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ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST



Malene Barnett (wearing a dress by Epperson Studio and jewelry by Lorraine West) at her Brooklyn town house.

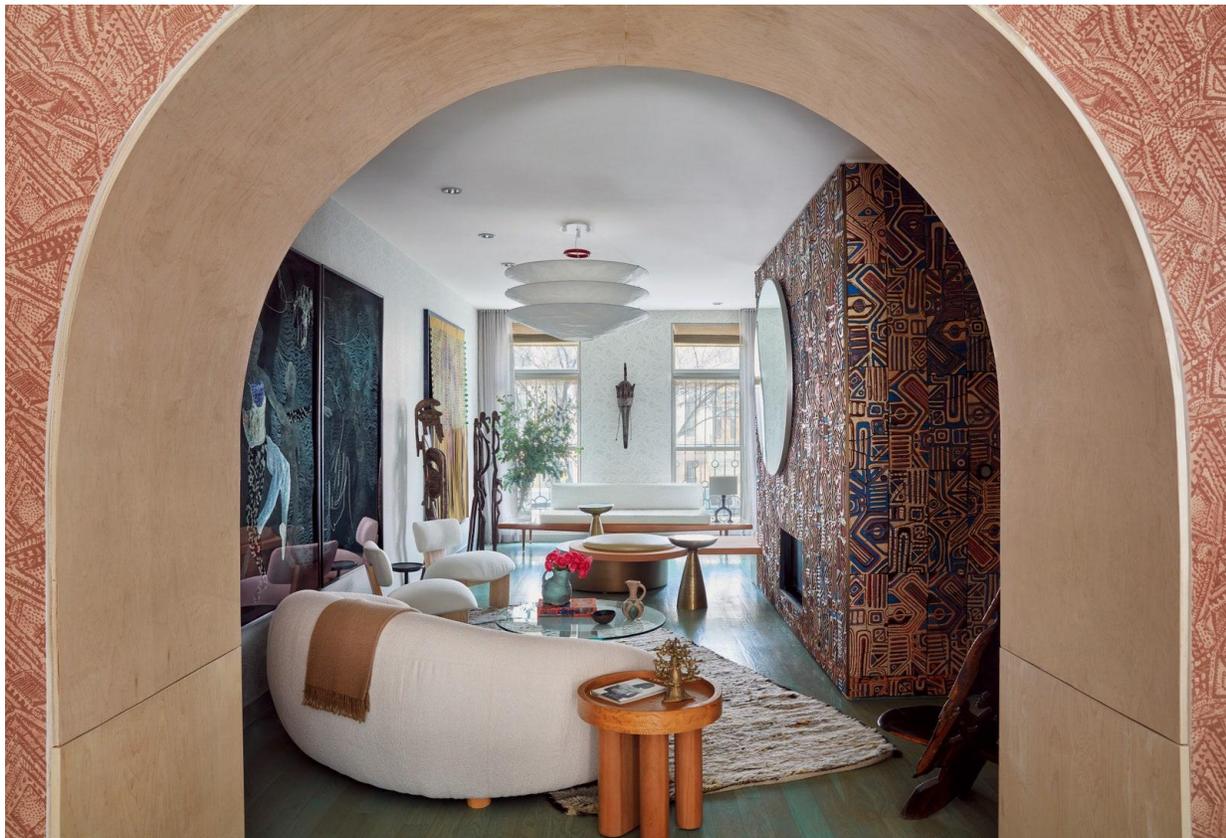
Malene Barnett's Brooklyn Townhouse Is a Living Embodiment of Black Love

In collaboration with AD100 designer Leyden Lewis, the founder of Black Artists + Designers Guild transforms her home into a deeply personal reflection of her creative ethos

By [Sydney Gore](#)
Photography by [Ashok Sinha](#)
Styled by [Dorcia Kelley](#)
March 8, 2023

As the founder of the [Black Artists + Designers Guild](#) (BADG), Malene Barnett has introduced the design world to a creative practice built around the modern Black experience. There's no stronger case study for this concept than her own Brooklyn home. When the artist and activist says that "there are a lot of moments throughout the space where you see the presence of Black hands, Black life, and [Black design](#)," she's not exaggerating.

