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NEW YORK DESIGN CENTER

KEITH GRANET'S
Formula for Success

ELEGANT EDITOR
Jennifer Post

MARKS & FRANTZ
Setting the Stage

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Display through September 2012



The Strand Hotel Rooftop Bar, originally designed by Lydia Marks, now gets a seasonal redesign twice yearly by Marks & Frantz. Fireplaces, in lieu of plants in a few select spots, give this rooftop a warm cozy Aspen après-ski vibe.
© Myriam Babin Photography



By Catherine McHugh

Photography by Andrew French

SETTING THE STAGE

LISA FRANTZ AND LYDIA MARKS BRING A FLAIR FOR THE
DRAMATIC TO THEIR APPROACH TO INTERIOR DESIGN.

Since officially forming Marks & Frantz Interior Design about three years ago, Lydia Marks and Lisa Frantz have seen their client base triple. Yet just this spring, Marks was out doing the set decoration for an ABC TV pilot, and Frantz had just returned from Atlanta where she created the set design for a national commercial.

Ultra-modern kitchen for a Noho penthouse is the focal point of this 4,000-square-foot loft for a young family. © Tom Sibley Photography





The designers then regrouped at their New York City office where the bulk of their current projects are centered on homes in and around the Tri-State area—though their work can be found in Los Angeles, Houston, and Aspen as well. It's an impressive balancing act, which is uniquely grounded by their roots in the entertainment industry.

Brooklyn native Marks is probably best known for her work on *The Devil Wears Prada* (featuring *Runway* magazine's spectacular closet!) and the *Sex and the City* films (including Carrie Bradshaw and company's realistically nonspacious apartments—and, of course, that fantasy home closet!). Upon graduating from Tufts University, she focused on documentary photography, working at the Ansel Adams Center for Photography in San Francisco and the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Houston native Frantz was a journalist who headed to New York City after graduating from the University of Colorado to work at *Cosmopolitan* magazine. She most loved the part of her job that involved pulling together all the visual elements for a layout. So, on the suggestion of a makeup artist, she decided to become an art director. "I hadn't actually realized you could make a career out of working in the art department on a film set," she says.

Both designers actually got their start in the entertainment business in the once-thriving trial-by-fire world of music videos before moving on to commercials where they eventually met. **"WE WORKED AS A TEAM ON A LOT OF JOBS AND FOUND WE SHARED A COMMON AESTHETIC," MARKS SAYS. "SO WE SOUGHT EACH OTHER OUT BECAUSE PERSONALITY-WISE AND STYLE-WISE IT WAS A GOOD COMBINATION," MARKS EXPLAINS. "I STRONGLY BELIEVE THAT OUR BACKGROUNDS GAVE US SOME INCREDIBLE DESIGN EXPERIENCE."**

Their skills, combined with a fantastic network of resources, have given the designers the ability to assemble a crew of painters and carpenters at a moment's notice, know who to call to find a place to build a set, and where to find lumber available 24 hours a day. "We know things like where to get Plexiglas and glass cut in three hours," Franz says. "I feel this gives us an edge when it comes to speed, and we brought those resources from film into interior design."

So, when Marks needed help completing her design for the Strand Hotel's rooftop bar, she called Frantz. "Lydia was pregnant with her son and also about to start on *Sex and City 2*," Frantz says. "So we did it together and we had a really good time—it was such fun to collaborate with her."

By this point, Frantz's ever-evolving career had moved into print photography and prop styling, which had led her into launching her own interior design company. "A photographer asked me to design a loft in SoHo, then an agent asked me to do her penthouse in Chinatown, and a makeup artist who had just bought a house in Sag Harbor asked me to design that," Frantz says. "So through the industry, my interior design career sort of evolved, and it spread by word of mouth and then expanded beyond industry people."

At first, the designers began working under the umbrella of Frantz's company name. "I already had all the accounts set up, and we started out so busy that it took us a while to set up the actual company," she says. "It's interesting that we tapped into this other outlet for our clients. That's how we formed our business. **I WOULD SAY OUR SIGNATURE IS KIND OF A CLASSIC STYLE WITH CONTEMPORARY FABRICS AND COLORS. WE PUT A MODERN TWIST ON CLASSIC SHAPES. ALSO I LIKE CONVINCING PEOPLE THAT THEY**

CAN INCORPORATE BOLD COLORS IN THEIR LIFE—EVEN IF IT'S IN A SMALL WAY."

Marks was excited to infuse the interior design business with their shared aesthetic perspective. "Our strengths in coming from this film-related background is that you help develop characters by showing what people choose to have around them—and you have to do it very quickly. You never know how long the pan of the room is going to be, so you have to learn to tell a story about the person with their objects, choices of wallpaper and fabrics, and the layering of those combinations," she explains. "I had felt that a lot of the interior design didn't always have the client's personality in them. LISA AND I BOTH FEEL IT'S REALLY IMPORTANT THAT WE HELP OUR CLIENTS EXPRESS WHO THEY ARE—WE TAKE OUR CUES FROM WHO THEY ARE, NOT WHO WE ARE. OF COURSE, WE CHOOSE WHAT WE LOVE. BUT WE EXCEEDINGLY TRY TO GEAR EVERY CHOICE TOWARD THEM, SO THEY CAN EXPRESS THEMSELVES THROUGH THEIR HOMES AND FEEL REALLY COMFORTABLE IN THEM."

Frantz concurs: "Especially on commercials where there is no script or character development, you need to give the audience a quick read so they can feel the emotion. We take that sensibility to our clients. And I think they like that because it shows that we're not just there to make a quick buck and create a beautiful room. We're invested emotionally."

The designers estimate that their business is now 90% residential but that hasn't kept them from "freelancing" on outside projects—or dreaming big about the future. "I think the biggest change is that we started getting large jobs—entire homes, when previously, we had done mostly apartments and some commercial spaces. It has led us to doing landscape design, including pools and exteriors. For one couple who is planning to build a house in a year or two, we are involved with them from property purchase to what style house they want to build, so we're very excited about that."

So for now, the designers are looking forward to the gamut of projects on their current slate, which includes a mix of complete homes to partial apartment renovations. "I don't think you can run a business on all big projects," Frantz says. "So I think the mix is ideal. And the little ones are fun, too."

Still Marks admits to thinking even bigger. For *Sex and the City 2*, she built an entire airplane set from scratch and, "it got me thinking that one of the things I'd like to take my company into is doing airplanes and yachts. It's all about functionality and space issues, yet making them beautiful. So I think it would be something amazing for our company to do."

Clearly for these two, the sky's the limit.

Clockwise from top left: The living room of the Noho penthouse with a pair of chairs from Holly Hunt and a B&B Italia Sofa. Lamps by Donghia; Bright pops of turquoise, fuchsia, and white give a teenager on Long Island a new bedroom. © Tom Sibley Photographer; Dining Room of Noho penthouse, handblown glass bubble chandelier by Lindsey Adelman. © Tom Sibley Photographer; Marks & Frantz creates a Spring 2011 redesign of The Strand's Rooftop Bar with Trina Turk for Schumacher fabrics and cabana awnings; From "Runway to Rooms" Grange designer showcase, featuring Grange furniture, Kravet fabrics, and Lindsey Adelman lighting. Floral designs by Tess Casey for Aisling Studio, paper dresses by Eloise Corr Danch. Workroom courtesy of Martin Albert Interiors.





Captions