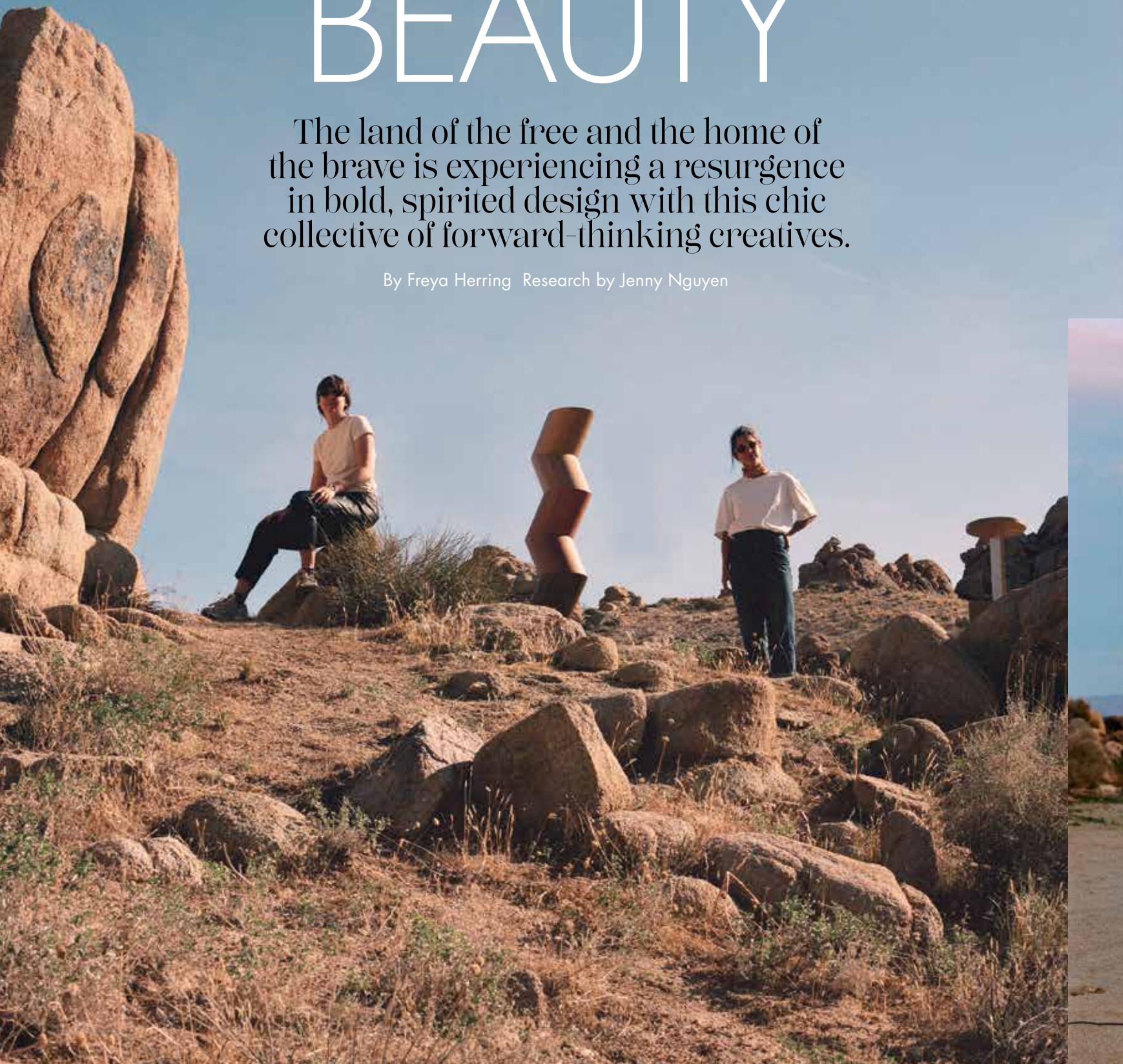


# AMERICAN BEAUTY

The land of the free and the home of the brave is experiencing a resurgence in bold, spirited design with this chic collective of forward-thinking creatives.

