

# O AT HOME

AN OPRAH  
MAGAZINE

WIN A CHANCE  
TO JOIN  
NATE BERKOWITZ  
ON OPRAH'S  
SHOW  
see page 102

## THE BEST STUFF!

How to know it when you see it  
(from \$1.79 to \$10,500)

### OPRAH'S SCHOOL

Her love is in the details—a private tour

### MARTHA BECK

Quality—what it can add to your life

### ART SMITH'S OUTDOOR KITCHEN

The gear, the good times...  
and the perfect pizza under the stars

**Mariska Hargitay**  
*Law & Order: SVU*  
arresting star at home



SUMMER 2007 Display until Sept 3  
\$3.95 US/\$5.50 CANADA/FOREIGN





# CONQUERING SPACE

Turning 60 started a new chapter in the life of fashion designer Kay Unger. She shows Emily Listfield how a move to a loft helped her turn the page.

photographs by **timothy kolk** styling by **lance boyd**







OPPOSITE: Kay Unger drapes a mannequin in her home office with a pattern inspired by a Japanese silk print.

THIS PAGE: About 200 cubbyholes—painted the colors of Kay's favorite nail polishes—line the walls of her bedroom. They store some of her shoes, bags, and family photographs. Kay reupholstered the tan Le Corbusier chairs from one of her previous apartments in red leather and tufted the ottoman in pink silk. The Tibetan runner is from the Rug Company.





THIS PAGE: The painting *W 74th Street* almost mirrors the view outside Kay's dining-room window. "Of all the places I've lived, the painting looks best here," she says. Mies van der Rohe chairs surround a hemlock table.

OPPOSITE, TOP: Kay designed the headboard in the master bedroom and dressed her bed in French linens. The sconce is a classic design by Serge Mouille.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM: Art from her grown sons' childhood decorates the room where Kay's guests (including her sons) sleep. The bed is from Design Within Reach.



KAY UNGER SITS ON HER SAGE GREEN SOFA, sipping club soda from a crystal goblet. She's in the ample center room of the 4,300-square-foot loft she bought two years ago in New York City's SoHo neighborhood, and it has huge windows, generously proportioned bookcases, and a polished fresco fireplace that stretches up to meet the 15-foot-high ceiling. Another person might be dwarfed by the surroundings, but Kay, a successful clothing designer for nearly four decades, has made them completely and delightfully her own.

The benefits of the place were not immediately apparent. "Being here alone took some getting used to," she says. Not only had her previous apartments, on the city's Upper East Side, been more formal in their design, but for most of the last 30 years, until she and her second husband separated in 1996, they had been defined by marriage and children, two sons now in their mid-20s. "It was great," she says of the years of school meetings, parent potlucks, and sporting events. "But it's over. Uptown began to feel more like suburbia—the parks are beautiful, but everyone was married and I was single." She was also turning 60 and ready to start another chapter in her life. A new environment, she decided, would force her to turn that page.

The loft she chose had just been renovated and had a great kitchen and luxurious bathrooms, but its modernist aesthetic felt chilly. Even worse for an accumulator like Kay, whose collections range from garden-hose nozzles to coffee pots, it had almost no storage space. The closets, which had no interior lighting, made little sense, since poles were hung for suits and shirts but not dresses. She suspected they'd been designed by a man. So Kay's remodeling largely consisted of building places for her things, including a walk-in pantry—and-china closet, and designing wall-filling shelves for order and display space.

Oak cases flanking the fireplace hold a fairly static collection of books and mementos, but the cubbies lining her master-bedroom walls are, she says, "art in motion." To energize and feminize the display, Kay had squares of Masonite painted in reds and pinks and attached them with Velcro to the back walls of the cubbyholes. They hold almost half of Kay's beloved 150-pair footwear collection, from vintage Manolos to well-worn espadrilles. "I love shoes," she says. "I love the shapes, I love the way they make me feel taller and sexier. To me, they're sculpture." Waking up to those pieces of personal history brings the 22-foot-square room down to a human scale.

"I'm always pushing for comfort and warmth," she says. For the furniture, she rejected scratchy, stiff fabrics and said no to seating with high sides that could impede conversation. Some couches and tables are on wheels, for easy rearranging, and the media room is so lounge-friendly that she often ends up there for the night. ▶

When selecting fabric for her home, Kay says she pushed "for comfort and warmth."








Because the loft is welcoming (and the neighborhood is hip), Kay's sons spend more time here than they did in her last apartment. "They watch football and baseball in the media room," she says. "The only difference from when they were younger is that now they clean up after themselves and cook for me."

Kay filled the loft with artwork: Her sons' childhood paintings are lovingly framed in one of the bedrooms, and her own fashion sketches, dating back four decades, hang in the powder room. Her interest in art runs deeper than collecting; she studied painting before switching to the (slightly) more practical path of design. Despite her success in fashion, the love of fine art never dissipated. "For years, it haunted me that the career I had planned left me not one moment for other kinds of art." Since her move, she's taken a sculpture course and has a weekly art-making get-together with two former college roommates.

In Kay's studio, casement windows let in floods of light, and walls covered in Homasote and linen function as outsize bulletin boards, where she pins up sketches and swatches. "In my last apartment, I did have a small studio," she says, "but I always ended up working in the big, bright kitchen because of the space and light. I would tape all my inspiration on the cabinets. Now I can work in my studio." But she also sketches in other rooms, and with the silver lining of singledom that makes coupled people envious, she can leave her projects wherever she likes. "They can be on every table in every room, and I don't have to explain it to anybody." 



FOR KAY UNGER

## Quality Is...

**LIGHT** "Sunshine and color."

**SILENCE** "Days when the phone doesn't ring."

**FOOD** "Crunchy things to eat in bed  
(and a DustBuster to hide the trail)."

**SOFTNESS** "Furnishings and fabrics that  
can pass the 'bare-legs test.'"

**STORAGE** "Having a place for everything...  
and being able to remember where everything is."

**COMPANY** "Making a home for my children  
and their loved ones."



“My sons come here to watch football and baseball. The only difference from when they were younger is that now they clean up after themselves and cook for me,” Kay says.

OPPOSITE, TOP: Kay displays her collection of costume jewelry on a wall in her closet.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM: Fashion sketches from Kay's college days hang in Crate & Barrel frames in the powder room. The sink and the washstand are from Waterworks.

THIS PAGE: The living room features more cubbyholes (this time for books, snapshots, and pottery); a gold pony-skin daybed; and Edward Wormley club chairs covered in chocolate brown alpaca. The green silk rug matches the B&B Italia sofa by Antonio Citterio. For details, see *Shop Guide*.