Having lived in the 2,000-square-foot space since 2009, she was ready for a change. At this chapter in her life, she says, "I needed a space that really reflected where I am as an artist, as a designer, and as a woman." New furniture and a fresh coat of paint weren't going to be enough; this refresh would be the ultimate labor of Black love, and that required a special eye for curation. This is where [Leyden Lewis](#) entered the picture.



The living room fireplace is clad in ceramic tiles by [Malene Barnett](#). Hanging light by [Ingo Maurer](#); curved sofa by [France & Son](#); end table from [Four Hands](#); vintage Moroccan rug from [Carini NYC](#).

Barnett had been waiting for the right moment to collaborate on something personal with the AD100 designer, so when the opportunity to join forces in updating her own home presented itself—which, as she describes it, hit them like a "tsunami"—he was all in. "I want people to understand the importance of working with not just an interior designer, but someone who has vision and understands that decorating space is about so much more than buying furnishings and placing items," she explains. "Leyden is complex in a good way; he was thinking about how I could live in the space without me really thinking about it."

When designing products, Barnett often considers how other people will live with them. So the starting point for this personal endeavor was installing wallpapers from her collection for Lulu and Georgia. Lewis points out how it all goes back to this idea of "finding people's own personal

character even within their own bodies of work.” The prime example of this is the [ceramic art](#) installation in Barnett’s living room, something she had been wanting to do for years. Barnett created each tile pattern on the cut grid and made each of them by hand. Even with unexpected imperfections like shrinking during the firing process, the final result was even better than Barnett conceived—and it’s a manifestation of her latest transformation. “That ceramic installation is my legacy wall,” she says.



A [Pottery Barn](#) circular wall mirror reflects Barnett’s [Heritage](#) wallpaper. Custom bench designed by [Leyden Lewis](#) and fabricated by [Wesley Daniels](#); pedestal table from [Four Hands](#).

Lewis views this concept of legacy as the foundation of this iteration of the renovation. “Changing your environment is changing self, and creating opportunities for a self that you do not recognize,” he explains. “I think this is one of the most critical things; it should invite a new version of an unseen self rather than ‘Oh, I know who I am.’”