By Freya Herring Research by Jenny Nguyen



Recessions are bad — that’s a given. But the GFC may well have borne an American design renaissance. “The crisis meant a lot of people were laid off, many designers went out on their own,” says Jean Lee of Ladies and Gentlemen Studio. “Lots of trade shows became free, to bring in new energy, highlighting independent designers, and that progressed to collective design trade shows and designers connecting more with the art collector world.” Today, 13 tumultuous years on, having trudged through the Trump era, empowerment movements like Black Lives Matter and Me Too, not to mention a global pandemic, sights have turned away from the calming Scandi-led, mid-century modern look onto something that seems to say ‘new start’. It’s altogether more vibrant, outwardly confident and even, at times, breathlessly optimistic. It’s arguably the kind of design that American culture was established to create.

## Estudio Persona

Jessie Young and Emiliana Gonzalez worked in film in their native Uruguay but upon moving to Los Angeles, both shifted to a career in design. The pair’s lighting and furniture — geometric and graphic with flowing forms set against hard lines — come out of collaborative thought. “Our practice is formed usually from a very visual point, playing with shapes,” says Gonzalez. “We get a lot of inspiration from art and architecture.” “It’s always about form — how this connects with this, how this has a tension with that,” Young continues. Sustainability is paramount and so Estudio Persona objects are made locally with local materials. Young and Gonzalez’s new collection, which includes stools and tables plus their first sofa and cabinet, showcases pale or black-stained oak and nude-toned leather taut against refined shadow gaps. “Even with the stools and the table, we are playing with tension and rhythm — the contrast between the very bulky form and the thin gap of air,” says Young. “We are playing with light and dark, large and small, curves and straight lines. We are always playing with contrast in some way.”  
*@estudiopersona*



**THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT**  
 Bow floor lamp. The Luz table and Aire stools from Estudio Persona’s latest collection.

H chair. Block chair.  
**OPPOSITE PAGE** Emiliana Gonzalez and Jessie Young of Estudio Persona, with a stack of Arrow tables.

PHOTOGRAPHER: PIA RIVEROLA (@ESTUDIO-PERSONA-PORTRAIT)



## Apparatus

**F**ounded in 2012 by Gabriel Hendifar and Jeremy Anderson, Apparatus is perhaps the most well established of the new wave of American design. Now helmed solely by Hendifar, the New York-based studio's charmingly rambunctious aesthetic is most recently expressed in its Act Four collection. "Act Four is inspired by a 1960s view of the future in which man-made ingenuity and technology elicited delight," says Hendifar. "I wanted to capture a sense of optimism and wonder, a sense of humour, where chairs feel like friendly robots that might say 'beep boop' when you sit on them. The collection negotiates the delicate balance between machine perfection and the human hand." Act Four includes three lighting series, as well as Apparatus's first range of seating and rugs. The Reprise lights showcase illuminated orbs cupped by suede strapping, while the Episode chairs play with material expectation. "I find the resolution of the button detail, which is actually the absence or memory of a button, to be particularly beautiful," he says. Newly renovated New York showrooms are due to open again at the end of January, arguably the best place to experience the awe-inspiring power of this new collection. "What has become more and more clear to me in the last 10 years is that my process starts first with imagining a full world — its mood, its attitude, its references," says Hendifar. "From that point of departure, the pieces I design become the tangible artefacts of that world." @apparatusstudio



**THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE**  
**FROM ABOVE LEFT**  
 Episode armchairs  
 from the Act Four  
 collection. Reprise  
 pendant light.  
 Gabriel Hendifar  
 of Apparatus.

PHOTOGRAPHERS: MATTHEW PLACEK (APPARATUS PRODUCTS), WICHMANN + BERNTSEN (APPARATUS ATTRACTION), JONATHAN FORT (LADIES & GENTLEMEN), JUDIC (PORTRAIT), MAX BURKHALTER (MICA PROJECT), ESTHER CHOI (DASH MANIFEST PROJECT)

## Ladies & Gentleman Studio

**C**uriosity is what drives the multidisciplinary practice of Ladies and Gentlemen Studio — cofounded by Jean Lee and Dylan Davis — producing lighting, sculptures, furniture, home accessories and jewellery between Seattle and Brooklyn. “We want to explore different modalities of design, whether it’s through community, materials or context,” says Lee.

