

Rock & Roll

Interior designer and music aficionado Christina Karras creates a recording studio that is off the charts

BY JORDAN KUSHINS
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LIKE FINDING TRUE LOVE, it's not often that an interior designer encounters their ideal project. The one that embodies their aesthetic and that affords them unbridled creative freedom as well as a generous budget. Los Angeles-based interior designer Christina Karras lived this dream when she shouldered this A-list recording studio, where

some of the biggest number one hits in recent history have been created. From the first meeting, it was clear that Karras had discovered the project she'd been groomed for her entire life. There was a whirlwind 10-minute meeting about drapery—"I thought outside the box. The client wanted lace and my idea of lace was this sort of spider-webby, Stevie Nicks-y creation...it

wasn't your typical lace"—and a month later, Karras was notified that she'd landed the entire job, carte blanche.

But of course, as with true love, it was not all sunshine and roses. There was the enormous scope of the project: three separate buildings clustered around a central courtyard, with a total of 25 rooms. There was the truncated time frame: The client wanted the studio finished by the time they returned to Los Angeles. And there was learning the intricacies of creating spaces that cradled sound. "I had never done acoustic elements before and here every single room needed them," says Karras. Not to mention the dictum of creating a space that was comfortable, inspiring, and unique.

For Karras, a former dancer who had traveled with legendary music promoter Bill Graham and hung out with musicians before turning her energies to creating interiors, the project was a dream come true, a chance to marry her love of music with her love of design in service of the artists who create the songs she adores.

Though she had never done half of the commissioned tasks, she jumped in feet first, working 80-hour weeks, forgoing vacations, and learning the nuances of controlling sound. "I found out that if you clap and you can hear a reverberation that's not enough; you need to carpet the space differently or throw in another element of furniture or make the drapes heavier. I found out that Knoll makes an entire line of acoustic fabric because you have to be able to breathe through it. The fabric can't stop the breath; it just has to filter it so it doesn't shake back." She learned how to manage a large team and discovered that she loved working on commercial spaces. "I thought I only wanted to do residential because I like the intimacy of a residential home. I didn't realize you could take commercial and it could be intimate."

To wrangle a project of this size, a controlled color palette is key. Karras is emphatic on this point: "If you keep your color palette intact, you can do anything." Although stripes, florals, animal prints, and paisley patterns seem to mingle with Mid-century, contemporary, '70s, and Moroccan styles with complete abandon, a closer inspection reveals that the entire project is led by a tightly restricted scheme: black, white, coral, green, and gold, with the occasional pop of hot pink rearing its startling punk head. Suddenly, what looks

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like a cacophony of color and styles falls in line as neatly as the notes on a page of sheet music.

The client possessed a treasure trove of original Tony Duquette pieces [that had taken up residence in all of the rooms. From Foo Dogs that guard the front entrance to whimsical sconces in a bathroom, an ornate plant stand in the reception area, and the opulent chairs Karras draped with gray mohair that form an inviting circle in the listening room, there was an existing paradigm that Karras was inspired to match. “When you have that to work off of,” says Karras as her eyes light up, “when Duquette gives you that? You just want to say ‘Hallelujah! Thank you!’ I got to work with this ghost, this maestro.”

Energized, she sourced pieces that channeled Duquette’s exuberance, snatching up a special edition Togo couch, a delicate burlwood writing table, and a curvaceous desk inset with leather. “I would

walk into a vintage store with my list—my lists were massive—and I would just buy and buy.” As word got out, estate sale managers would call her up, offering her a first look at their inventory. “I wasn’t messing around. I would go there with my movers on hold and move it all out.” What her eagle eyes couldn’t find, she fabricated, manufacturing pieces at her factory or ferreting out the best artisans in Los Angeles to create special items for her. “There are so many artists in Los Angeles...I mean, you can make anything.”

The result is a spirited and romantic space that has proven to be catnip to musicians and songwriters alike. “They can’t get enough of it,” Karras shares. “It’s booked months and months in advance. It’s become the place where they all want to work.” Moroccan rugs, swaths of Grammy gold and brass, Jimi Hendrix florals, and Rat Pack modern swirl together in a sumptuous sundae of musical references. “It was an explosive project,” Karras says. Just like true love.



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