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## heather dunn & richard kostura

### *the poetics of space*

by Saxon Henry

Photography by Elizabeth Glasgow

“Our house is our corner of the world,” wrote French philosopher Gaston Bachelard. “It is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word.”

Bachelard proposes that a house is

one of the greatest opportunities for mankind to integrate thoughts, memories and dreams. Interior decorative artisans Heather Dunn and Richard Kostura of Heather Dunn & Company in Huntington know this opportunity

well; they spend their days helping clients create interiors that bring their visions to light.

For the past four years, the two have been composing lush spaces that exude warmth and depth, and have turned their talents for faux finishes and woodworking into a veritable art form. “There is a power we have as human beings that amazes me,” says Kostura. “It is the power to conceptualize and then to bring that conceptualization into reality.”

Dunn and Kostura share a dedication to excellence. Partners both at work and at home, they are always seeking ways to make a positive impact through their lives. Kostura remembers the moment when he first realized how deeply he cares about the complete commitment to quality that the two bring to their work.

During one of their first jobs in Manhattan, he was sanding a piece of crown molding that had a small, unrelenting depression in it. There was a bit of a battle going on in his

*Heather Dunn and Richard Kostura confer on a paint texture in their Huntington studio.*



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head at the same time, as he was trying to decide whether it would be acceptable to leave the indentation. After all, he mused, would anyone even see the flaw from so far away? Then he realized that it was absolutely not okay to leave it, because he would always know that the imperfection was there.

“At that moment,” says Kostura, “I realized that if we just take each moment this seriously and put our efforts into achieving a complete attention to every tiny detail, we won’t have to worry about being successful.”

As he was putting the finishing touches on that piece of molding, Kostura thought of the Zen Buddhist monks who use innumerable grains of sand to create their painterly mandalas. “When the monks are placing each drop of sand, they are not thinking, ‘My knees are killing me,’ or, ‘Man, it’s Friday and it’s only three o’clock . . . I can’t believe I’m on for another two hours.’ They are concentrating on dropping each grain of sand and making sure it’s absolutely perfect because that’s

*In the Huntington Bay home of a client, Dunn and Kostura brought casual elegance to the den (above left) designing the mantel, shelves and storage pieces to balance an adjoining kitchen. In the same home’s “cigar room” (left) the pair created the custom faux finishes that enrich ceiling and walls and enhance the moldings.*



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what they want to be doing,” he explains.

With a similar degree of devotion to their craft, Dunn and Kostura say they are happy to be doing what they are doing every day. Faux finishing and texturizing, which Dunn learned at The Finishing School in Floral Park, have been central elements in their

work from the start. But, because they know the importance of taking every little particle of a room into consideration, giving a room a “new skin” has become only one facet of their product. They now design and install moldings, free hardware from old paint and other residues, and replace outdated, flimsy or damaged hardware

in their efforts to enliven a space. They also refurbish a client’s existing furniture, or build new furnishings when a particular item that would enhance a focal point in the home is not readily available.

Though the couple advises clients on virtually every detail of an interior, they prefer to call themselves

*Kostura and Dunn work their interior magic with help from their talented staff (from left to right): Desirée Giunta, Jennifer Toscano, Theresa Nardore, Joanna York, Kostura, Wendy Wehmeyer, Dunn and Jennifer Ryan.*



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alchemists rather than interior designers. “We turn lead to gold when we take all the materials that are available to us from the universe and turn the interiors of people’s homes into something absolutely special,” explains Kostura.

In June 1998, two years after these interior alchemists began working their magic in homes from Manhattan to Montauk, they opened a showroom in downtown Huntington. They wanted to show prospective clients how a room can be given a new

personality when the wall texture and color are altered, so they treated the walls in the showroom with a variety of finishes in a medley of colors.

The storefront on Wall Street has evolved into a space from which they sell a full range of design-related products as well as the site from which they serve clients a taste of their life-related philosophy. Zen sayings, which they have inscribed on the walls of the showroom, entice visitors to linger as they contemplate the provocative adages.

“Hope and fear cannot alter the seasons,” suggests Chogyam Trungpa in one of the sayings, and John Burroughs proposes, “The kingdom of heaven is not a place, but a state of mind” in another. Kostura says that responses to the maxims have been so positive that some clients have asked to have them placed in their own homes.

This is but one of the heartfelt elements that makes the pair’s approach so particular. Each job they undertake is artfully custom in its execution. “There isn’t such a thing as a stock wall finish or a stock color for us,” Dunn explains. If someone walks into the showroom and says, “I want exactly that finish in that color on the walls in my kitchen,” Dunn warns then against making a decision until they are standing in the kitchen while looking at the color.

In this area, Dunn certainly knows best. She’s a whiz at color choice and color matching. “It’s weird,” she says, laughing. “I look at something and I can match it. Give me a sweater or a rug or a wallpaper swatch and I rarely miss.”

Dunn and Kostura put their all into a home and turn it over to the client saying, “This is yours; enjoy it.” In this, Kostura once again sees a



*In their showroom, Dunn and Kostura offer beautiful objects, along with a wealth of inspiration. A variety of wall finishes are on display to help clients visualize potential paint treatments.*

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comparison to the monks, who spend many hours working on their mandalas only to pour the sand into the ocean when their creations are completed. Like these Buddhist devotees, who offer the positive energy of their reverence to the earth by returning the sand to its origin, Heather Dunn and Richard Kostura offer their positive energy to their clients by returning to them a home transformed.

They are often rewarded for their devotion with intense gratitude from the people whose homes they renew. Kostura says he'll never forget the day when a client's mother walked into a nearly completed dining room on which they were working. She began to cry, telling him that she was simply overwhelmed by the beauty of the room.

"It's the care that creates the magic," says Kostura. "The client gets a space that is poetic, one that exudes a powerful energy because of everything we put into it."

Given this level of pride and the depth of attachment the two feel toward their work, it is not surprising that Dunn and Kostura touch people's lives with their exceptional talents and their visionary philosophies. Through their participation in the metamorphoses of their clients' most intimate spaces, they transform cosmos after cosmos — one corner of the world at a time.



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