

A State Of The Art *frame of mind*

By Griffin Cooper
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Famed designer Robert L. Peters once opined about the implications of design saying, “Design creates culture. Culture shapes values. Values determine the future.” With such a vast scope of varying design elements and skilled artisans sweeping across the hills and valleys of our region, it is hard to deny the influence design has on our lives. It isn’t simply about the spaces we occupy anymore, it’s about how those spaces frame themselves around how we see ourselves – our spirit, our function, our personal reflection. For *New York Times*-featured curator Katharine Dufault, extensive experience has led to a holistic approach to design philosophy.

Dufault has emerged from a life immersed in the world of the arts and brought her skill for discerning the design-mind connection to the quiet foothills nestled within Berkshire County. Katharine grew up amid a flourishing art scene in Cambridge, England, and from a young age was exposed to a range of inspiring interiors which helped inform her contemporary eclectic aesthetic. After studying visual arts, graphic design, and photography at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, she came to New York and graduated with honors in painting and literature from Columbia University in New York City.

Design + identity

Since launching her design firm State Of The Art in 2015, Katharine has designed spaces that have helped redefine the terms “workplace” and “home.” Driven by her intuitive desire to revitalize interiors, Dufault has become a veritable

guide through the growing cultural link between design and identity. Now, as she lays roots down in an area where artistic inspiration has made respite for generations, she seeks to finally cross the bridge that connects aesthetic design with a cultural state of mind.

How has being immersed in the ever-evolving world of arts for most of your life influenced your design path? How does that world inform your design instincts?

It has given me a familiarity and ease within the world of art, and allowed me to keep on top of what is trending. Growing up in Cambridge, England, amid a flourishing art scene, has given me, I suppose, a certain cultural sophistication and knowledge of the art world. Both my education and my work as artist and curator has led me to a deeper understanding of the contemporary scene. I have an eye for balance and symmetry and an ability to communicate about why things work, or don’t work, visually. Giving time to art and making it a priority was nurtured from an early age. I am comfortable in a gallery setting discussing art; I have knowledge of the history of western art but have travelled to India and have visual familiarity with eastern culture as well as art. I am aware of the ever-evolving Manhattan art gallery scene and I have a wide network of artist friends and peers whose work I often see and discuss. I am used to looking at art and understanding it.

I was influenced by dwellings in England whose mix of antique furniture and textiles, with contemporary art and design informed my aesthetic. I also learned about Indian prints and textiles. I studied painting, graphic design, and photography which gave me visual language and formalized my sense of design. My experience as a curator for the past decade honed my skills in selecting, placing, and installing work for a wider audience. I am ex-

cited to create a dialogue between the works which flow throughout the gallery. I led multiple curatorial tours to the public where I talked about the various artists and their artwork in the context of the exhibition. (Two of the exhibitions I curated were reviewed in the *NY Times*), I enjoy enhancing the visual dialogue, if you will, in a client’s home by sourcing the perfect artwork. After finding out what they are interested in, what they like and what they want their personal space to reflect, I will propose several selections for their approval. I have a good visual memory and I have been trained to ‘look’ in a particular way: as an artist, curator, and designer. Everything I have seen, learned, and studied informs my design aesthetic. I have designed spaces for myself and for friends, then later for clients. I have an understanding of what we call the Golden Sector: the alignment or composition of size and shape and placement, which is harmonious and satisfying, and I have an intuitive sense of Feng Shui.

Do you see each design project as something that exists in its own space? Or do you find links between each project as they relate to your overall style?

Yes – each project is customized specifically for each client. I like to see their space, the light, the colors, and find out what they like, what is important to them, what they are interested in. This gives me a



sense of how they want their space to reflect who they are. As an artist and designer there will be a certain link or aesthetic to all my work, and perhaps clients seek me out because they resonate with it. However, each project is fully individualized for each client.

I work with several different types of clients – those interested in acquiring artworks for their home or office and would like to be guided by a professional because they don't know how to go about it; clients who know what they like but don't have time; or those who have a fixed budget and no idea what they can acquire and need a helping hand.

Much of your philosophy revolves around the revitalization of space. Do you see a connection between the spaces we occupy and the way we interpret them spiritually or emotionally?

Absolutely! Our space is a reflection of our spiritual and emotional wellbeing. We immediately feel at ease, and relaxed when we enter a space that is harmonious and inviting. However, some people are not sure how to articulate this for themselves and that is where I can help guide them. Visual harmony can be achieved through color choices, furniture shapes, and of course, artworks. How the pieces relate to each other can create this effect – or not! I am of the 'less is more' school of design. Clutter can fill up a space and bog you down emotionally. However, that does not mean spaces need to be empty but rather discrimination can be applied to what is kept visible and what is stashed or donated!

Many clients require encouragement to change and are not sure how to begin; or perhaps they have moved – and need to edit their furniture and find new placement for their artworks. Often a client wants to update their space and

make it more contemporary. I can guide them to make small changes such as frames and placement, or larger changes like paint colors and furniture upgrades.

Other clients want artworks to reflect their knowledge of contemporary art – they want artworks that provoke dialogue, that are statements. Some like to know that they have a 'blue chip' – or established a well-known name hanging on their wall!

Do you feel that the prominent arts scene in our area is in tune with your design style? Have you been inspired in any way by the eclectic local arts community?

Yes, I have an eclectic design aesthetic which was formed in the university city of Cambridge, and honed throughout my lived experience in the arts – as an artist and curator. I have visited the Berkshires for nearly thirty years and have been aware of the cultural and arts scene here so the decision to move had been discussed for quite a while. There is a sophisticated and cultured community here, also informed by the desire to live in nature. Everyone who visits here comes because they love the beauty of the Berkshires – and beyond. I am delighted to see mountains, forests, and great swathes of stunning sky when I drive around.

Of course there is an eclectic community of makers, artisans, and emerging artists as well as galleries which show more established artists. The Berkshires have long been a place where designers from New York and Connecticut have come to source antique furniture, or specialized items such as antique colored glass, or Asian artifacts. I notice a plethora of delightful independent household goods and design stores which have cropped up in the past few years. I am inspired by the homemade, craft, and design which permeates the Berkshires. Even the local Rudolf Steiner schools have an enduring European design aesthetic of hand-knit, natural colored, handcrafted wooden toys – a design ethos which trickles up!



What do you see moving forward for State of the Art, from your own philosophy and from the design community in the coming years?

I hope to build my client network in this area by helping more clients create spaces which reflect who they are. Guiding clients to find contemporary artworks which bring them pleasure and enhance their rooms, artwork that is meaningful within their space is important. Working closely with local makers, designers, galleries, and artist. Fostering connection and community is also a goal, and of course, I would like to bring artists and existing contacts into play. The Berkshires are a thriving community, and despite the pandemic, many new people have come to this beautiful area. I hope to be of service to them. •

To learn more about Katharine Dufault and her work, you can visit www.katharinedufault.com or www.stateoftheartthome.com.