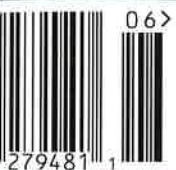


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Downward, a 2012 painting by Barbara Takenaga.

137 DESIGN SOLUTIONS

An apartment in a renowned Paris villa by Le Corbusier gets an update that respects the master while catering to a young family's needs. *By Michael Lassell*

145 TOOLBOX

Smart products for stylish homes

148 DANIEL'S DISH

A hearty buckwheat crepe serves as the basis for a classic yet easy Breton luncheon. *By Daniel Boulud*

202 RESOURCES

Where to find it. *By Mary Spencer Morten*

208 ETCETERA

Lanterns that add candle power to any summer evening. *By Carisha Swanson*

FEATURES

155 ELLE DECOR STYLE

156 SCALING NEW HEIGHTS

A grand Manhattan townhouse undergoes a renovation for a large family that hardly skimps on glamour. *By Ingrid Abramovitch*

166 MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

Madeline Stuart conjures a Beverly Hills cottage that reinvigorates the Arts and Crafts ideal. *By David A. Keeps*

174 COLOR COMMENTARY

A lover of all things white happily submits her New York townhouse to an infusion of bold colors by designer Katie Ridder. *By Kathleen Hackett*

WHAT'S NEW at ELLE DECOR ONLINE

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INSIDER INSIGHTS

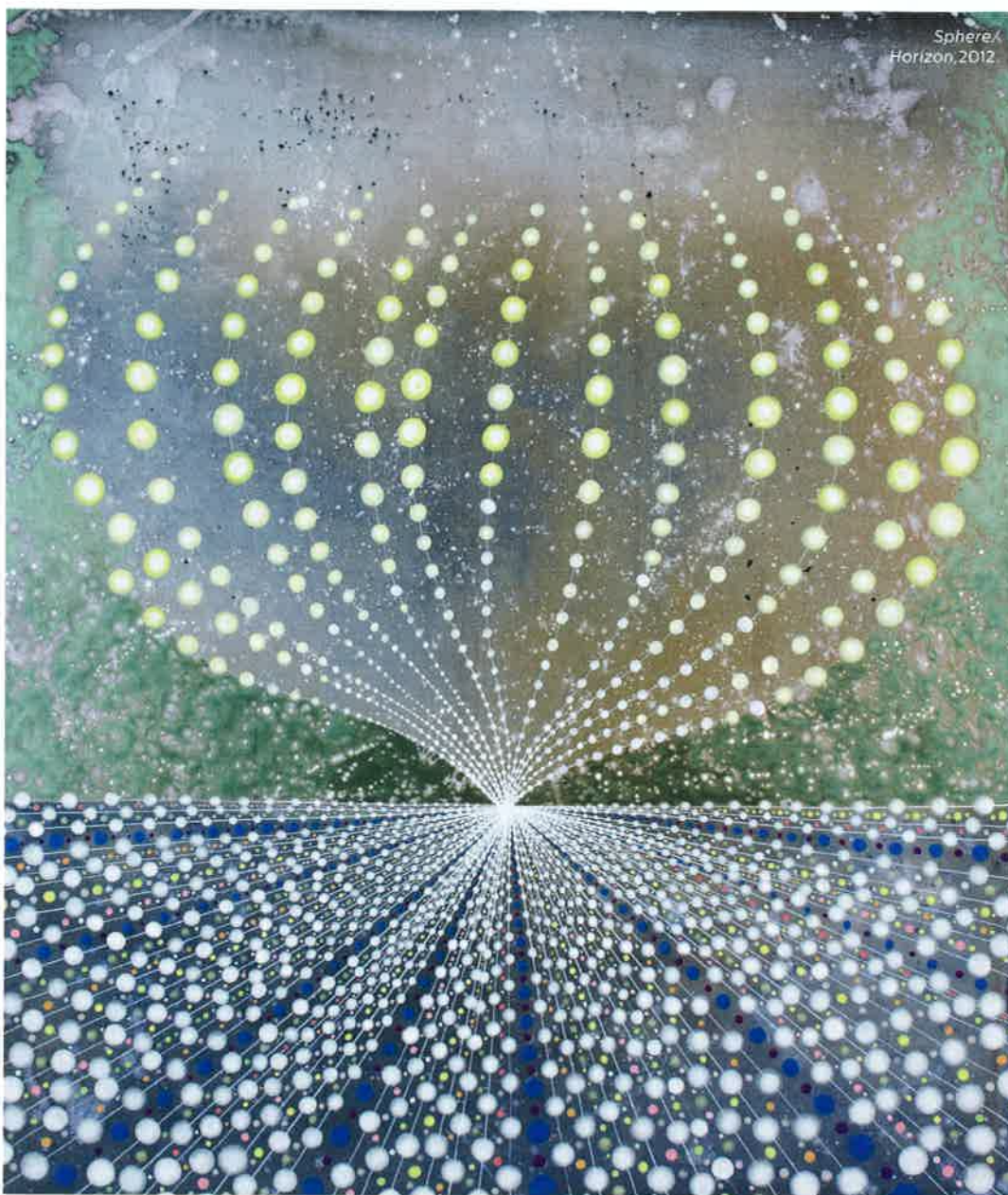
A fan of our A-List talents? Then you'll want to check out how they bring their distinctive styles home, with a roundup of their own houses, apartments, and weekend retreats, including the Manhattan apartment of Jeffrey Bilhuber, which we featured in our May 2007 issue (elledecor.com/alist).