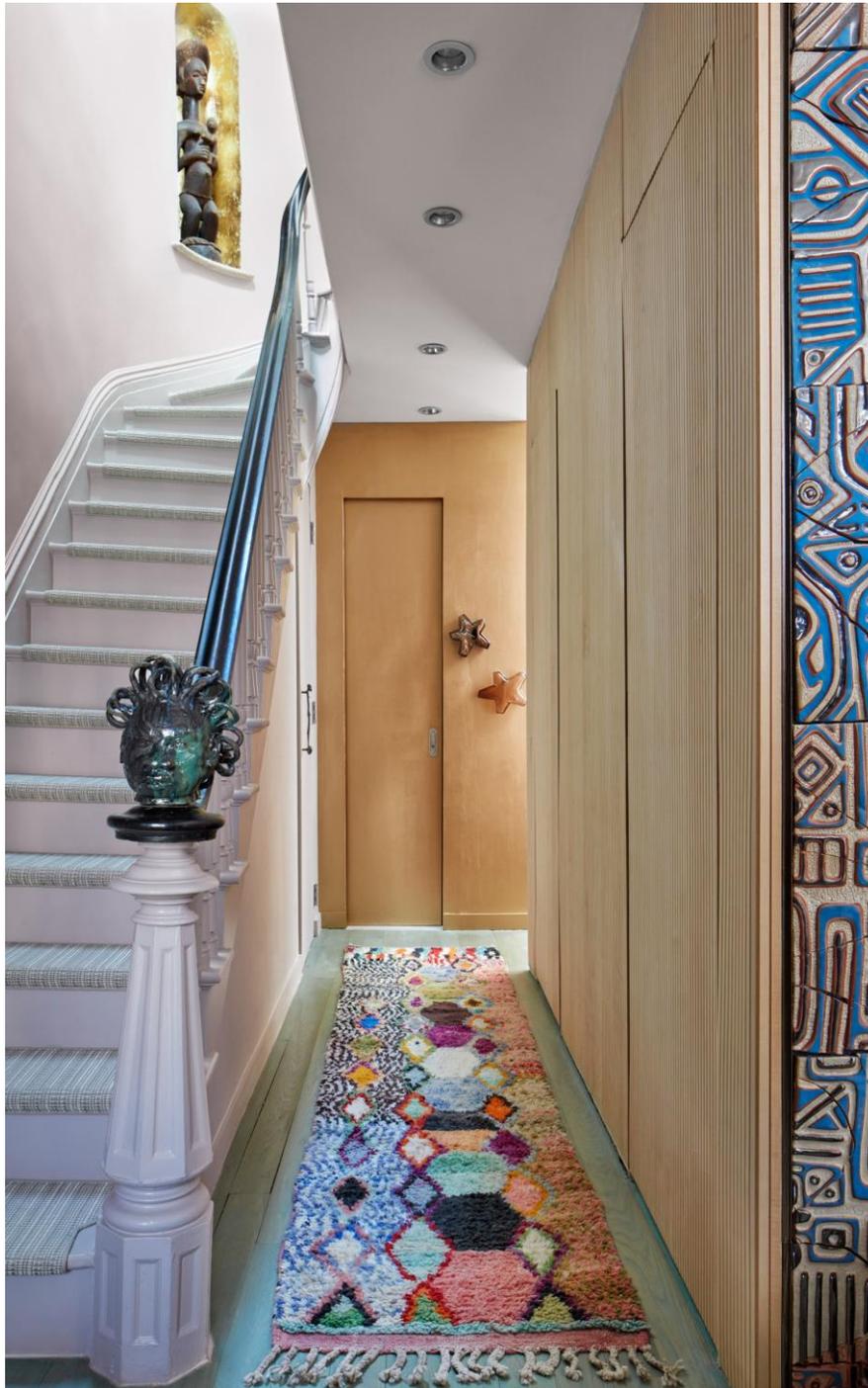
Breaking away from the rigidity of traditional layouts, the collective vision for Barnett’s home was an open floor plan so “all of the spaces are linked to each other visually.” Another one of her requirements was being able to dance in every space in the house in the name of Black joy, so Lewis spent a lot of time thinking about fluidity in the context of how to physically maneuver throughout the space.



In the kitchen, [Lulu and Georgia](#) pendant lights hang above a [Willy Ballez](#) table. The dining chairs and counter stools are from [Four Hands](#). The [IKEA](#) cabinets have been outfitted with doors by [Semihandmade](#). Custom acid-etched-mirror backsplash; custom stone-clad island; [Franke](#) sink and fittings; [Alaari](#) wallpaper by Barnett for Lulu and Georgia; curtains from [The Shade Store](#).

But the most important part of this collaborative process of “renovation as rejuvenation” (as Lewis puts it) was tapping into ancestral memory. Reflected in the circular mirror is a framed piece mounted on the opposite wall titled *Made for Mom* that weaves together pictures of Barnett’s grandmother, her mother, and her mother’s siblings. Not only is this Barnett’s special way of celebrating coming from what she describes as “a lineage of makers,” but the specific placement signals to others that they’re entering a space that is “occupied by the energy and synergy of [Black women](#)” that are “supporting you spiritually.”

The most pressing concern for the primary bedroom was “How do we create a place that is an invitation to sensuality and rest?” Lewis says. The designer answered this call with a neutral palette that combines subtle frequencies of pattern to effect a serene private haven. “This room is my sanctuary,” Barnett avers. “It’s a space where I get to retreat and explore other parts of my life. Having my work around me is all a part of me sharing that love for self.”



A ceramic head by Barnett greets visitors in the entrance hall, and a West African sculpture stands in the stair niche. Star-shaped glass works by [Leo Tecosky](#); Moroccan runner from Berber Artisan at Fine.



