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Design of the Times: The AD100 Legacy

By Alison Clare Steingold

Meet 10 of the vanguard talents featured in the 2016 AD100 list—plus look back at how the interior design world’s highest honor has changed how people think about the profession and about their own surroundings.

When asked by the Los Angeles Times what has changed over the past fifty years in the world of interior decorating, the voluble Mario Buatta, decorator to Jackie O. dubbed the Prince of Chintz, provided a rather arch [response](#): “Everything. Today, I call it interior desecrating,” he quipped. “Most young people who call themselves interior designers are just stylists. Everything they do looks like a window setting for a shop. They don’t know much about the classics and the history of architecture and design. They’ve never heard of the great New York decorators like Sister Parish or George Stacey.”

We’ve moved beyond the class of early greats—the William Haineses, the Elsie de Wolfes, known primarily to socialites and royals—and into an era of democratized design and consumption. As tastes evolve and firms autosketch their way toward veteran status, there must be a method by which high-flying decorators and housewives alike can tabulate the most accomplished talents in the field.

So leave it to 95-year-old Architectural Digest, the international design authority, to codify the gestalt.

The AD100 list was launched in 1990 by then editor in chief Paige Rense Noland (a separate laureate for architecture would follow, but they have now been reunited). The original AD100 offered a snapshot of a continental and well-heeled era; in addition to Buatta—who has remained on the list since 1990—you’ll recognize icons like David Hicks (Prince Charles and Princess Anne have his beloved hexagons on glam repeat) and many others—well, after 20 years, you might not recognize many names. For not only have tastes changed, so has the public’s relationship with these top-tier professionals, who are now regarded as rock stars. The debut list provided a relevant shorthand, resource and guide to everybody who was anybody. If the age of the celebrity designer was inevitable in the Instagram era, the AD100 was sure-fire kindling.

When Margaret Russell took the helm of the magazine in 2010, part of her stylish statement was to identify the icons, remove those who were primed for the annals of design, and to update the list with new boldface names. (“It is at once a tribute and a challenge. What it will never be is static,” the editor-in-chief wrote on her January 2012 Editor’s Page.) The self-described “classical, old-fashioned” floral-on-florals of Nancy Pierrepont, an early decorator for Brooke Astor, were relegated to the past as contemporary conversation began to mute such overly cohesive, monolithic styles and turn up the volume on eclecticism—a point of view which may require a more rigorous discernment to identify and amplify the rhyme when pairing off a classical chair with a contemporary painting.

This month, the legacy of the AD100 comes into focus with a new Paddle8 auction, launched in tandem with the grand reveal of the 2016 edition of the list. The [sale](#), which runs December 1 through 17, offers a rare glimpse into the private worlds of ten of the 2016 AD100 honorees, introduced below. Each has curated approximately 6–8 furniture items, design pieces, artworks, or decorative objects from their personal collections to offer in this exclusive sale. As varied as their distinctive approaches to design, art, and collecting may be, as a whole, these ten talents push the evolution of taste into ever-loftier heights of refinement.



An Emily Summers–designed living room for a Dallas client offers an appealing midcentury homage. Photo by

EMILY SUMMERS DESIGN ASSOCIATES

Alluring, crisp, and utterly contemporary, Emily Summers’s interiors exhibit a command of 20th-century fine art and design. Demure hues and gleaming floors, woods and natural textures create a neo-midcentury vernacular of sorts when kitted out in the sharply curvaceous lines of vintage Italian design. Visit her new Dallas boutique, [Emily Summers Studio 54](#), and—in addition to the lineup of classical klismos seating by T.H. Robsjohn-Gibbings for Saridis of Athens, plus her eponymous line of vintage-feel gondola sofas and onyx cocktail tables—you’ll find a rare assembly of contemporary makers, including brutalist Peter Lane and U.K. ceramist [Gareth Mason](#). Not surprisingly, Summers, a 35-year veteran of the industry, was an art-history major who turned to the decorative arts. She also runs an art consultancy and was appointed in 2002 by President George W. Bush to the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation. www.emilysummers.com