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Local colors

New York Spaces hit the streets of NoLita with the Dufner Heighes design duo to hunt for the perfect hues



While browsing at Hable Construction, Greg Dufner (left) and Daniel Heighes are drawn to patterned pillows in varying shades of green.

WITH A MULTI-COLORED, faux fur scarf swathed around his neck, designer Daniel Heighes looks psyched. The goal: to pump a stark white apartment full of color. The mission: to scour the streets of New York for color-coordinating accessories in the neighborhood north of Little Italy (dubbed NoLita). It's ironic that Greg Dufner, Heighes' partner in the design firm that bears their names, wears a nondescript black coat. But that's Manhattan, where even those on a quest for color are bound by social contract to wear black.

As we set off down the street, though, we're talking green. "I have a theory," says Dufner, "that you can use any greens together if you pull them from nature." One hue, it seems, has a head start.

Our first stop is **Cath Kidston** at 201 Mulberry Street. The sole U.S. outpost of the U.K.-based store looks like the inside of a cheery cottage. We are surrounded by linens, china, lamps, dog beds, decorative bags and rolls of fabric, all in a predominantly sky-blue, bold red and antique green color palette, with a floral emphasis.

As we explore the store, Heighes gravitates toward a red-painted chair. Dufner says he's usually "against red," especially as an accent color. They're both enticed by a sky-blue, wire-it-yourself pendant light—it's a sleek, curved inverted funnel, a shape they both love.

"But do they have a green?"

asks Heighes with a glance at his partner. Yes, their first pick in our search does exist, but it has regrettably sold out.

We head east down Spring Street to **Nancy Koltas** at No. 31. The linen shop looks like the pillowed interior of a jewel box. Here, we'd be hard-pressed to find sheets under a 550 thread count, not that we'd want anything less. Dufner finds a tropics-inspired, blood-orange throw pillow—part of the Cannes collection—accented with gold and magenta hibiscus. "I'm always attracted to patterns from which we could draw other colors," he says. For one job, the duo designed an entire room around a fabric they loved, coordinating the walls, carpet and furniture to complement it. The client then nixed the fabric, but kept everything else.

They go with the Cannes pillow. Dufner homes in on a Capri throw striped with various vibrant shades of blue and red, accented with orange and cream. It's chosen as well, just for good measure.

We walk further east on Spring Street and turn south onto Elizabeth. Along the way, the conversation turns to the neighborhood's charm. "One thing about NoLita is that it's accessible," says Dufner, contrasting these friendly, cozy shops to large, intimidating, roped-off furniture showrooms elsewhere in the city. "And it's a good-sized neighborhood to wander around for a couple of hours," says Heighes. (True enough—it takes us about two hours to hit nine shops.)

Next is **Tricia's Place**, a color-filled salon/furniture boutique at



At Area ID, top, the duo agrees these Chinese lamps look best in red shades. Above, at Michael Anchin Glass Co., the pair chooses pale lavender to counter brighter hues like orange and green.

No. 171. The odd fact that this boutique also peddles haircuts is obscured by two large, blush-pink, Murano egg lamps sitting in the window. About two feet tall, they lure the designers with their enchanting rosy glow. Most of the objects are from the '60s and '70s, and many are from Sweden. We find bright orange egg cups, an oversized ceramic turquoise lamp, a canary yellow leather rocker and an assortment of retro glass vases. All are fabulous, but Dufner warns against going overboard.

"You have to be very careful not to buy all retro stuff," he says. "Otherwise the place will start to look like this shop." Following the theme of the Nancy Koltes throw pillow, they choose an orange, 1960s Swedish pendant lamp, but forgo the haircut.