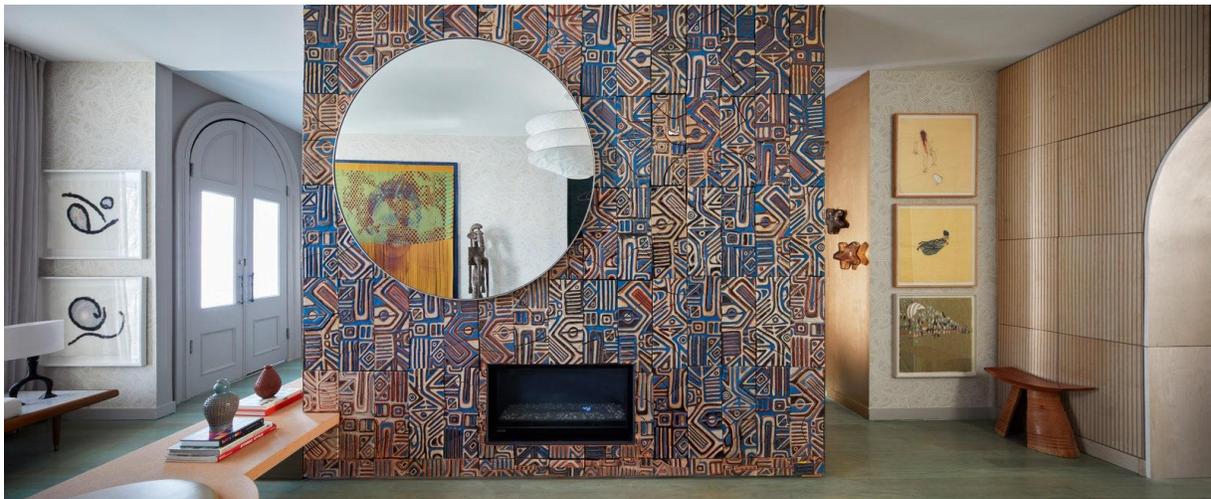
The living room fireplace is clad in ceramic tiles by [Malene Barnett](#). Hanging light by [Ingo Maurer](#); curved sofa by [France & Son](#); end table from [Four Hands](#); vintage Moroccan rug from [Carini NYC](#).



A view of the living room looking into the kitchen.



In the living room the circular Room & Board cocktail table echoes the curve of the France & Son sofa. Apparatus floor lamp; side tables from Four Hands; artwork by Nate Lewis.



Another view of the living room. Artworks by Terry Boddie (far left) and Wura-Natasha Ogunji (far right); Design Tekura stool. The walls at right are covered in tambour millwork by Wesley Daniels.



A [Pottery Barn](#) circular wall mirror reflects Barnett's [Heritage](#) wallpaper. Custom bench designed by [Leyden Lewis](#) and fabricated by Wesley Daniels; pedestal table from [Four Hands](#).



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Another view of the kitchen showing ceramic sculptures by [Lauren Sandler](#) and with a wall hanging by [Dianne Smith](#).



Artworks by [M. Florine Démosthène](#) are displayed in the bedroom. The side table, chair, and Barnett-designed wallpaper are all from [Lulu and Georgia](#). Bed by [Maiden Home](#); [Lisa Hunt](#) duvet cover and pillowcases.



Malene Barnett (wearing clothing by [Epperson Studio](#), jewelry by [Lorraine West](#), and [Trippen](#) shoes) in front of the fireplace.

Lewis applauds Barnett's vision in curating a space that fully represents Black heritage and culture, pointing out how "pretty much everything in this home has been made, manufactured, produced, and installed by Black hands." At the same time, she doesn't lose her own identity in the mix. "I'm committed to telling stories about my clients within their spaces so it feels like an architectural portrait," he emphasizes.

Barnett sees her home as an investment in the community that she's worked so hard to bring together, as much as an investment in herself. She hopes visitors feel a strong sense of permanence. "This work is not an individualistic culture project," Barnett concludes. "It's a collaboration of minds creatively, physically, and intuitively. That is how we create truly lived-in spaces."

