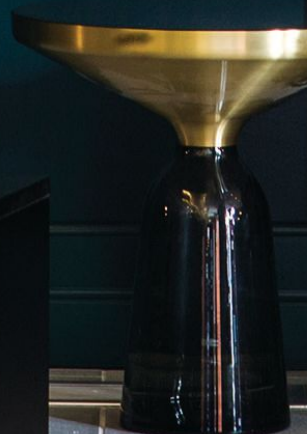


GENTRY

HOME



EXTRAVAGANT GESTURES

San Francisco designer Pamela Babey creates virtuoso décor for adventurous and chic clients around the world.

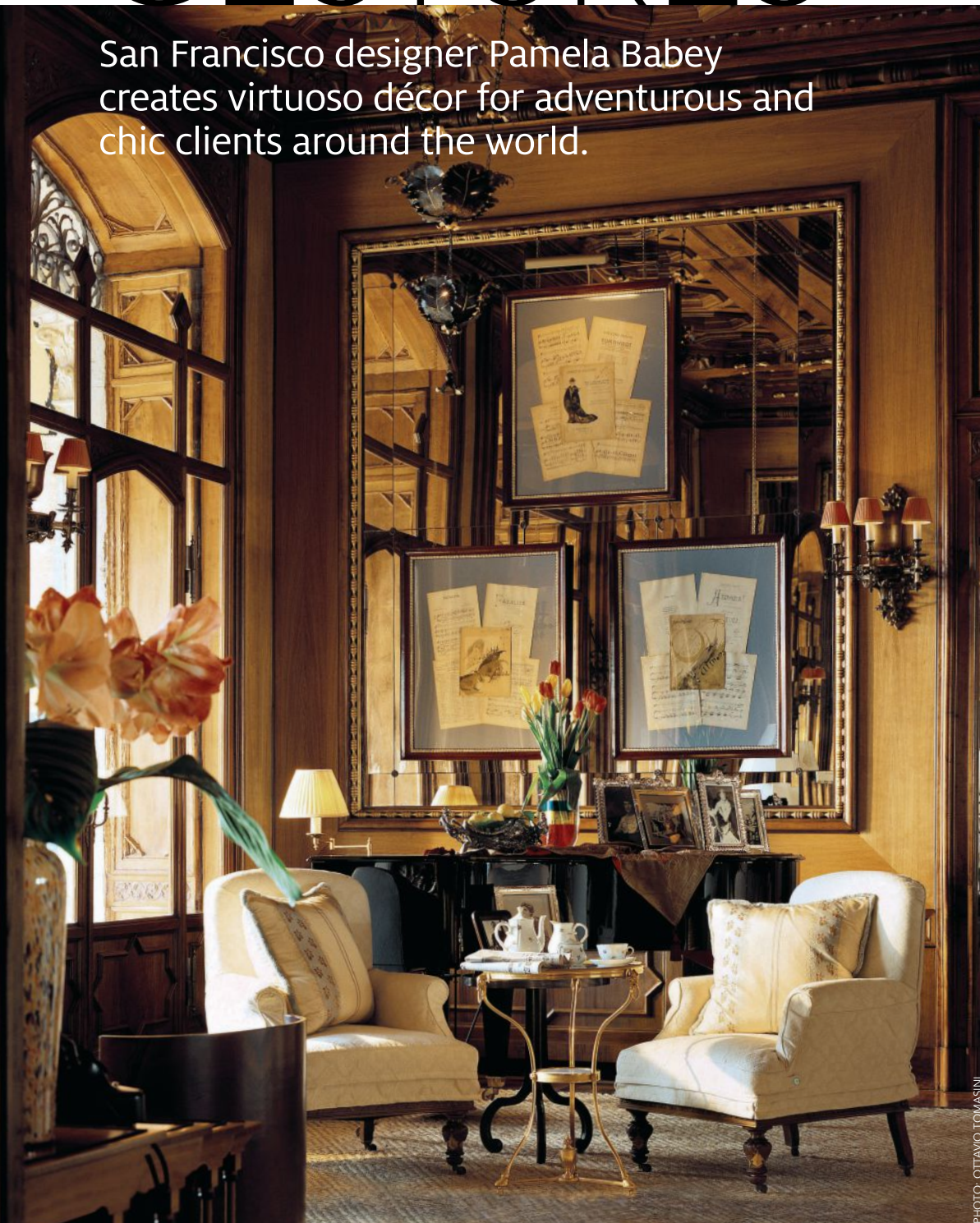


PHOTO: OTTAVIO TOMASINI



PHOTO: COURTESY OF GRAND HOTEL A VILLA FELTRINELLI

STORY BY DIANE DORRANS SAEKS



The reflections in the mirror (opposite page) enliven the main salon of Villa Feltrinelli by bringing the sunlight and lake view inside. The grounds of the historic Grand Hotel a Villa Feltrinelli (this page), with views of Lake Garda in the background. Pamela Babey of BAMO has been consulting on the design of the interiors since BAMO's original renovation in 2001.



“

am a rebel modernist,” says Pamela Babey, a co-founder in 1991 of the internationally successful San Francisco interior design firm, BAMO. “I believe bigger is better, and that exuberance in design is a wonderful thing,” she notes. Her modernist apartment on Russian Hill is a luscious treasure chest of the finest Venetian glass, 18th-century etchings, shimmering Fortuny fabrics, rich velvets, and gilded detailing.

Babey, with a highly successful career spanning four decades, says she is definitely not a minimalist. “Less is less exciting, and more is always a thrill,” she related recently at the San Francisco headquarters of BAMO. “I’m a modernist who loves collections, vivid color, the glint of gold, the gleam of silver, and I can create both subtle and dramatic detail in interiors. I love to delight the eye.”

Babey, with her signature fiery red hair, chic Chanel ensembles, in-the-know conversation, and joyful creative energy, is a leader and a visionary in the world of luxury interiors. She was born in Brooklyn and grew up in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Babey has spent the last 40 years traveling the world, designing luxurious hotels and residences. Selecting art, antiques, and rare decorative objects, she has also developed a community of artisans worldwide. Babey infuses each space with elegance, expression, and pure enjoyment.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF GRAND HOTEL A VILLA FELTRINELLI



