

# Old Souls

Color, curiosity and a deep-rooted love of history are at the core of San Francisco design firm Chroma

by **LINDSEY SHOOK** photography by **SAM FROST**



**RIGHT:** Chroma partners, Leann Conquer and Alexis Tompkins. **LEFT:** Inside Chroma's new studio in San Francisco's Dogpatch neighborhood.

**“CHROMA RELATES TO THE** purity and intensity of color, and that implied vibrancy and passion inflects our whole approach to design,” says Leann Conquer, managing partner of San Francisco-based design firm Chroma, which she helms with friend and creative partner Alexis Tompkins. What brought the pair together was not just their love of design but then with their husbands. Both moved across the country to fulfill career opportunities (Conquer began working with Nicole Hollis; Tompkins with Steven Volpe), then upon their husbands—who are also business partners—insisted they meet, they formed an instant connection, and the firm was established just two years later. “Very quickly, our conversations turned to building something for ourselves,” Tompkins recalls. “We manifested Chroma, which is an interior design studio, but in many ways, it’s also an artistic practice. We like to think of Chroma as a medium for reveling in the beauty and complexities of being human.”

While the firm is still ascending in a very crowded industry, Chroma has already developed a deeply distinct voice that reflects a profuse knowledge and appreciation of artists, designers and movements. “We’re ravenous for all things contemporary culture, and we’re also obsessed with cultural history and historical research,” says Conquer. “We love to pull obscure references—past and present—from art, fashion, music, film, literature and other creative realms then use them as a lens to source uncommon solutions—through textiles, furniture, lighting, artwork—that give habitable form to the desires and aspirations of our clients.”

One defining moment that revealed why Chroma is a true force to

be reckoned with happened during the 2020 San Francisco Decorator Showcase House. Chroma's “Sunset Lounge” was rich with extraordinary vintage and contemporary works and sensual hues. “Showcase is all about partnerships, which makes it a perfect medium for us because collaboration is at the core of who we are as people and what Chroma is as a studio,” Conquer remarks. “For us, Showcase has always been about telling a story that’s completely of this time and timeless. It’s about creating a moment, not a monument—a living memory.”

Defiant of the trending neutral palette and wabi-sabi references commonly found in current design, Chroma has established that through conceptual color and curation a visionary perspective can be established. “The creation of a design narrative is vastly underappreciated in the industry. A lot of designers today—maybe it’s the pace of the world and client demands, or maybe it’s a sort of apathy—create a look and repeat that look,” says Tompkins. Instead, Tompkins and Conquer approach each project by telling the personal stories of the inhabitants and incorporating as many artisans, craftspeople and tradespeople as possible in the customization process. “It’s our responsibility not only to our clients but to our larger community of collaborators—whose immense efforts and talents go into each of those pieces—to write that story,” says Conquer. “We take that responsibility very seriously. Being designers, being artists, it’s about an aesthetic of care—for each other, for our clients and for our collaborators and the artisan community.”