

1stDIBS

HOW SCULPTURE CAN TAKE A ROOM FROM GOOD TO GREAT

Whether daring or contemplative, monumental or tabletop, sculpture can transform a space with its powerful presence.

BY JORGE S. ARANGO



Photo by Michael Mundy

Interior designer [Michael S. Smith](#) says that for this barn-like post-and-beam [Hamptons home](#) by architecture firm [Ferguson & Shamamian](#), he was “trying to concentrate on the most reductive aspects of vernacular American style — the organic, almost agrarian saltbox form — as a starting point but pushing them in an interesting way.”

To that end, he conceived the dining area of the open-plan great room as a “vision of the materiality and simplicity of agrarian life,” with handmade [ladderback chairs](#) from [Jamb](#) and a custom [reclaimed-wood table](#). The carved [mid-century](#) sycamore [sculpture](#) by the self-taught French artist and furniture maker [Alexandre Noll](#) jibes with that embrace of handcrafted materials.

It also serves an important function. “Scale is hard in a barn — how do you humanize those tall open spaces and bring them down?” Smith asks, explaining that Noll’s sculpture adds a weight and volume that ground the room’s lofty airiness, so people don’t feel dwarfed by its cavernous expanse.



Photo by Brittany H. Giannone

The collectors who own [this home in San Francisco’s Pacific Heights](#) came across the unusual [African sculpture](#) that now dominates their entryway at San Francisco Academy of Art University while out on an evening walk. Called *Tranquility*, it was made from a single block of [clay](#) by an anonymous artist.

At the time, their residence was under renovation, so they had the stair adjusted to wrap partially around the work. A decade later, [ABD Studio](#) was brought in for another revamp, and “*Tranquility* became the impetus for many design decisions,” says firm founder Brittany Giannone. “The team incorporated the same burnt-umber color of the clay throughout the space.”

Despite its size, she notes, the sense of peace it radiates means that “most visitors do not initially notice its presence but rather will recognize later that they’ve walked by it.” One exception was the owners’ nephew, who crossed the room to avoid it until he was older. “Now, he has come to admire it,” Giannone says.



Photo by Alice Gao

Bridging the dichotomies inherent in a residential tower that rises out of a 19th-century landmark was [Magdalena Keck](#)’s mission in this [43rd-floor apartment](#) above the old Temple Court Building in downtown Manhattan.

Keck went appropriately modern and swanky with the living room’s Galileo sofa by [Patrick Naggar](#), lounge chairs by Mexican mid-century architect [Arturo Pani](#) from [Compasso](#) and [a coffee table in brass and cast glass by Bruno Moinard](#). The [Dórica floor lamp](#) by [Santa & Cole](#) mirrors the rounded corners of Keck’s custom-designed tambour cabinet.

A niche in the latter holds the pivotal element, one that adds a sense of time and history. *Leg with Blue Wing*, a clay and bronze sculpture by American artist Stephen De Staebler, “pays homage to antiquity while capturing relationships connecting the body and earth,” says Keck. “[Art expands one’s experience in the space](#). . . . It is the perception between the viewer and the work that creates the energy that in turn resonates through the physical space.”