



Text by Abigail Stone / Photography by Karyn Millet

JASON KOHARIK DREAM WORKS

THE ARTIST-DESIGNER'S GLASSELL
PARK STUDIO IS A WONDERLAND OF
IDEAS AND INSPIRATIONS

Above and left:
Jason Koharik's 7,000-square-foot studio is filled with his diverse creations, including a custom hexagon work light, which hangs over a work table and myriad other pieces he designed.



Opposite, clockwise from top left: Koharik's Templum desk, hand-carved wall sculpture, Geo Calve wall lights and Petit Lawyer's Lamp; Jason Koharik; The Catacombs, a hand-sculpted plaster-and concrete shelving unit, a Telmet Nosca chair, and the Dory Bouquet standing lamp; work tables with various lighting parts.

Above: Koharik's painting studio, with a collection of floral portraits, is lit by one of his hand-made Geo Calve pendants.

A few months ago, interior designer Tamara Kaye-Honey of House of Honey came to Jason Koharik with a request: would he carve a set of wolf's-head faucets for a project she was doing? Koharik sketched them out for her, sculpted them in plaster, molded them in wax and cast them in bronze. "I'm not sure why she thought I could make something like that," he says, sounding slightly baffled. "It's not like I'm a faucet maker."

Kaye-Honey, however, had complete confidence in his abilities. "Jason is not only a renaissance man in the classic sense, he's also a dreamer and a believer in realms of possibility outside what we can see and touch," she says. "All this, paired with his breadth of technical knowledge, allows us to lean on him again and again when we need someone who can collaborate with and inspire us."

It only takes one look around Koharik's Glassell Park studio to confirm Kaye-Honey's sentiments. The bow-truss-ceilinged building, designed by Norstrom and Anderson Architects in 1932, began life as the Hemphill Diesel Engineering School before being commandeered by Capitol Records in 1945 as a pressing plant. Later it became a gathering spot for graffiti artists. Koharik had long had his eye on the

space. When it finally became available three years ago, just as he'd outgrown his home garage, he pounced. Next door, lighting designer Brendan Ravenhill's bright white atelier stands in sharp contrast to Koharik's moody laboratory, its exterior washed in black.

The 7,000-square-foot workshop is crammed with examples of Koharik's work. A candle with two wicks, perfumed with a mix of rose and leather, is designed to tip over, spilling out its liquid contents ("It's a love story described in wax," he explains). A cluster of his Calve Geo pendants, mountain ranges of glass angles, are corralled by a belt of brass. The Basilisk wall sconce, a snake of brass undulating across the room, is studded with glass globes. His tubular Corinthian pendant drips with horsehair. Bas-relief carved-plaster sculptures depict a Greek-style goddess and voluptuous draperies. Intricately detailed floral paintings cover one wall.

These pieces, all created by Koharik, are interspersed with objects that inspire him: a vignette of Tobias Scarpa work; a quartet of chairs from Tony Duquette's estate; a pair of Porsche arm chairs; items plucked from the streets of Los Angeles and reimagined. Even the kitchen—a study in dark plaster—and the bathroom—a lush wonderland fit for Sarah Bernhardt—were designed and built by Koharik. He can



Koharik's Hooded Angel light and Calafia wall sculpture are arranged with his Corinthian pendant, fringed in horsehair. Custom sectional sofa, Atheon side table and Mariposa lounge chairs.

upholster, weld, sandblast, sculpt and paint. He makes stools, tables and couches. He writes poetry and plays guitar.

And though the list of Koharik's abilities seems endless, he is perhaps best known among Los Angeles's interior designers and tight-knit community of makers as a lighting designer. Koharik's pieces tango throughout Martyn Lawrence Bullard's projects, including the designer's own home. Pam Shamsiri grabbed him for Superba Food + Bread, the restaurant that's going into the old The Cat & Fiddle space in Hollywood. Joel Mozersky insisted on his Platonic Solids sconce series for the elevators of the new Virgin Hotels Dallas. The Mineral Chain Lamps and Breer Bedside Pendants that lope through the rooms of the ETC.etera-designed Firehouse Hotel in the Arts District are his. His pieces provide the finishing touch on a dozen homes by Studio Hus. Rapt Studio counted on his Library Desk Lamps in Dropbox's San Francisco headquarters. Oliver Furth hung the Large Folded Shell pendant in an apartment he created for Imagine co-chairman Michael Rosenberg. Nate Berkus used the same piece in the dressing room of his New York home. Restoration Hardware grabbed nine of his lights and put them into production (the sinuous Convessi Collection of sconces, table lamps, chandeliers and floor lights). Wolfs-head faucets are only the tip of the iceberg.

