



2022  
**Design  
Awards**



# Studio Ahead

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**IT SEEMS LIKE** a simple enough question: “How do you like to sit?” Yet the responses to the query—among a series that designers Homan Rajai and Elena Dendiberia typically ask their clients early on—is quite telling, according to the duo. “A question like that has so many cultural implications and design opportunities,” says Rajai.

Their approach to design—“not to make generalizations about how people feel comfortable living,” Rajai elaborates—is rooted in their own narratives. Rajai is Persian and has lived in Kenya and Mexico. Dendiberia hails from Russia. They met in San Francisco while working for a design firm that specialized in 17th- to 20th-century European antiques, which it turns out didn’t resonate with either of them. They favored the organic wooden forms of Marin County sculptors like J.B. Blunk and Ido Yoshimoto over the marquetry of a Louis XVI commode, and lounging on a Persian divan with pillows thrown about as opposed to sitting on a stiff-backed settee.

A shared vision led to Studio Ahead, whose ethos merges “local artists

and artisans who embody the Northern California lifestyle,” says Rajai, with “aspects of our clients’ diverse cultural backgrounds and interests.” Their portfolio ranges from new builds to Craftsman homes to even a French chateau-inspired dwelling. Among their current endeavors are a mid-century residence in Hillsborough and an intimate exhibition and event space in San Francisco.

Recently, Rajai and Dendiberia launched a production arm to their business. The stacked pillow formation of their signature piece, the Sheep lounge chair—for which they collaborated with Sonoma-based textile artisan JG Switzer on the upholstery—is reminiscent of a divan. A wool headboard and stool are the latest additions to their product line.

Whether they are devising rooms or objects, the pair’s unique point of view comes through. Dendiberia describes Studio Ahead as “a Silk Road of sorts: a juxtaposition of Eastern and Western identities and an exploration of the possibilities inherent in combining contrasting elements—contemporary and primitive aesthetics, logic and intuition.”

A bedroom harmonizes an array of materials with OTQ’s Bisu cork bed frame; felted wool Sheep pillows by Studio Ahead; Sohyun Yun’s hand-dyed acrylic side tables; an iridescent Swoopy glass bowl by Katherine Gray; and String Lights cone pendants by Michael Anastassiades for Flos.



The merino wool felt Sheep tapestry by Studio Ahead and JG Switzer serves as the backdrop for a Molteni&C dining table and vintage chairs by Silvio Coppola.

In a study, a custom bookcase and table by Kerf Design—both constructed of plywood and laminate—are combined with vintage armchairs upholstered in Edelman leather.



A living room is appointed with a vintage Camaleonda sofa by Mario Bellini, covered in Kravet’s Pelham velvet in Moss, and a custom tile mural by Studio Ahead in collaboration with Eunoia Modern.

