

15 QUESTIONS FOR...

KELLY BEHUN

The **INTERIOR DESIGNER** who loves houseboats, Transcendental Meditation and is most creative in bed.

PORTRAIT BY RICHARD POWERS

How did you first discover you wanted to work in a creative industry? I found at a pretty young age, like 10 or 12 years old. When we would travel as a family, I had a tendency to move things around the various hotel rooms to create what I thought was a more pleasing arrangement. This would often include stashing ugly pillows in closets or under the bed. When I discovered that my friends weren't doing the same, I thought that was so odd, and later understood it was some kind of sign.

What is the hardest part of your job that no-one would guess? Saying goodbye at the end of a project can be hard. It's such an exciting but also emotional journey, and there is nothing more gratifying than a happy client, but finishing a project and moving on can also be bittersweet.

Career highlight so far? Working with Alicia Keys and Swizz Beatz on their home, the Razor House. They are as inspiring and iconic a couple as there is. The creativity level is, of course, renowned, but it was also just wonderful to see them together, behind the scenes of their hectic lives, and to witness how down-to-earth, loving and family-oriented they are, and how important home is to them. That was a really gratifying project.

Is there something you do or use in all of your projects? Something that makes it a "signature" Kelly Behun look? I strenuously avoid trying to have a signature look or style; it not only doesn't interest me, it sort of scares me.

When are you most creative? This may sound strange, but there is something about the period just before drifting off to sleep, when the mind finally quiets down, but before it starts doing fantastical dreamland stuff. It's that pre-dream zone that feels so particularly expansive and free. You're not asleep yet, but you're also not fully awake and tethered by the constraints of the status quo. I have had some of my best and most creative ideas then. The challenge, of course, is remembering them all in the morning.



PHOTOS BY HEIDIS BRIDGE PHOTOGRAPHY (LAMP); OLLIE CLARKE (RUG); COURTESY KELLY BEHUN STUDIO

Any young designers or ceramicists you've discovered recently? I love discovering new artists. Right now, I am loving Nadia Yaron's carved wood and stone totems that she refers to as landscape sculptures.

Most valuable lesson learned from Ian Schrager? How to play to people's strengths. Ian was a genius at figuring out what made people tick, what excited them, what they were truly good at, and then laser-focusing on eliciting the best from them. Working for Ian and his team was so exhilarating. It was the best education I could have ever hoped for. To have been even a small part of creating some of his most iconic hotels was a thrill.

City you find most visually inspiring? New York. It's been my home for many years and the place I always knew I wanted to be. It never ceases to surprise, frustrate and inspire. I once did a panel discussion with the former *New York Times* architecture critic Paul Goldberger, and he had a quote that I always liked; to paraphrase New York is what it always was—a constant ebb and flow, harsh, dirty and rough but also whimsical, beautiful and utterly soaring—and that it isn't one or the other but all of them at once. In this paradox is where the true magic of New York resides.

Favorite kind of house to design, or favorite room in any house to design? I like them all but am super ready for an A-frame in the woods. And a houseboat. So come on 2022, I'm here, just bring me all your A-frame houseboats!

Best design or architecture trends born out of the pandemic? The realization by so many that home can bring a profound sense of joy and feelings of sanctuary and restoration to the spirit. So give her some love and attention and she will pay you back a hundredfold.

Favorite artist of the moment? I really like the portrait work of Toyin Ojih Odutola, which came out of getting a look inside the magnificent Dean Collection and being up close to some of her work installed at the Razor House, while I worked on the interiors there.

Tried and true self-care tip? I learned Transcendental Meditation years ago from Bob Roth at the David Lynch Foundation and am amazed at how powerful it is. I recently gifted my entire Studio team with instruction on how to use this technique. It's a gift you carry with you for life. It is without

a doubt the best self-care routine I have ever found.

Designer, living or dead, who you most admire and why? Andrée Putman and Jacques Grange, not sure any further explanation is necessary, but I admire the refinement of their respective eyes and how "educated" their interiors feel. Ms. Putman was a force well into her eighties and Jacques is as in-demand as ever. Their longevity in the industry is something I aspire to!

Favorite part of designing your own houses? You'd assume it would be always getting your way with things, but I think that arrangement is vastly overrated. I've always maintained that the beauty of the designer-client relationship, if one is being fully honest, is that it's in those occasionally uncomfortable moments that the best design is born. When we are pushed by clients to create solutions, or to compromise to consider something we might not have otherwise, it creates an energy that can be liberating once you find the path forward.

Trendiest color of the moment? I read about trends because it's interesting to see things cycle in and out of fashion, but I really try not to actually follow trends. I find they just have you chasing your tail. In fact, I'm so anti the notion of making decisions based on what's "in" and what's "out" that if I read something is "out" it makes me want to use it all the more, just to be contrarian. If something is good it's good and that's it.

Current project you are most excited about? We're doing a major renovation on a home in Miami that I'm really excited about. It's for a wonderful young family who have beautiful taste but are not afraid to take some risks aesthetically, which is about as pretty and perfect a tune as my ears could ever ask to hear. I love south Florida; my husband and I have been coming to Miami for many years. It's remarkable to see how much the city has grown and evolved, and become a major hub for art, design, tech, and more, all while holding onto a relaxed vibe.

The best gift you ever received? A vintage locket with my sons' photos in it.

Describe your personal style? I'm entering a phase where nothing feels more chic than a well-tailored, mannish suit. I like things that skew masculine.

—Sarah G. Harrelson



Clockwise from above: Artist Nadia Yaron's stone and wood totems; Behun's locket; the Eclipse rug for The Rug Company; the designer in front of a painting by Yolande Milan Batteau; the staircase at Swizz Beatz and Alicia Keys home, the Razor House and Behun's Palisade lamp for Hudson Valley Lighting.