



DESIGN
INTERIOR DESIGN



PEAK PERFORMANCE

*Interior designer Candice Keilin and architect
Narissa Bonnet hit their creative stride as partners*

by ROBIN HOWARD / *photography by* HOLGER OBENAU

THERE'S A SPECIAL TIME FRAME IN A CREATIVE PROFESSIONAL'S CAREER THAT'S difficult to capture and even harder to sustain. It arrives after the hard-won lessons of early projects, after the confidence that comes from solving countless design challenges, but before the creep of complacency or the temptation to repeat what once worked. Interior designer Candice Keilin and her sister, architect Narissa Bonnet, have found themselves in exactly this sweet spot. With their firm, Candice Keilin & Bonnet Designs, the sisters have spent years cultivating the kind of expertise that makes complex projects look effortless. Yet, they remain hungry for innovation, fascinated by possibility and deeply connected to what's emerging on the horizon of design.





The partnership between the two sisters wasn't always inevitable, though in retrospect it feels perfectly natural. Growing up in South Africa before immigrating to the United States as young adults, both women developed distinct creative paths that would eventually converge. Bonnet pursued architectural design with academic excellence, graduating magna cum laude from Georgia Tech. Keilin's journey wound through fashion design and sustainability studies, leading her to the rarefied world of runway fashion and jewelry design. For years, she created pieces for fashion designer Tadashi Shoji, arriving at New York Fashion Week a week before the shows to design jewelry that complemented the collections. Her work sold globally and appeared in movies and television shows, giving her an education in how design elements work together to create impact.

Despite her success in fashion, Keilin discovered that while she loved textiles, sewing wasn't her strongest skill. When she moved to Atlanta and designed her home's interiors, the enthusiastic response from visiting friends revealed where her true talents lay. She returned to school for an international diploma in interior design and built a thriving practice entirely through word of mouth.

Meanwhile, Bonnet was experiencing her own professional reckoning. Working at an architectural firm, she grew

increasingly frustrated with cookie-cutter projects that prioritized convenience over creativity and ignored practical considerations. She pushed back on designs that didn't serve their intended purpose but ultimately found the work unfulfilling. The decision to leave wasn't easy, but it created space for something better.

That's when Keilin made a call that would change both their trajectories. She was already hiring draftspeople to execute her interior design visions, and her sister possessed all those skills and more. Why not work together? The collaboration proved immediately successful. "It's been a beautiful process to be on this journey," Keilin reflects. "We've had amazing opportunities." Those opportunities have taken them across the country and around the world. Recent projects include a building in New York, two properties in Israel for clients based in Philadelphia and Tel Aviv, a home in a Dallas country club and a second residence in Florida.

The sisters have developed particular expertise in apartment complexes, completing so many that they jokingly dubbed themselves the Club House Queens. But their portfolio ranges far beyond clubhouses. A recent gym project in Brookhaven showcases their willingness to push creative boundaries, featuring original string art created in collaboration with a woodcutter, a 15-foot-tall running man suspended 30 feet off the



ground. They've also demonstrated their ability to work under pressure, completing a restaurant remodel in just three weeks, a success Keilin attributes to the owner's willingness to trust their vision and let them do what they do best.

That restaurant project reveals much about Keilin's design philosophy. Because of the culinary focus, she wanted the space to feel hearty, deep and intense. "When you walk in, you feel enveloped by the design," she explains. "You eat with your eyes first. If you think about it, when you go out, you don't just want to eat, you want to enjoy the space. It should be about living in the moment, which we often sacrifice." The details give the design its depth: leather binding on banquettes with rich texture, high-performance fabrics with impressive Wyzenbeek ratings that don't sacrifice beauty for durability. "We didn't have to give up function for form," she says.

This commitment to both aesthetics and practicality comes partly from their South African background and extensive travels, which have given the sisters fluency in transitional, European and modern interior design styles. Keilin's university studies in history fueled her love of antiques and her skill at combining old and new elements. She particularly enjoys incorporating clients' heirloom pieces into fresh designs, creating spaces that feel both timeless and contemporary.

"There's something about historical details that are so

exquisite," she says. While she acknowledges we no longer have routine access to the kind of craftsmanship common in earlier centuries, she doesn't see this as a limitation. "The great thing about this time in history is we've got access to innovation. There are so many options; we can do custom mosaics or have wallpaper hand embroidered. We may not have access to the craftsmanship of the past, but we have modern craftsmanship, if you know how to tap into it."

This perspective captures what makes their work distinctive. Many designers either chase every passing trend or rigidly cling to traditional approaches. Keilin and Bonnet inhabit a more nuanced position. They stay alert to shifts in taste, noting that people are moving away from all-white interiors toward designs with more depth and layered complexity, but they also understand the value of timeless elements that won't feel dated in five years.

Both sisters maintain active creative practices beyond their professional work, creating hand-built sculptures and pottery forms. This commitment to making things with their hands keeps their creative instincts sharp and feeds their design work. Keilin has always possessed a gift for spotting beautiful objects and identifying trends before they reach the mainstream. Still, she balances this forward vision with practical wisdom passed down from her grandmother, who made wedding dresses. "She told



me, 'When you look at something, look at the detail. When you buy furniture, buy more than what you think you can afford.' I still have furniture that is timeless because it's not just cheap and cheerful," Keilin says. "There's too much of that, and it doesn't last."

Their approach to client relationships reveals equal sophistication. Keilin compares working with clients to being in a marriage. "We're talking about finances, which is personal, and we're together day to day for a long time, sometimes years. It's an intimate relationship." Despite having their own beautifully designed homes, neither sister imposes her personal aesthetic on clients. "This is your home, so whatever you want, we'll give it to you," Keilin says. Clients appreciate their unpretentious personalities and the sense of calm they bring to projects. "My husband is a physician, so I know what an emergency is," Keilin adds. "There are no design emergencies. We can work through the aesthetic decisions as they come up."

For prospective clients, Keilin offers clear advice: hire someone you want to work with, then trust them to do their job. When clients try to become the designer themselves, they often undo carefully considered choices that hold the entire design together, turning a cohesive vision into disconnected pieces and parts. She advocates for budget transparency, encouraging homeowners to approach their projects more like commercial ventures, with less emotional involvement, which typically yields better results and happier outcomes for everyone involved.

Being deeply involved in their community, sitting on various boards and maintaining an extensive network has provided the sisters opportunities to work across the country and around the world, all through word of mouth. This organic growth speaks to something essential about their practice: They deliver not just beautiful spaces but positive experiences that clients want to share.

"We are both so passionate about objects and design; we can completely transform a space and elevate the way people live," Keilin says. "We've traveled so much and know what's available. I'm always inspired by beautiful things and how other people are so creative." This openness to inspiration combined with technical expertise and hard-won experience positions them precisely where every creative professional hopes to be: skilled enough to execute any vision, curious enough to keep discovering new possibilities and confident enough to know the difference. *

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