, an Etsy find, adds a warm glow to supplement incoming natural light from tall windows. The cool, curated blend of textures and furnishings spans eras to bridge generations and set the tone for the colonial's ongoing renovation."

#### Furniture and more

Orchid & Elm in Croton-on-Hudson bloomed from a friendship between Rose Marie Melda and Leigh Fludd-Smith that began in 2021 when they participated in Westchester County's Launch1000, a free entrepreneurial training program. Fludd-Smith then brought in Diandra Sklar and Lorraine DeMaio, and this diverse group –

members of several generations who are "living the dream," as the website said – not only sells its own restored furniture in the boutique but also supports other entrepreneurs and small businesses in the process.

Through Orchid & Elm's Visiting Artists program, local artisans (mostly female business owners and artists in Westchester) are given space in the shop and are able to sell their products. Orchid & Elm also supports women's groups in Botswana, Guyana and Senegal through the sale of their handmade baskets.

#### Jewelry

Nancy Street, curator and CEO of the new Lolovivi <https://lolovivi-jewelry.com/collections/frontpage> jewelry brand and store in New Rochelle, has always been passionate about creating – not only food products, financial services and storytelling apps but a "more inclusive and loving world."

"Meeting with Ron (Rosen, designer and partner) gave me the



Nancy Street, CEO and curator of the new Lolovivi jewelry brand and store in New Rochelle, which is as much about love and inclusivity as it is about jewelry. *Courtesy Lolovivi.*



The founder of Ronnie Taubenfeld Jewelry working in her Thornwood-based studio. *Courtesy Ronnie Taubenfeld Jewelry.*

chance to blend that experience with my love of jewelry and fashion," she said on their website.

Each unisex piece – featuring interlocking motifs, often in contrasting stones – is designed to express the brand's mission to celebrate individuality and diversity. To walk the talk, Lolovivi donates 5% of all profits to organizations working for equality and justice for all.

Ronnie Taubenfeld of Ronnie Taubenfeld Jewelry <https://ronnietaubenfeld.com/> combines

a background in metalwork that was forged at the Rhode Island School of Design with her years as a costume jewelry designer in Providence, Rhode Island, and New York City. The results are one-of-a-kind, contemporary pieces in various materials that she makes in her Thornwood studio with her dog, Henna, at her side. Taubenfeld gives back as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), monitoring the well-being of children in Westchester County's foster-care system.