

Designer Profile



# The **STYLE** **MAKERS**

**TOCAR'S** *Susan Bednar Long and  
Christina Sullivan are making their  
mark on the lexicon of modern design*



# The Style Makers: Tocar

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Photograph above by Mark La Rosa

*Written by Donna Sapolin*

Susan Bednar Long and Christina Sullivan, partners in the New York-based firm [Tocar](#), are not just style innovators- they're vital contributors to the nation's design lexicon. They coined the phrase 'modern traditional' to describe their take on design, and in so doing, gave clients, writers, and retailers alike a targeted and intriguing way to speak about products and environments that conflate opposing looks.

The schemes that Tocar shapes are no less pointed or compelling than the two words they use to describe them. The partners, who launched their business 10 years ago, met while employed at Ralph Lauren as store designers. Christina brought a fashion background to the task, and Susan applied her interior design expertise. Both visions are expressed in their narrative-spinning decor.

***Ralph Lauren's stores evoke an entire lifestyle; Tocar's rooms do the same- any one of their spaces invites an onlooker to participate in an experience that extends far beyond the visual plane.***



Photograph above by John Gruen.

When designing the master bedroom in her Litchfield Country, Connecticut home, Susan Bednar Long drew on her travels to Venice, where her wedding took place. Her goal was to carry the modern-cum-country sensibility that prevailed in the rest of her home into this space and utilize a classic Venetian palette of sophisticated taupes, creams, and tans. Long's stay in the Danieli Hotel inspired the bed's cutout headboard, which is upholstered in luscious welt leather from Edelman.

Her sojourn in the Cipriani Hotel suggested the linens that dress the bed: an ivory coverlet, bedskirt and shams from Serra Linens, and flanged pillowcases with a line detail from Matouk. These echo the Benjamin Moore "China White" hue used on the walls.

Two small pillows, one clad in a Bennison floral fabric and the other in a stripe from Rogers & Goffigon, punch up the neutral scheme as do the draperies, made with an Manuel Canovas fabric featuring an awning stripe. "I've always been into stripes and these draperies are a nod to that," says Long. The thin wrought-iron rods mimic the room's old black closet and door latches.

Additional white details include the hand-carved painted wood sculpture that hangs over the bed, Williams Sonoma Home's step-up lacquer side tables, and a pair of vintage Italian ceramic lamps that Long found at a local consignment shop. "I knew I had to have them as soon as I saw them," she says.



Photograph above by John Gruen.

*“In my ‘loving Italy mode’ but, at the same time, inspired by period American furniture, I took a dull brown dresser my husband had owned before we got married and transformed it into an Italian country piece,” says Long.*

She used an ivory milk paint finish with a taupe line detail to effect the metamorphosis, and then, as her crowning touch, set an arresting tableaux composed of her wedding pictures, hydrangea from her garden, a crystal lamp from Circa Lighting, and an Italian Chelini & Giovannini mirror. “The mirror has a subtle gilded finish that’s in keeping with the downplayed opulence in the rest of the house,” she says.

Long says that one of the qualities that distinguishes Tocar is the designers’ ability to implement a project on time and on budget.

*“We’re design without drama.”*

“A lot of people think that designers run around with scarves and sunglasses, like chickens with their heads cut off. We don’t do that. Our work at Ralph Lauren taught us to cope with huge amounts of pressure. After all, if you have a store installation and it has to be done the next day, you get it done—there’s no other option. Clients need to understand that great design is only part of the formula; where’s the value in a brilliant scheme if a firm can’t execute it smoothly?”



Photograph above by Susan Bednar Long.

A testimony to Tocar's ability to pull off a project quickly, this 1800-square-foot Chelsea Club apartment (a pied-a-terre intended for the client's visiting friends and family) was completed in three months flat. Long and Sullivan based their design on the interior of Hugh Hefner's 1968 jet, which was depicted in an old issue of Playboy magazine that Sullivan found in an antique shop.

*"The look was James Bond meets Cary Grant. It incorporated sophisticated materials in a palette that Billy Baldwin would have used if he had gone totally modern- sable, rich chocolate brown, camel, orange and ivory."*

The owner had already outfitted the residence with a soft gray sofa and lacquer coffee table from DDC; Tocar worked with these to implement a scheme that would have all the impact of the Hefner jet but be more friendly-looking. To that end, the designers adopted a dark gray, silver and black palette enlivened by jewel-green touches—a green ashtray filled with customized white and green M&Ms on the coffee table, a gray cashmere custom throw trimmed in a Holland & Sherry green silk velvet, a sofa pillow in the same fabric, and, in front of the window, green glass Aalto vases planted with topiaries.