We retrace our steps and pop into **Jen Bekman**, an art gallery at 6 Spring Street that hosts a decidedly risqué photography exhibit the owner describes as "more off-color than colorful." She also carries abstract paintings by Agnes Barley, one of the designers' favorite



A stop at Cath Kidston reveals a palette of products in bold red, sky blue and antique green. At Nancy Koltes, a tropical orange Cannes pillow and striped Capri throw catch the designers' attention.

artists. Heighes admires a Barley work comprising gracefully arcing lines against a white backdrop. "There are a lot of things going on with these really beautiful colors," he says. Dufner looks skeptical.

"If this is about color, then I think the photo by Tema Stauffer is really striking," he offers. Stauffer's long-exposure image of a gas station at sunset captures the setting's practically radioactive orange, yellow and green. "And they are not manipulated at all," he adds. The designers often build a color palette around a piece of art, and have done so with this photo before.

Back to Elizabeth Street and on to **Hable Construction** at No. 230. The textile shop carries wool felt pillows with colorful appliques of starfish, black-eyed susans, poppies and lily pads. "You really have to come in here every few weeks," says Heighes, "because it changes."

Dufner's attention is quickly sidetracked. "Look at my green story over there," he says, pointing to a group of about 15 pillows in various shades of his current favorite hue. "That's perfect, because the shades blend into yellow, which is a good way to go." He takes a pillow with a jagged, grass-green pattern called Zig Zag and places it on a small chair upholstered in a light teal polka-dot fabric. Score one for the theory of greens; the pillow display makes the grade.

We head up to **Area ID** at 262 Elizabeth Street, a store outfitted with a patchwork of muted animal hides on the floor and a bleached antler chandelier in the storefront. No, this is no upscale taxidermist, but a chic shop filled with cleverly selected furniture and accessories. A pair of intense blue turquoise Chinese dragon bookends seem a possibility, but the designers become enamored of a 1950s Murano glass chandelier with bulbs covered by teal glass shades that spin out from the





At Jen Bekman, Heighes picks two abstract paintings by Agnes Barley while Dufner leans toward colorful photography by Tema Stauffer.

center on thin wires. Then they spot a pair of light green and red porcelain lamp bases in the figures of a Chinese man and woman. “I’d put a red lamp shade on those,” says Dufner, playing against his red-averse rep. Strangely, Heighes has said precisely the same thing out of earshot, moments before. Psychically, it’s unanimous.

We cross the street to **Capitol Furnishings** at No. 259. “There are a lot of nice glass accessories in here,” says Dufner, after an aqua and misty-green translucent glass vase catches his eye. The store carries art deco pieces such as a pair of 1940s mirrored side tables and a Barovier glass ball lamp in chartreuse, blue and copper. But an olive Persian-lamb’s-wool-and-leather pillow is the winner—a textured

complement to the felt Hable Construction pillows.

On to **Michael Anchin Glass Co.** at 250 Elizabeth. A rainbow of hand-blown, long-necked glass vases lines the storefront, and inside is a wonderland of solid, swirled, mottled and dotted vases, bowls and lamps. The colors range from searing chartreuse to soulful purple.

“You see, you have a bright color, but then a muted shade,” says Dufner, using the window display to demonstrate the importance of color families. This combination of bright and neutral, he explains, creates depth. The pair’s pick at Anchin? A translucent vase in pale lavender—a muted balance to the brilliant oranges and greens.

Finally, we make our way to **Kar’ikter** at 19 Prince Street. The

shop is packed with colorful tchotchkes—Alessi kitchen tools and nesting bowls made of woven magazines. But the most fascinating object in the store is suctioned to the screen of a small television sitting on a counter. It’s called the Groovetube, and it’s a translucent plastic box with a grid of dividers that diffuse and scramble the picture into abstract pulsating blocks. “It’s really beautiful,” says Dufner, spellbound by the colors that randomly progress from vivid oranges to pale lavenders and—yes—mossy greens.

As he points out, it hides a clumsy TV screen. But it also serves as a visual echo of all of the colors we’ve met on our productive stroll. Thanks to the style and panache of NoLita, that white apartment will never be the same. □