In focus

Black Artists + Designers Guild founder Malene Barnett highlights six BADG members who are building on the legacy of Black women makers. —Produced by Madeline O'Malley.

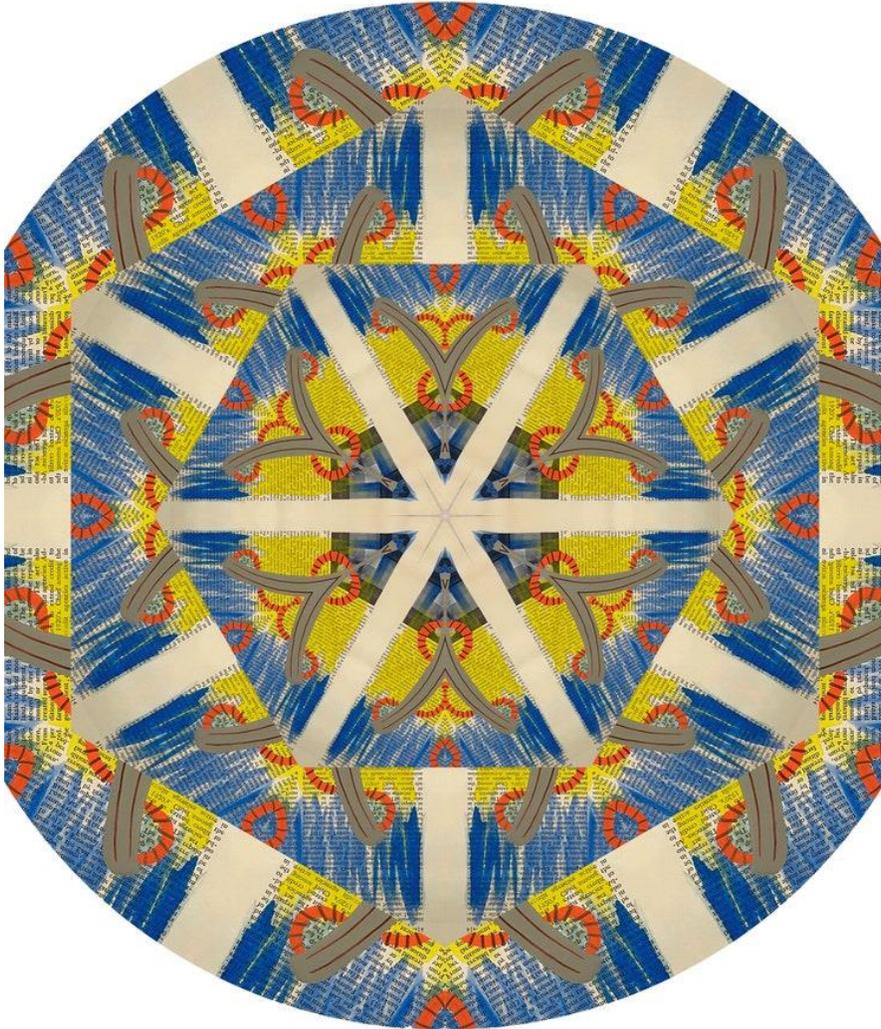
Karen J Revis Studio



The triptych Spindle and Spun A/P
\$6,500
KAREN J REVIS STUDIO

“I admire Karen’s passion for paper and printmaking processes. I love how she draws a connection between Black experiences through color, pattern, and symbolic elements in each print.”

Cheryl R. Riley



Begin I
\$200
CHERYL R. RILEY

“If you are a die-hard pattern lover like me, you will be drawn to Cheryl’s Kaleidoscope art series. It exemplifies the beauty of vibrant color and pattern repeats in organic shapes.”