Photograph above by Susan Bednar Long.

To adjust the scale shaped by low-slung furniture, the designers employed a 40-plus-inch-high mercury glass lamp from Andrew Martin, which leads the eye upward and provides a dash of drama. A pillow covered in a Ralph Lauren black-and-white stripe adds panache to the neutral sofa just as Gallart's zebra rug jazzes up the gray sisal carpet.

The designers integrated Philippe Starck "Charles Ghost" counter stools into the kitchen bar area. They covered the column there in a [Donghia](#) silver leaf wallpaper, which, like the lamp it echoes, shifts the scale of the room. A faux shagreen wallpaper covers the TV wall.



Photograph above by Christina Sullivan.

Black tubular chairs and white molded ones from Design Within Reach pull up to a DDC dining table. A flokati rug from Gallart underpins the scheme while a cast porcelain antler chandelier by artist Jason Miller provides overhead illumination. Black-and-white photographs by Len Prince from New York's Staley-Wise Gallery decorate one adjacent wall; a Williams-Sonoma Home mirror highlights another.



Photograph above by Susan Bednar Long.

Applying their signature modern traditional aesthetic, Tocar infused the master bedroom of the pied-a-terre with the light feeling fostered by an ivory, white and taupe palette.

***"We want there to be a spa-like atmosphere in the master bedrooms we create," says Sullivan.***

Williams Sonoma Home's linens and faux fur blanket set a tranquil bed while [Schumacher's](#) embossed faux crocodile wall covering add intriguing texture to the bed wall. A thinly striped rug anchors the scheme. Vintage crackle ceramic jar lamps from Duane Antiques top wood nesting tables.



Photograph above by Susan Bednar Long.

Tocar Interior Design takes on projects worldwide, from Belgravia to Philadelphia. But not all of their work is stationary. They recently designed the interiors of a Florida-based Ferretti yacht (“Wicked Cool”) that heads up to Massachusetts each summer. “The family wanted the yacht to be really fun and nautical,” says Sullivan. She and Long created the WC logo and used it on a host of goods ranging from table linens to throw pillows to a metal ceiling plate. Apart from these, the firm’s design work included the navy and ivory carpet, custom bedding in the two boys’ rooms and the master bedroom, and the framing of nautical images.

**Resource List:**

NY TownHouse: Bedside Table Lamps- Ralph Lauren Home, Bedside Tables- James Mont Side Tables from Capitol Furnishings, Occasional Chair- Roman Thomas, Occasional Chest- Madeleine Stuart, Bedding- Frette Bedding  
 Long Master Bedroom: Camel Leather Headboard- Custom by Designer, Italian Ceramic Bedside Lamps- Antiques, Striped Drapery Fabric- Cowtan & Tout, Wall Sculpture- Tozai Home, King pillow Shams- Matouk, Throw Pillow Fabric- Bennison Fabrics, Bedside Tables- Williams Sonoma Home, Coverlet & Euro Shams- Sferra Fine Linens, Milk Painted Tall Chest of Drawers- Custom by Designer, Crystal & Silver Lamp- Circa Lighting, Carved Mirror- Chelini & Giovannini, Crystal Vase- Jurliska, Parchment Box- R&Y Augousti/Barney’s NY.  
 Chelsea Club Living Room: Carpet- Patterson, Flynn and Martin, Zebra Hide- Galart International  
 Ghost Bar Stools- Highbrow Furniture. Dining Room: Ceramic Horn Chandelier- Jason Miller, Table- DDC, Alvar Alto Vases- Just Scandinavian, Photography- Staley-Wise Gallery. Master Bedroom: Lamps- Duane Antiques, Faux Croc Wallcovering- Schumacher.  
 Yacht Stateroom: Striped Area Rug- Patterson, Flynn & Martin, Globe- The Globe Store, Chrome Nautical Lamp- Circa Lighting, Inc., Monogrammed Napkins & Pillow- Personal Best Monogram Shoppe, Monogrammed Glassware- Turvis Tumblers, Dinnerware- Ralph Lauren Home, Pillow Fabric- Hinson & Company.