Rachel Lee Hovnanian  
Plugged-In or Unplugged?
QUEST

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DON'T YOU JUST love the crisp winds of fall? This is by far my favorite season, and it’s always made me sad that you can find places that are in perpetual spring (California), summer (the Caribbean), and winter (Siberia—though I have no personal experience with that one), but nowhere that the leaves are always turning various shades of red and brown. And fall brings one of my favorite Quest issues as well: the Arts & Culture Issue. With all the fantastic exhibits and social events of the season, we had an embarrassment of riches to cover.

The much-discussed artist on our cover, Rachel Lee Hovnanian, has started an interesting conversation with her new show “Plastic Perfect”: What effect is technology having on our lives, both in the everyday and in the longer term? “The next generation is not going to know what it was like to not be connected all the time,” she said, and looks at what that might mean for interpersonal relationships. It’s enough to give Philip K. Dick nightmares about his own electric sheep.

Which is not to say that humanism is dead, as another artist we feature strives to remind us with his own art. With his large-scale photographs of people around the world, JR shows us that when we put a face to different cultures and groups (well, actually, thousands and thousands of faces) we can realize that we’re not just connected electronically, we are also connected by our basic humanity. And now, with a new exhibit on Ellis Island, we can also see the faces of our own past looking back at us—now that’s worth the price of a ferry ride.

We also shrug on our metaphorical doctor’s coats to examine the elegant eye of venerable interior designer Bunny Williams to see how she composes her masterpieces of interior design. Her secret: 20/20 vision of taste and practicality.

Enjoy this all-too-brief season and our own artistic pages—but for your own sake, without the pumpkin spice latte.


How art can affect all aspects of life: The legendary interior designer Bunny Williams (left); a couple used JR’s trademark oversized portraits to express their love (right).

ON THE COVER: Rachel Lee Hovnanian, whose show “Plastic Perfect” is on view at the Leila Heller Gallery through October 18. Alex R. Travers talks to the artist about how technology is impacting our everyday lives in “Instant Gratification.” Photograph by Margaret Gibbons.
THE ELEGANT EYE

BY GEORGINA SCHREFFER

This page: Bunny Williams in her office on East 70th Street. The main gallery is decorated in her signature style and often showcases new product from Bunny Williams Home. Opposite page: Williams uses the Litchfield Garden Bench, from her new collection of outdoor furniture for Century Furniture, in her own sunken garden in Connecticut.
"I DESIGN WHAT I THINK is needed and what I can’t find," legendary interior designer Bunny Williams says. “A lot of it comes from solving practical problems,” she continues, with her trademark roll-up-your-sleeves attitude. A shelf with baskets might be the answer to clean up a room full of children’s toys or a larger buffet might be needed for more surface space while entertaining outdoors.

Last month, Williams unveiled her latest collaboration, a new tabletop collection for Ballard Designs. This is hardly the designer’s first foray into the product arena. In the last three years, she has launched more than half a dozen licensed collections: paper goods with Caspari, mirrors with Mirror Image Home, indoor rugs with Doris Leslie Blau, outdoor rugs with Dash and Albert, decorative pillows and throws with Pine Cone Hill, mantles and fireplace tools with Chenseys, and an outdoor furniture collection with Century, which was the buzz among the design cognoscenti at last fall’s Highpoint Furniture Market. And that’s to say nothing of the furniture line that she designs and manufactures, which she started six years ago:

Bunny Williams Home.

Born in Charlottesville, Virginia, Williams began her interior design training at Stair & Co. Antiques and then continued to hone her skills at the venerated firm...
This page: Williams and her husband, famed antiques dealer John Rosselli, in their home in Panama City.

Washable slipcovers on the upholstery mean their dogs are always welcome. Williams always arranges furniture into seating groups to allow for easy conversation, and always mixes periods and styles. Opposite page: Shown in this living room is a Venetian lacquer screen with a Venetian sofa, a 19th-century chinoiserie, and a carved Italian mirror.
of Parish-Hadley for 22 years. "I can still hear Albert's voice in my head all the time," she says of her mentor, the late Albert Hadley. "It was the greatest education I could ever have. He is with me every day." In 1988, she founded her own firm, Bunny Williams Inc., and continues to be a leader in the design world, receiving countless accolades, including being inducted into the Interior Design Hall of Fame.

As a designer, she is known for her classical approach, creating rooms with a mix of fine period pieces that she puts together with her well-trained eye. "I want things that are unique and special, but also that work," she says rather matter-of-factly. "I like a sofa to sit down on, a conversation group, a space to be comfortable in. Not everyone cares about decorating, but everyone cares about comfort." The "Bunny Williams look" is as signature as the designer herself: refined without sacrificing ease, smart without coming off as pretentious, traditional without being boring. Williams' deft hand at mixing styles and pieces establishes the soul of her rooms with the depth and richness of a luxurious eclecticism. On a personal quest for beautiful things, Williams takes her time finding the right pieces for a space. "I don't do a whole room at once. I don't always know what I am going to find," she says. Whatever does not find a place in a client project might end up at Treillage, the home furnishings and garden shop she owns with her husband, antiques dealer John Rosselli.

She and Rosselli share three homes together with their two rescue dogs, Annabelle and Bebe: an apartment in New York, a country house in Connecticut, and a villa in Porta Cana. Williams lives in the works, surrounding herself with beautiful and practical objects. "I think I am the luckiest person in the whole world," she says of her work. "It's what I love to do."
This spread: This Richmond, Va., living room shows Williams’ deft ability to mix pieces of varying provenance to create a timeless look.