PHOTO: OBERTO GIU

In the 2016 update to the Salon (opposite page), Pamela brought in blue and white Rubelli watercolor fabric, bringing in the feeling of a summer house. The chartreuse and coral pillows accent the butterfly prints that encircle the room. Side chairs are slipcovered in crisp white linens, impeccably maintained by the Villa staff.

In the 2016 refresh (above), Pamela updated the Pastore Suite with pale blue-gray colors on the walls and fabrics. She took the sweetness away with a black, white, and gray Fortuny accent. The space just sparkles.

Lakeside veranda (left), with red and white details that frame the world-renowned cuisine the Villa is known for, with dreamy views of the water. The terrace is furnished in an almost tent-like fashion with sconces and hanging lights, creating a rustic but convivial atmosphere.

Situated on the hillside in Hong Kong, the formal dining table (right) balances the two diverse and stylish living rooms nearby. The room is designed for parties and entertainment, surrounded by reflective glass and views of the city below.

The bathroom (center) designed for Nancy Epstein, owner of Artistic Tile, was to be over-the-top. Epstein loves marble extravagance and collects Deco antiques.

The neoclassical architecture (far right) of the home inspired this interpretation of a Roman Palazzo entry that is theatrically imagined and something to command the guest's attention upon entry.

"For some projects, my clients love bold color and heightened theatricality in their interiors," says Babey. "For others, the effect is muted, pale, and understated."

Heaven, for her, is in the details. "In my own apartment I have mirrors hung on top of mirrors, and I love the layering of reflecting," says Babey, who also layers sofas with pillows and tablecloths of antique Fortuny fabrics in mysterious colors.

