



Maryline Damour and Mel Jones Jr. of Damour Drake in the meditation room they designed for the 2019 Kingston Design Showcase.

Last year, I wrote about the then-new organization Kingston Design Connection (KDC), whose goal was to bring together Hudson Valley designers, builders, and makers for support and collaboration. KDC's inaugural Kingston Design Showcase, held in October 2018, featured regional designers revamping the 1,400-square foot ground floor of a midtown house—organized by KDC founder Maryline Damour.

But Damour, co-founder of the full-service design/build firm Damour Drake, wasn't sure about a repeat performance. "The first show house was supposed to be a one-off event," she admits. "I hadn't committed myself to it, or decided, 'This is a *thing*.'"

In 2019, the Kingston Design Showcase most definitely became a *thing*. Kingston is on the map when it comes to interior design—so much so that five internationally renowned designers signed on to KDC's board of advisors: interior designer and Harlem Toile products creator Sheila Bridges; creative director and design journalist Linda O'Keeffe; Brad Ford, touted by *House Beautiful* as one of America's top young designers; Riley Johndonnell, UMEWE social justice design firm cofounder and creator with Pantone of International Optimism Yellow; and Jon Sherman, founder of Flavor Paper wall coverings brand.

KDC has grown substantially. While the 2018 event involved about 100 participants—including makers, businesses, and 10 designers—this year's showcase, held in uptown Kingston in October, attracted 180 participants—including 17 designers—with 98 percent hailing from the Hudson Valley.

"Last year I had one goal: to bring all these people from the design/build trade together so we could support each other's businesses, and give the public a real visual demonstration that they don't need to go outside the Hudson Valley for design," Damour explains. But now that the Hudson Valley is recognized as a design hub, she wants to "introduce our designers and makers to a broader marketplace across the Hudson Valley and beyond."

Besides the showcase, Damour assembled two traveling KDC exhibits in 2019. In June, she and KDC members teamed up to create a garden room for the Rhinebeck Craft Fair. And last March, she included 15 upstate makers in a Damour Drake

dining room design for the *Architectural Digest* Design Show at the Javits Center. "I didn't want to focus on showcasing the latest design trends as many participants do," she says. "Instead, I chose to highlight the uniqueness of design in the Hudson Valley, with handmade, functional, and decorative works of art. I think that also helped set our space apart from others and helped us get media attention."

For the 2019 Kingston Design Showcase, KDC members transformed 15 interior spaces and the front entrance of the Wiltwyck, a large, 19th-century brick Italianate private home with Airbnb spaces on Clinton Street. Damour encouraged makers to expand their lines, including ceramicist Christopher Brody, who produced a line of custom tiles for the front parlor fireplace, and artist Sienna Martz, who created a large-scale fiber artwork for the meditation room that Damour designed with her partner at Damour Drake, Mel Jones Jr. "I like challenging people to stretch themselves," she says. "I ask, 'Why are you doing this when you could be doing that?' I don't see why we have to put ourselves in buckets and restrict our career paths."

Junior designers were welcomed this year too. "Last year my goal was to showcase established designers up here," says Damour. "But why don't we give a path to junior designers, help them get established and let them see how more established designers approach their work? We all worked together for a whole month [on the house], and it was great."

Kingston Design Showcase took place over the same weekend as the Field + Supply craft fair, so the two organizations teamed up to provide busing for design writers and editors from Manhattan, and Damour says she hopes for even more collaboration and support in 2020. "Both city and county government worked with us this year and we plan to continue to engage with them next year," she says. "A major goal for next year is to partner with a real estate agency to provide a house for the design showcase. The more we come together in support of our shared goal to promote and showcase our talented artists, the more we all grow and develop."

# HOUSE

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