

# sex and the city

Set Decorator **Karin Wiesel-Holmes** SDSA  
 Set Decorator **Christina Tonkin** SDSA  
 Assistant Set Decorator **Ondine Karady** SDSA  
 Production Designer **Jeremy Conway**  
**HBO**

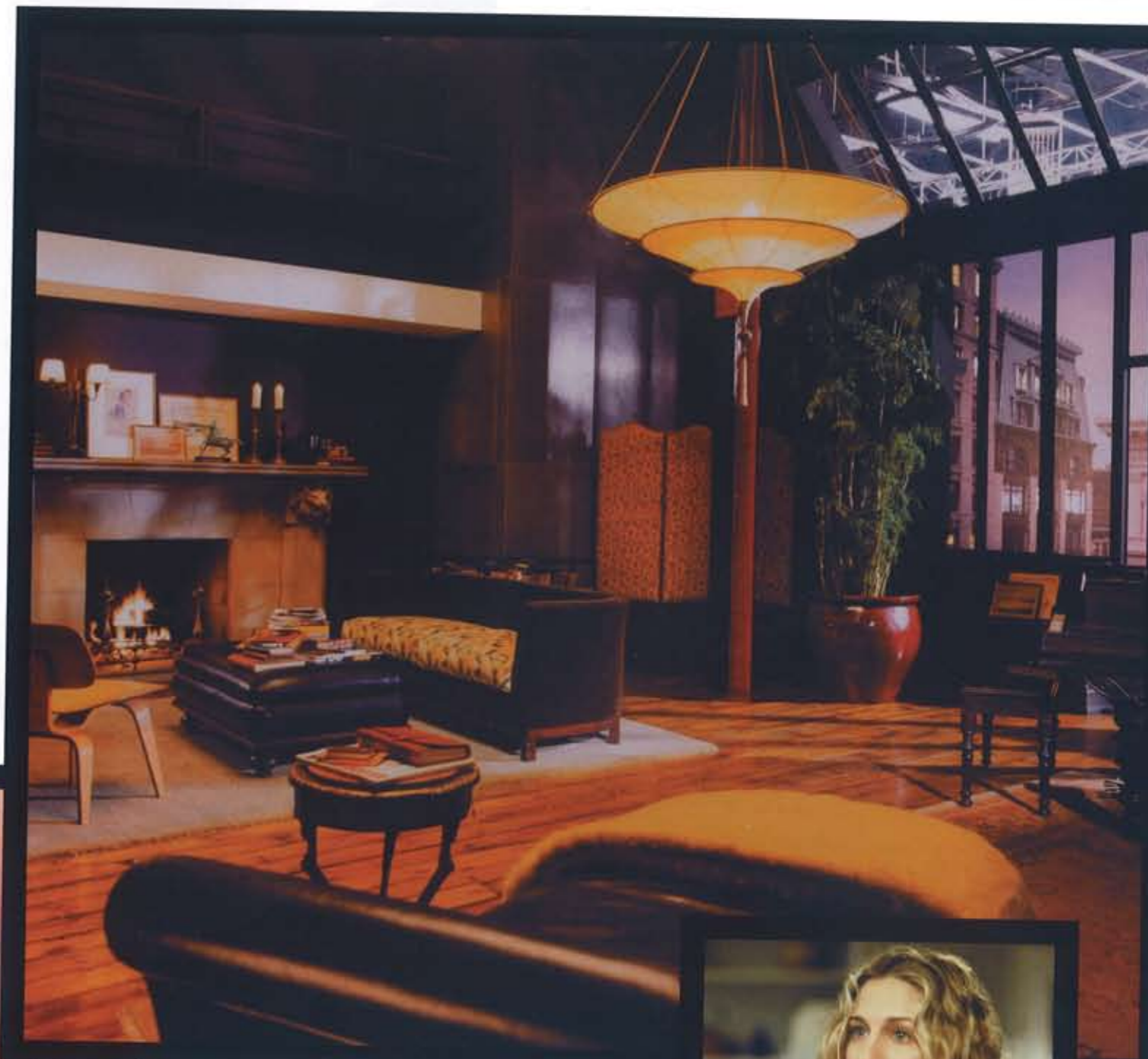


*clockwise from above:* Restaurant swing set detail focusing on the Paul Smith china that provided inspiration; The Salon of Petrosky's loft showing the working fireplace and the grand piano; Sarah Jessica Parker as Carrie at her computer; Charlotte's writing desk.