“The guiding value for us is keeping it open, allowing us to be curious and discover new things and new channels.” Inspiration could come from the tiniest of sources. “It could be a little sample of material that’s been sitting on our shelf for years,” says Davis. The design for the duo’s Lightscape Candle light sprung from their enduring fascination with illumination itself. “Light is a physical thing, but it’s not a physical thing,” says Davis. “Statement lighting is the jewellery that completes the space,” adds Lee. The Myrna pendant light is the result of the couple posing a question. “How can you manipulate a thin piece of material in a minimal way to give it a beautiful form?” ponders Davis. “Everything we make is in this lineage of curiosity.”  
[@ladiesandgentlemenstudio](#)



**THIS PAGE, FROM BELOW LEFT** the Myrna pendant light in Dash Marshall’s Tambor Loft project. Dylan Davis and Jean Lee of Ladies & Gentleman Studio. Folded utensils. The Myrna pendant light in MCKA’s Carnegie Hill Apartment project.



“How can you manipulate a thin piece of material in a minimal way to give it a beautiful form? Everything we make is in this lineage of curiosity”

DYLAN DAVIS



THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Agate Iris rug (on floor) and Claystone Coral rug (on wall), both from the Travertine collection. Quartz Citrine rug in repurposed silk. Designer and founder Arati Rao of Tantuvi.



## Tantuvi

**L**ike many designers straight out of university, once Arati Rao entered the workplace, disillusionment set in. “I studied fashion, then I worked for larger companies where everything was very automated, and you don’t know where your fabric is made,” she says. “I felt disconnected from the work I was doing, and I knew there was a better way to do it.” Having grown up in the States, Rao regularly holidayed with family in India and on visiting weaving communities there in 2010, the seeds of Tantuvi were sown, launching five years later. Working from Brooklyn, New York, Rao designs both with or without artist Adam Sipe, compositions often springing out of her collages, or photographs of textures or shadows she’s taken on the road. The rugs — crafted from silk, cotton and hemp — are “very graphic,” she says. “We never want perfect symmetry.” Each is woven in India by families at home on a loom from communities Rao has familiarised herself with. She intends on launching her latest collection — a range of outdoor furniture sustainably made from recycled plastic transformed into yarn — in the American spring, with new tabletop runners due for release in February. [@tantuvi](#)

PHOTOGRAPHERS: ORI HARPAZ (ARATI RAO PORTRAIT), NAREG TALMOORIAN (TANTUVI STUDIO), ISABEL ASHA FENZLIEN (TANTUVI PRODUCTS), CLEMENT PASCAL (IN COMMON WITH PRODUCTS), JUSTIN J WEE (IN COMMON WITH PORTRAIT)



## In Common With

The relationship between In Common With cofounders Nick Ozemba and Felicia Hung sounds like something out of a movie. “We met on the first day of school, in college,” says Ozemba. “We always knew that we were going to do something together, but we never knew what.” Working primarily in lighting, the pair collaborate but also work with a wider range of creatives such as ceramicist Danny Kaplan and glass-blower Adam Holtzinger, both of whom work out of Brooklyn, too. Having studied furniture design, learning from their peers informs much of Ozemba and Hung’s refined but sensuously tactile aesthetic. “There are some things where we thought we were going to make something one way, and in watching them we were like, ‘Actually, the way that this material wants to be formed is going to be way more interesting,’” says Ozemba, “so we really try to allow that to inform the design.” Next up is a new collection, due in the American fall, which will include an impressive chandelier pendant. More pieces with Kaplan and work with product designer Sophie Lou Jacobsen are also in the pipeline.