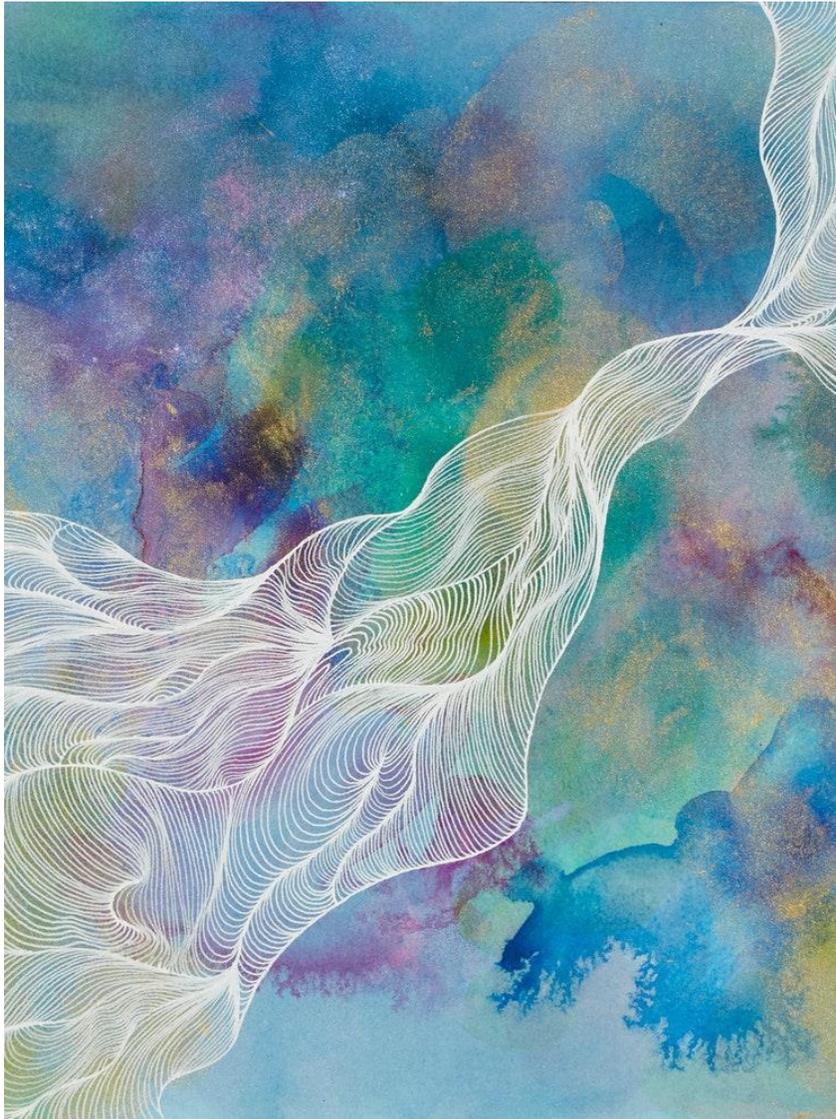
Studio Lani



Sisi Eko pendant light; price upon request. studio-lani.com

“I’m swooning over Lani’s pendant lights. They exude a futuristic aura yet timeless sensibility. At the same time, their intricate sculptural forms celebrate metal artistry and craftsmanship.”

Glenyse Thompson Contemporary Art



A Dance With Bill Murray

\$1,300

GLENYSE THOMPSON CONTEMPORARY ART

“Who doesn’t want a piece of art to spark a conversation? Well, the art of conversation inspires Glenyse’s work. Every time I gaze at the painted lines, and the color blending, it puts me in a dreamy state to visualize my life goals. I think about memories from the past and plan for the future.”

Malene Barnett for Lulu and Georgia



Bequia wallpaper
\$178
LULU AND GEORGIA

“I always look for ways to honor my mother. Bequia pays homage to one of the islands of her home country, St. Vincent and the Grenadines in the Caribbean.”

Marie Burgos Collection



Milo armchair
\$4,290

MARIE BURGOS COLLECTION

“Bold-colored, comfy chairs are great memories from my childhood. I love Marie’s version of the midcentury-modern chair; it’s a simple yet bold statement piece for any space.”

Oi Studio



Drop Daybed
\$9,029
OI STUDIO

“Studio founder and creative director Boa’s work speaks to our shared island roots. The simplicity of the bench form and the textile’s bold representation of Haiti’s revolutionary women remind the world to take a seat and let Black women lead. Nuff said!”