Opening up a lavish portfolio of images of a grand hotel she designed overlooking Lake Garda in Northern Italy, she indicated her use of rich hues and artful embellishments. Villa Feltrinelli, a 21-room hotel, is a former family castle built in 1890 in the neo-Gothic style. "It's not a heavy-handed restoration. It's understated luxury, but it's real luxury," she emphasizes. "This was a fantasy project. We designed everything from crystal to bed linens to theatrical lighting."

Working at BAMO with partners Gerry Jue, Michael Booth, Dorothy Greene, and Steve Henry, Babey's portfolio includes décor as varied as hotels in Uruguay and Bora Bora, Han Yue Lou Hotel in Nanjing, a private residence in Abu Dhabi, a residential compound in Beijing, plus several residences and a luxury yacht in Hong Kong. "Our plan in hotel design is to give a nod to yesterday

but make the décor very cosmopolitan, very today," she says. "We don't do formula design. My designs for hotels feel fresh, a little eccentric, very personal, and more like a residence than a hotel."

Signatures of Babey and her team are clear "happy" colors, subtle textures, attention to detail, and a high degree of fine craftsmanship and planning.

Design for her is about the joy of dreaming, creating, experimenting. "My favorite part of design for clients and for myself is collecting and applying all the details of the décor—the art, the fabrics, the china, the cutlery, the antiques, the frames for the mirrors, the trims and carpets," notes Babey. "It's so stimulating to do this, and it can give everyone so much delight and surprise. Success for each design project means taking each detail to the nth degree."

One of her most exciting recent projects has been designing a superyacht, *The Lady Candy*, for a longtime Hong Kong client. The yacht now features guest cabins with Fortuny 'Tapa' walls



PHOTO: LISA ROMERIN



PHOTO: JONIN COOLIDGE

and headboards, and very pale wood veneers. Doors are leather with leather hardware, giving a silent feeling to the cabins.

Large suites feature hand-painted de Gournay wall coverings. “I love the color red,” says the designer. “I think everybody should have a red room. When you walk into the room, it gives a sudden burst of energy, like a shot of caffeine. I am lucky to have several clients and a partner who agree.”

Babey has been traveling to Venice for much of her life, and finds the array of colors, Gothic architecture, the theatrical interiors, her friends, and the reflective light endlessly inspiring. “I often visit the studio of Fortuny in Venice,” she notes. “It’s truly astounding what richness can be created simply by layering paint onto a piece of cotton fabric. Today, I can say I will never tire of Fortuny; I cannot imagine life without it!”



PHOTO: LISA ROMERIN

One reason for Babey’s success is that she is always working and constantly curious and open to new ideas. “It is impossible to create in a vacuum. My colleagues, clients, and fine artists and craftspeople inspire and energize me. Add to that the interaction from some of the world’s finest artisans and you have an amazing assortment of ideas and solutions, all beautifully crafted. Working on the Villa Feltrinelli, I was very pleased to find highly talented Italian artisans whose crafts were handed down from one generation to the next.”

Babey continues, “I keep a catalog in my mind which contains vignettes of inspirations I have encountered over the years. Most inspiring are the spit-and-glue of designer Tony Duquette, the rich patina of well-worn objects, the bravery of designer Elsie de Wolfe, and the luscious sensuality of Manolo Blahnik. When recalled in the right proportions, they provide the passion to create.”

Babey’s favorite ‘holiday’ includes visiting historic architecture in Portugal, Italy, France, and Miami. “Inspiration is a very personal thing,” she adds. “Inspiration is fleeting and what inspires me at this particular moment may not have gotten a second thought last year. Inspiration stirs the senses and gladdens the heart,” she enthuses. “I try to surround myself with an environment and with activities and people that give me energy and passion to create. In the end, I ask myself, ‘Is it pretty?’ and the answer must be a very affirmative ‘yes’.” ♦