Koharik was born in Bedford, Ohio. The first piece he made—when he was three and which he still has—was something he created for his father, a scrap of balsa wood carved with the single word *Dad*. His father was a Jack-of-all-trades, the guy in the neighborhood with the basement full of parts and tools and hardware who people went to when they needed things fixed. "Everybody's water heater, everyone's car was in the yard," Koharik remembers. "He was just that guy who

knew how to do it all." Koharik and his twin brother, Jonathon, had the kind of lawless childhood common to people who grew up before iPhones and Netflix and social media gobbled up time. They spent it exploring and taking things apart. "People are always asking me, 'How do you know how to do all this stuff?' and it really comes from my dad and being around a roomful of tools all the time."

When he was in his early teens, Koharik got a job—courtesy of Tim Anderson, his neighbor and history teacher, whom he still speaks of with reverence—working for the city's Department of Parks and Recreation. The work called for him to do everything, usually without much guidance other than a basic outline of the steps and a deadline. Refinish the interior of a pool? Lay rebar? Koharik figured it out. The fearlessness to plunge in, coupled with the patience to work through a period of trial and error, still informs his process. "Those are the things that I do constantly," he says. "I'm not afraid to grab a tool I don't know how to use and just screw something up a million times."

While Koharik attended a few semesters of college at Kent State University, it was clear that school wasn't for him. He and his girlfriend left for the West Coast. "I thought, Well, California has a ton of swimming pools. I'll have a pool business."

That wasn't to be. Instead he got a job as a production assistant at a commercial house. He was incredulous that he was being paid \$175 a day to fetch coffee. Koharik made himself useful wherever he was needed—art department, wardrobe—collecting discarded odds and ends—dregs of paint, coffee stirrers, bits of gaffer's tape, the short ends of film strips—and cobbling them together into whatever objects his feverish brain conjured up. (The tape was modeled into a camera,



The Golden Apple of Discord sofa and ottoman join a plethora of Koharik's other furniture, lighting and art creations in the studio's back section.



This page: Koharik's Stalactite pendants hang in the studio's garden corner.

Opposite, clockwise from top left: The Archaic Swing-Arm Sconce and 1930s Parlor Chair by Baker, reimaged by Koharik; a Mineral Lighting fixture over his Arciform dining table; the Tobia Scarpa pendant; the artist takes a break.





This page, clockwise from top left: Koharik's candle-making station; a customized chair; a piece from his target series; paint-spattered sneakers; an abstract Medusa, created from a cinder block.

Opposite top: Koharik designed and installed the studio's bath, including the custom artichoke shower head.



coffee stirrers were arranged in a mesmerizing ombre, the film strips were woven and framed.)

A turning point came when one of the producers who'd taken him under her wing asked him to help out with her house, putting him to work redesigning her home in preparation for the birth of her twins. "I did the nursery and then worked on a room for her older kids," he remembers. Then Glenn Lawson of Lawson-Fenning, to whom Koharik occasionally sold vintage pieces, spotted one of his "target" paintings, circular works that resembled an archery bullseye. "They started selling them," says Koharik. "They sold a lot of them. And then he saw some of the lighting I was making, and it also did really well." Now Koharik's work—in addition to being sold at Lawson-Fenning, through Koharik's website, *collectedby.com*, and on Instagram—can be found at Hammer and Spear and The Future Perfect.

Perhaps because Koharik stumbled into his vocation, he still wrestles with seeing what he does as a business. He's more comfortable with the word *artist*, though that, too, took some getting used to. "I'm an 'art first' maker," he stresses. "I'm not a production designer." He still makes everything by hand, putting his heart and soul into what he creates. "The way I approach everything is as sculpture, as a piece of art," he says. It's one of the reasons he bristles at the word *fabricator* (he won't copy the work of others even if the paycheck is substantial).

Indeed, Koharik's pieces function as more than just objects designed to fill a need in a home. Evoked by a particular emotion or an experience, conjured up in dreams and captured in the poems and stories he sometimes shares on his Instagram, they are designed to bestow grace

and majesty—even a little bit of magic and divinity—on one's environment. "These everyday things that we interact with, they should be made into these sacred spaces, because that's where we spend our time," he explains. "I want to bring that into your house. I want to do this for your bed, your desk, wherever you choose to put your energy." That everything goes out of the studio only after being blessed by Koharik doesn't come as a surprise.

Koharik is well aware that maintaining his singular vision and his integrity in a world where everything has become commoditized is challenging. "The visualization and the story and how it's presented and how people see it, I want to maintain that control," he says. It's the reason he prefers concentrating on projects rather than focusing on devising a way to industrialize his production. "That's why I like working with interior designers," he says. "They find me and I draw something they like and I know that I'm going to get to make something that I've thought of, that feels right, and then that becomes a prototype. And that's where a lot of my designs come from."

"I know I'm lucky," Koharik says, and shares a story his brother constantly brings up. "When we were kids, I sat on a rock pile and I said, 'One day I'm gonna have a giant space where I can just make and do anything that I want to.'" Prophecy fulfilled. □

Jason Koharik
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