Photos this page courtesy of Karin Wiesel-Holmes

Photo: Richard Feiber



**S**ex and the City was not just a television show, it was a cross-cultural phenomenon. In just a few short seasons, it became one of the most influential series in memory, setting the bar way high for fashion, decoration, sass and independence. Women, girls and even a good number of men around the world swore by it, gasped at it and emulated its elegant extravagances. As a cable show debuting ahead of the avalanche of critical acclaim it created for HBO, it was at first designed and created by a relatively small, tight-knit team of dedicated professionals who worked tirelessly together to bring this ▶



Photo: Craig Blankenhorn/HBO



# television

sparkling fairy tale of New York City to life.

Susie Goulder was Set Decorator for *Sex and the City's* first season. Karin Wiesel-Holmes was Set Decorator from the second season onward. When she left to have a baby after the fourth episode of the sixth season, Christina Tonkin came aboard and they co-decorated the last half of the season. Ondine Karady has been the Assistant Set Decorator for both Karin and Christina.

"We do 20-30 sets for each episode, often we shoot two at once, so we collaborate and delegate," says Wiesel-Holmes. "We are all very fond of Jeremy Conway, the Production Designer. He has been committed to hearing ideas from us, who, let's face it, are the show's demographic!"

"There's an incredible commitment to authenticity throughout the production. Drawers are filled, menus and matchbooks are from restaurants that the girls would go to and the take out menus are from their neighborhoods, there's no filler. Of course, there's no garbage on the streets either, which is a part of the fairy tale of glamour."

As the series drew to a close, the decorators were committed to a rich expression of the inner life of *Aleksandr Petrovsky's* character, in a way befitting his importance in the plot. Mikhail Baryshnikov was cast in a role that would both expand *Carrie's* horizons in the wider context of international culture and ultimately galvanize her love for *Mr. Big* and New York. This could only be accomplished with a man (and an apartment) that



*The best and by far the coolest set we've done is Aleksandr Petrovsky's Loft. It was the perfect example of working together. We ALL wanted that sable throw!*

*clockwise from right: the motorcycle under the open staircase; The bedroom's antique hand tooled leather upholstered wall and sable throw; The kitchen: A combination of stark Modernism and warm wood; Detail of the library corner.*



bespoke elegance, worldliness, luxury and utter difference from the NYC she inhabits.

To that end, the designers and decorators chose furnishings, accents, materials and palettes that were recognizably European in their aesthetic, and forbidding despite their obvious sex appeal. There were tons of books from The Strand that were modern and relevant to the character's life, including art and poetry, as well as literature and history.

Much of the fine art in *Petrovsky's loft* was from Mikhail Baryshnikov's private collection; high-end, powerful and not very well known in SoHo.

*Sex and the City* is not only the story of four friends looking for love and success in the Big Apple, it is also the fiction-inspired real life story of three Set Decorators with completely diverse tastes becoming fast friends and cultivating a give-and-take camaraderie.

In fact, our conversation at the Upper East Side renaissance-hip brasserie Amaranth bounced unpredictably between custom clothing, wedding outfits, business anecdotes, and a few nuggets of relationship insight. It was reminiscent of the famous breakfast scenes in every episode. ▶



Photos this spread: Richard Felber



right: *Miranda's* palette began as *bruiise* colors. Everything in her apartment had sharp edges. Later, she becomes softer. below: The bedroom of *Carrie's Paris suite*.



Photos courtesy of Christina Tonkin except photo of Ondine Karady courtesy of herself



So when it came to the strong friendships and increasingly parallel story lines that developed behind the scenes, I couldn't help but wonder: *How much of the inner lives of these decorators found its way into the sets they adorned?*

"We've had a chance to grow with the characters, to do sets that really move the story," Karin relates. "We redid *Carrie* when *Aidan's* character left. We took *Charlotte* from *Trey's* apartment 'where plaid furniture went to die' to a beautiful all white home with touches of color. *Miranda* softened up as she became a mother and this was evident in her *apartment* decor. Everyone has moved."

—Shana Nys Dambrot

Karin Wiesel-Holmes and Ondine Karady contributed to bring *Sex and the City* style to Christina Tonkin's wedding.

clockwise from left:

Set Decorator Christina Tonkin and Set Decorator Karin Wiesel-Holmes at the *Sex and the City* wrap party; The fabulous Sergio Rossi shoes were purchased after e-mailing photos to Karin for her approval; The hand dyed runner *Charlotte* and *Harry* tripped over after their wedding was borrowed from the show; Assistant Set Decorator Ondine Karady.



*We've turned into the girls over the years! Single at the beginning- we've fallen in love, had weddings and babies.*



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