"A room should never allow the eye to settle in one place. It should smile at you and create fantasy."

—Juan Montoya, June/July 1999

WORDS OF WISDOM

If you are amused or inspired by any of the designer quotes we feature on our Celebration quotes page, save and share your favorites—plus any other lessons and advice you may have garnered from our pages during the past 25 years (elledecor.com/quotes).



BARBARA TAKENAGA

The precisely crafted, richly imagined paintings of this New York-based artist reflect her Japanese heritage, Nebraska upbringing, and bohemian attitude.

BY JULIE L. BELCOVE

Barbara Takenaga's graphic paintings pulsate with an almost dizzying array of luminescent dots, strung like beads along swirling lines as skinny as silk thread. Tiny at the center, the dots radiate outward in off-kilter symmetry—a nod to Indian mandalas—gradually enlarging as they reach the canvas's edges. The effect can bring to mind something as overwhelming as the cosmos, as simple as a microorganism, as flashy as a fireworks display, as destructive as an explosion, or as life-affirming as a developing fetus.

Takenaga has had a penchant for intricate patterns since her college days, when she focused on printmaking and paid for a book of mandalas in weekly installments. Abstraction has long held sway for the artist, who attributes her taste at least in part to her Japanese heritage. Rather than taking her cue from, say, Mondrian or Rothko, Takenaga has looked to Eastern traditions. "I've always been drawn to non-Western art—I don't know if it's some sort of nostalgia," she says in her Chelsea studio, where she paints when she's not ▶



Roof, Fall, 2012 LEFT ABOVE: Blue Haze II, 2012 LEFT BELOW: Night Painting (Red), 2002

teaching at Williams College in Massachusetts. She subscribes to the theory that “when you’re of a culture, you have this longing to take on that culture, though it’s not *your* culture.”

Marshall Price, curator of modern and contemporary art at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, sees in Takenaga’s oeuvre references to the digital realm and, more recently, landscape painting, since the newer work often bears a dividing line that’s easily read as a horizon. “A lot of people don’t realize Barbara came from the Midwest,” he says. “When I discovered that, I understood more—cornfields, big open skies.” Takenaga alludes directly to the small-town Nebraska of her childhood in works such as 2011’s *Nebraska Painting (Rising)*, with streams of pale dots mimicking an endless sky soaring above rows of what could be yellow corn, and 2013’s *Red Funnel*, which manages to suggest both a tornado sweeping the plains and a carnival’s blinking lights.

Takenaga’s work has also been compared to psychedelic art. It’s a link that she says is unintentional but unobjectionable. She did, after

