



A LEG UP Design duo Dominic Kozerski and Enrico Bonetti

## European Union

Their list of clients may include Donna Karan and André Balazs, but the design duo of Bonetti/Kozerski likes to keep things understated | *By Ian Volner* |

Donna Karan on the sunny Caribbean isle of Parrot Cay. It's no easy feat, doing interiors for a luxury citadel on a remote tropical island. Principal Enrico Bonetti, 45, Italian-born and espresso-driven, is quick to confess that "Donna had hoped the project would be finished sooner." But, he adds meaningfully, "She was very understanding."

Bonetti and Kozerski have been court favorites in Karan's fashion empire since they designed her Manhattan apartment seven years ago. They followed with DKNY outlets from Beijing to London to Kuala Lumpur, each one a study in broody elegance with just a bit of flash. "When we first began working with Donna," explains Bonetti, "we had a lot of pent-up intellectual energy. But she had all these down-to-earth critiques, and she forced us to make our theories work in the real world." It's a lesson that's served the partners well as they've brought their singular vision to still larger projects for a growing list of high-profile clients.

It took them five years, five houses, countless flight hours, but the Manhattan-based design team of Enrico Bonetti and Dominic Kozerski—collectively known as Bonetti/Kozerski—have finally finished work on a deluxe private compound for fashion mogul

In their chic interior for Ford Models, in the Spartan refinement of their Tod's flagship store in New York and in two quietly contemporary residential revamps completed recently in Manhattan and Long Island, they have endeavored to expand their palette even as they broaden their audience. "In a way it gives us more pleasure to do a project like Ford than it does private homes because we get to change a lot of people's lives, rather than just a few," Kozerski says. Commercial projects have afforded them a bigger canvas to paint on: The atrium of Sony Music Entertainment's headquarters in Los Angeles, finished in February, shows what Bonetti/Kozerski can do with a simple masonry wall, a spider web of glass skylights and an abundance of open space.

It was this kind of expression that was "pent-up" during the pair's years of study and apprenticeship. Kozerski, a bearded Englishman of 40 with a manner at once hip and donnish, was trained as an architect in London under arch-functionalism Peter Cook. From there he moved to Cooper Union in New York, and then, in 1994, to a post as London liaison for the eccentric architect-to-the-fashion-stars, Peter Marino. It was in Marino's office that he met his future partner; after studying in Venice and completing a stint in Bologna, Bonetti was serving in an analogous role, running shuttle diplomacy for a Marino project CONTINUED...



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**PANEL DISCUSSION** Clockwise from top: Bonetti and Kozerski's Pennsylvania retreat, Peacock Hill; A Soho loft conversion for a family of four with gauzy linen curtains and subtle track lighting; The renovation of a barn with a river-stone floor in the Hamptons for a writer couple.

...CONTINUED in Milan. Both admit that working for Marino was a sort of crucible for their talents—tough, but fortifying. "If you have a strong personality, you can work with Peter," Bonetti says. "If not..."

Their time with Marino served another purpose: making them adroit handlers of their own clients. "If we were better businessmen, we'd probably let our clients make worse decisions," Kozerski says. But instead of cashing in on over-the-top projects, Bonetti and Kozerski work to steer their clients into calmer waters, a serene approach reflected in their unfussy domestic interiors.

But beyond the fundamentals of client relations, the greatest trick the partners learned from their experience with Marino was how to attract, capture and keep that rarest of birds, the celebrity client. It was Marino that led them to Karan, and it was Karan (for whose apartment they built full-size mock-ups, so she could "really feel what it's like to be in the space") who acclimated them to the particular demands of people who know what they want, and are accustomed to getting it. An office and apartment in New York for The Standard hotelier André Balazs, though finished, will require constant updating and readjusting to keep pace with the design-savvy client's evolving preferences. The challenge of working for Balazs, Kozerski says, is that "he's keen on things that are really authentic, so we have to find materials for him that are a bit forgotten," like the upholstery felt and leather the firm used for wall coverings. They appear to have hit their mark: visitors to Balazs hotels might be forgiven for detecting a few ideas that seem lifted from the Bonetti/Kozerski playbook. "We won't say which ones," Kozerski demurs.

The Chelsea location of the David Barton Gym franchise was another big-name project, and again they went looking for *recherché* fixtures. What they found was a cache of vintage flip clocks from the same



manufacturer that produced the original departure board at Penn Station. The designers proposed to installing a number of them around the converted YMCA building—but Barton balked. Bonetti and Kozerski wound up stuck with their funky flippers, one of which now adorns their downtown office.

Bonetti and Kozerski might hope for a more pliant partner in their latest prominent client, music producer Rick Rubin. Like Karan, Rubin has a penchant for spiritual reflection; Bonetti calls him "a very calm individual." The expanded and renovated house they'll be designing for Rubin will follow another home improvement project, undertaken for their most agreeable clients to date: themselves. The team acquired Peacock Hill—a Pennsylvania estate rumored to have been built by the epic swindler Robert Vesco—as a shared getaway, and the designers have spent the last couple of years larding it with contemporary furnishings, '70s audio equipment and enough concealed lighting and wood paneling to merit Kozerski's description of it as a "James Bond villain's lair." It's the kind of project they'd like to do more of—which is to say they still have some pent-up ideas they'd like to let loose. But the two see an opportunity in the slumping market to expand their reach: "Hopefully, the downturn will skim some bad things from the profession," Bonetti says, leaving less clutter and more quality. Just the way they like it. **M**