*@incommonwith*

“There are some things where we thought we were going to make something one way, then we were like, ‘Actually, the way that this material wants to be formed is going to be way more interesting’”

NICK OZEMBA

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In Common With cofounders Nick Ozemba and Felicia Hung. The Dome table lamp in White Clay and Oxide Red.



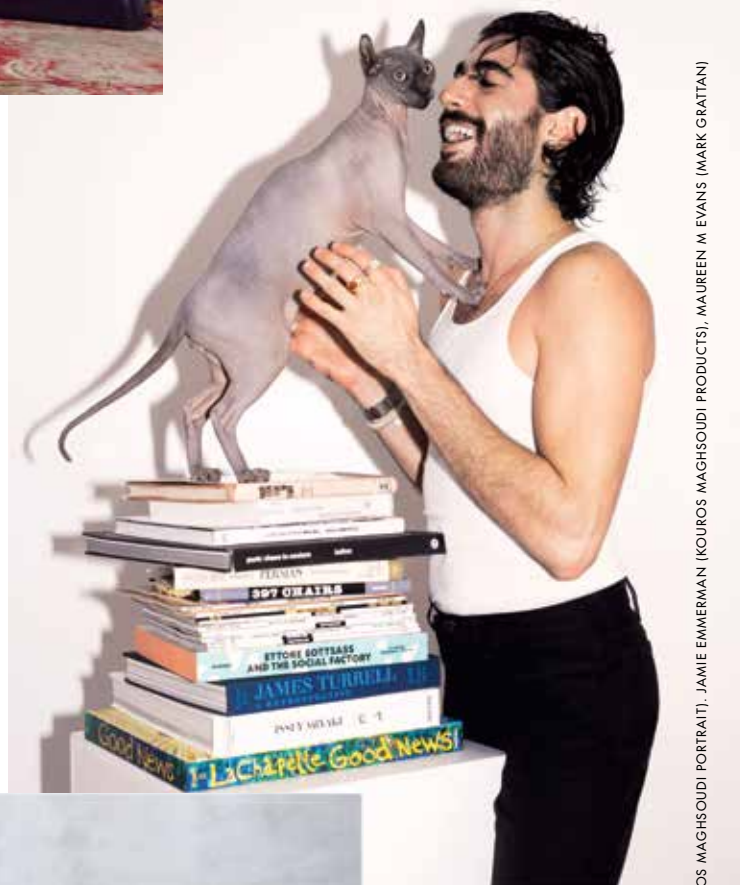


“As much as I love my culture, I was raised in Chicago, so it doesn’t feel genuine to use Iranian motifs – I integrate that through the messaging of the pieces rather than the physical design”

KOUROS MAGHSOUDI

## Kouros Maghsoudi

**N**ew York-based designer Kouros Maghsoudi’s furniture feels, and is, inspired by fashion but is also informed by his Iranian-American identity. “All of my pieces are inspired by Iranian culture and traditions,” he says. “As much as I love my culture, I was raised in the suburbs of Chicago, so it doesn’t feel genuine to use Iranian motifs, shapes and silhouettes – I integrate that through the messaging of the pieces rather than the physical design.” Take his Taarof table, a bulbous Michelin Man of an object reminiscent of New York Jeff Koons nostalgia. “*Taarof* is this thing that Iranians do where we are over-generous, over-serving, over-polite,” says Maghsoudi. “With my table you’re really able to *taarof*— there’s an ice bucket if you want to serve your guests champagne or wine, and there’s a fruit bowl and an ashtray. When you look at it, it doesn’t look Iranian but in the messaging and idea, it really allows you to fulfil that tradition.” His latest work – turn it one way and it’s a vase, flip it over and it’s a bowl – retains the glossed-up, postmodern aesthetic Maghsoudi has brought to the design scene, but with even more of a playful kick. [@kourosmaghsoudi](#)