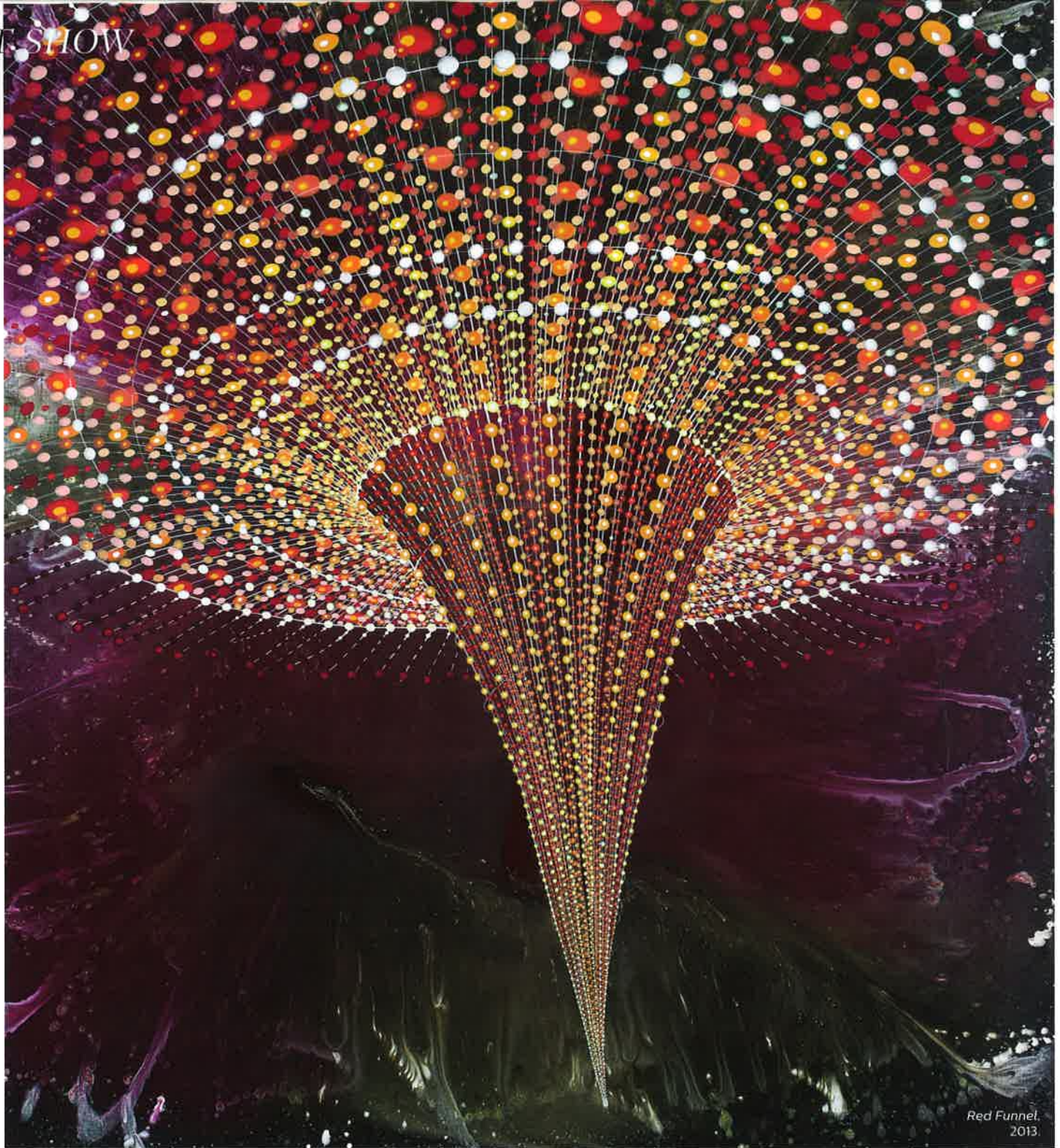
all, attend the University of Colorado, Boulder, in the 1970s, then a hotbed of spiritual and chemical experimentation. “I partook as much as possible,” Takenaga says with a broad smile.

In the early 1980s, after teaching in Wisconsin, St. Louis, and Denver, Takenaga headed to New York, where, as befell countless artists preceding and succeeding her, real estate realities necessitated a change in her art. Her work at the time incorporated large plywood installations, which were not only hard for the petite Takenaga to lug around but were simply too big for her 200-square-foot studio. “If you’re making 20-foot installations, you have the power of scale,” she says. “I had to find a way to make small powerful.”

The solution materialized in intimately sized panels of rippling, undulating dots. Diminutive does not mean easy: Takenaga’s process-oriented compositions are so labor-intensive as to look downright obsessive-compulsive. Who other than an artist afflicted with



Scan the image above to view more of the artist’s work

Red Funnel,
2013.

OCD could dab on dot after dot, each just so? For her part, Takenaga lightheartedly cops to checking her door lock repeatedly, but suggests it was her work that made her a little, well, eccentric.

Of late, Takenaga's approach has become less structured, more improvisational. The paintings are still painstakingly crafted. One work in progress appears to have been coated in black, then splattered à la Jackson Pollock with green, gray, and pink. But the effect is an illusion: In fact, she covered the entire surface in the colored paint first, then carefully brushed on the black to create the appearance of random splotches—a method she calls “faux Ab Ex.” “Even when freed up of dots,” she admits, “I still need a crazy process.” ■

Silver Wave,
2013.