

Florida | [Project Imagery](#)

Robert AM Stern Building, NY | [Project Imagery](#)

Pre-War Westchester Estate, NY | [Project Imagery](#)

[Headshots](#)

Anna Baraness and Kristin Tarsi of NY-based Studio AK on keeping things clean, calm and collected

The pair's muted design language has made waves in the Big Apple and beyond

Anna Baraness's childhood in Toronto, Canada was decidedly unique. The daughter of an architect father, her holidays, unlike her peers', didn't involve Disneyland getaways or day trips to amusement parks. Instead, they were filled with academic sojourns at architectural landmarks such as Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater (a home in southwest Pennsylvania built atop a waterfall), and walking tours of remote cathedrals in the French countryside. "As a kid, it wasn't always the most fun, but it did shape who I am and how I look at things. Those special trips helped me understand the connections between materials, details and the built world," says Baraness, who went on to do a bachelor's degree in interior design at Toronto Metropolitan University and thereafter moved to London where she worked for high-end residential firms with projects across the UK and overseas.

In 2011, Baraness moved to New York, where she joined an AD100 interior design firm that would define the next eight years of her career, thanks to many significant projects across the US and the Caribbean. It was here that she struck up a camaraderie with colleague Kristen Tarsi, an interior design graduate from Parsons School of Design. Both with rich experience under their belts, young families, and other life obligations, they had a lot in common. What they also shared was the recognition that it was time for a new direction. And a studio of their own seemed like just the antidote they needed to start afresh. They named their little venture Studio AK, as a hat-tip to both their first names.

Clean, collected and comfortable: those are the overarching tenets of all of Studio AK's projects. "We believe that a space should be cohesive and livable without compromising form and detail," says Tarsi of the pair's proclivity for fuss-free design. That said, the partners don't like to pigeonhole their style. "We like to think that neither we, nor our clients, fit into a box. We're always perceptive about the world around us and love to seek inspiration at every turn. To us,

this is not a job; it is a passion and a way of life," adds Baraness. What sets the pair apart isn't just their eye for detail, it's also their strong knowledge of architecture. This came in handy a few years ago when they were enlisted by a young family to modernise the interior of their traditional-style home in Coral Gables, Florida, without sacrificing its architectural charm.

Originally designed and built in the early 2000s, the 7,900-square-foot, five-bedroom, six-and-a-half-bath home was far removed from the style of the present owners, who preferred a more contemporary vibe. So began a 2.5-month overhaul (luckily coinciding with the family's annual summer vacation) that involved lots of big and little interventions: the stair rail and pickets were replaced with contemporary black iron and white oak rail, matte Venetian plaster was textured onto the walls, and a colourful Gabriel Kuri tapestry, sourced by the owners in Aspen through AGO Studios, was given pride of place. Inspired by the elegance of the grand staircase, Studio AK also curated sculptural furnishings that doubled as functional art pieces, with such examples as the circular Holly Hunt pedestal table and custom curved indoor-outdoor bouclé sofa, which mimic the curvature of the traditional architecture. "It was a tight timeline, but we prioritised simplifying the home's overstated traditional details, incorporating custom-designed built-ins to maximise hidden storage and functionality, and adding a bit of character with modern appeal," notes Tarsi.

If you were to cross-section the studio's client profile, you'd find an eclectic spread of patrons (figuratively and geographically speaking), as evidenced by one couple in South Korea who tapped the team to furnish and style their 12th-floor apartment in New York City's iconic Robert AM Stern Building. They wanted a functional, design-forward pied-à-terre they could call a home away from home. But the 2,460-square-foot, 4-bedroom apartment, originally built in 2019, was challenged by an open-concept layout; something the studio tackled by demarcating zones by way of furnishings. "It not only helped define the entrance, living room, dining room and kitchen, but also created intentional and intimate spaces for family and friends to gather," suggests Tarsi.

One thing the partners vow they'll never do is succumb to trends. "We prefer to see our interiors as functional and timeless for our clients," notes Baraness, who cites Irish architect Eileen Grey and French designer Christian Liaigre amongst her biggest sources of inspiration. Earlier this year, she and Tarsi took on a new project: the renovation of a grand pre-war estate in Scarsdale, New York. In the first stage of the home's ongoing renovation, the designers updated the den, facelifting its existing crafted oak panelling and built-ins with a high-gloss finish. Likewise, vintage furnishings from the pre-war era were complemented with contemporary overlays in an effort to marry past and present.

For a firm so young (it was established in 2020), Studio AK has come a long way. Surely then, there must be a secret sauce. "Not really," says Baraness. "[I think it all boils down to] trusting in yourself. There will always be ups and downs, but it's important to remember your strengths and to be your own advocate. There is something very empowering about that!"

Over the years, the friends turned business partners have had their fair share of challenges. Or, as they like to call it, "experiences". "Luckily, we've been able to laugh at most of them—at least in hindsight. One time, Kristin and I worked on a hotel project where we lived on-site for three

Vaishnavi Nayel Talawadekar

weeks while the renovations were going on. It was a very fun and chaotic experience I will never forget," finishes Baraness, laughing.