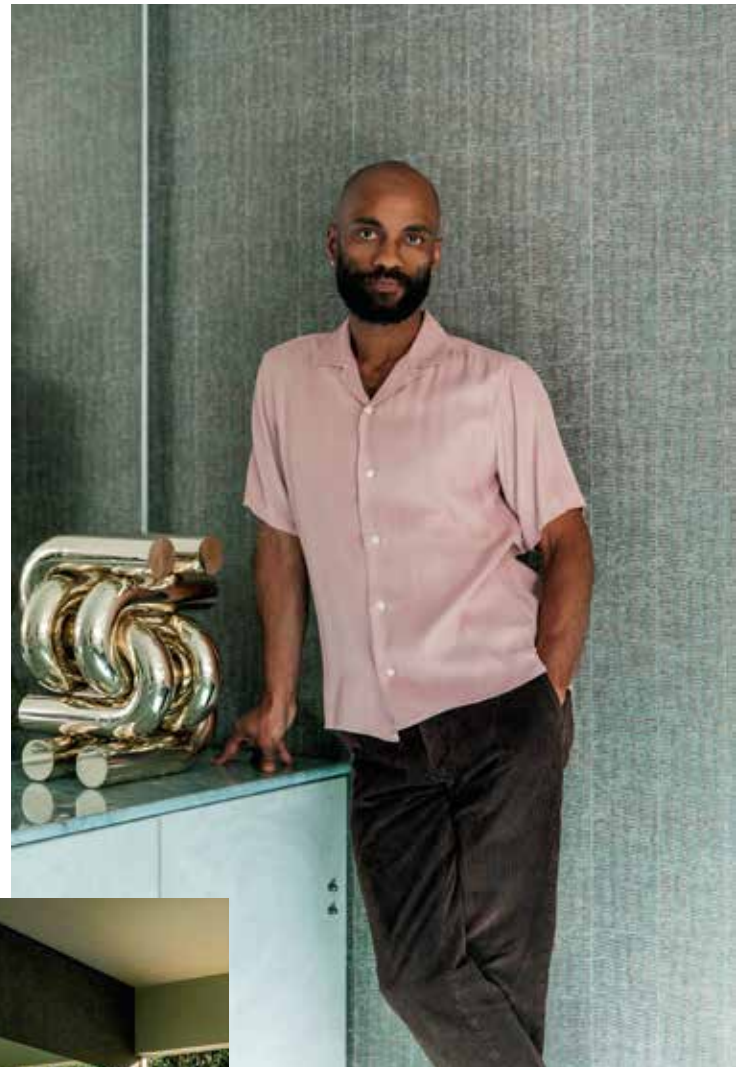


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Behsheen chairs and Doodool mirror. Designer Kouros Maghsoudi with Bugs the cat. Taarof table.

PHOTOGRAPHERS: DANNY ROCHE (KOUROS MAGHSOUDI PORTRAIT), JAMIE EMMERMAN (KOUROS MAGHSOUDI PRODUCTS), MAUREEN M. EVANS (MARK GRATTANI)

# Mark Grattan

**T**he way Mark Grattan — who runs VIDIVIXI with Adam Caplowe from Mexico City and New York — talks about his work, it's clear he possesses the collective soul of a designer, artist and filmmaker. He describes the 2018 collection — which includes Vivien's dinner table, a darkly dyed oak and bronze glass piece — as “the storyline of a tumultuous family, about a husband and his mistress and a wife who had found out”. For him, “there has to be drama, production, provocation, mystery — all of these things feed my practice.” Currently, Grattan is collaborating with singer-songwriter and creative Solange Knowles to develop a line of furniture for her multidisciplinary Saint Heron brand, slated for release in February. He describes his latest piece, a bench released at Cristina Grajales Gallery in Tribeca last November, as “quite tribal — wood stretched and skinned in green leather suede”. Everything Grattan does is intensely personal and deeply expressive: “My work is a way for me to communicate.”  
*@vidivixistudio*



**THIS PAGE, FROM FAR LEFT** the main bedroom of Mark Grattan's apartment in Mexico City, with a custom VIDIVIXI bed. The living area with a VIDIVIXI sofa. Designer Mark Grattan with a VIDIVIXI brass side table. Another view of the living area.



“There has to be drama,  
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MARK GRATTAN