

Legends

Stanley Felderman & Nancy Keatinge

By Guy Horton

With decades of superb design in the U.S. and Asia, from Fabergé to MTV and Legendary Pictures, Felderman and Keatinge are legendary

Years before flexible and open offices, customized furniture systems, sustainable design and recycling, and human-centered design became common practice in our profession, the husband-and-wife design team of Stanley Felderman and Nancy Keatinge were doing it. While Felderman's groundbreaking work goes back 45 years to his design of the Fabergé office in New York, Felderman and Keatinge together have been redefining boundaries and developing new precedents in design for more than three decades.

Throughout their careers, Felderman and Keatinge have been active and constant innovators, looking well beyond the bounds of their profession to seek the ideas and technologies that will shape the future. This way of working represents the duo's DNA, a special chemistry of creative pragmatism and invention that they have shared and refined since they first met and started working together in the early 1980s. This legacy—and the way they continue to advance it—is one of the primary reasons they have been awarded *Contract* magazine's 2016 Legend Award. They are the first partners in practice to win the award since its inception in 2002.

Their Los Angeles-based firm, Felderman Keatinge & Associates, known for its deeply empathetic and engaged approach to clients (a concept they call "total design"), has won numerous awards, including an Interiors Award from *Contract* in 2012 for the fluid and singular design for iCrete's corporate headquarters. The total design idea encompasses everything Felderman and Keatinge do, and it is *total* in the sense of creating integrated and engaging environments, from lighting and customized furniture systems to original art and a vocabulary of detailing that speaks to clients' identities. It's about touching everything and everyone with design.

"They have that human touch," says fellow Los Angeles-based designer Clive Wilkinson. "This, and the diversity of the work, is what makes them stand apart."

Joey Shimoda, who was *Contract* magazine's 2013 Designer of the Year and is also based in Los Angeles, concurs. "Their lifetime commitment to design is rare and should be acknowledged," Shimoda says. "I am inspired by the hands-on attention to detail that they exhibit

Felderman and Keatinge, pictured in a private dining room of the Los Angeles restaurant Drago Centro that they designed.





The catalyst for starting his own firm in New York, the 1970 Fabergé office project prompted Felderman (pictured in his interior, above) to pursue a futuristic design, which includes fiber optics and neon lighting, a multimedia stairway, and European furnishings (above right).



throughout the entire process of design. The number of repeat clients that they have is a testament to the quality of design that they deliver."

Their 15-person studio occupies a coveted sunny and open interior under an exposed bowstring truss in Culver City's emerging Arts District. Ever-evolving and always on the go, Felderman and Keatinge fittingly moved their practice here in 2014. Long in the business of envisioning futures, they are right at home in the heart of one of Southern California's creative hot spots, a place where the city itself is being reimaged.

Upon entering the studio, one of the first things that one notices is a pervasive atmosphere of calm and reverence, which makes it like stepping into a sacred interior. It might have something to do with the art—created by Felderman—that lines the walls. "I think of it as visual acoustics," he says. "These pieces are designed to affect the feeling of the space. A lot of spaces today are screaming at us constantly, and we need to find a balance. People realize that Google isn't for everyone.

"We want to create spaces that have a long lifespan," Felderman continues. "Not trendy and simply of the moment, but spaces that have roots in things that connect to us in a very visceral way."

Taking a chance with Fabergé

A New York native, Felderman attended Pratt Institute, in Brooklyn, in the late 1960s and received a bachelor of architecture degree. Not long after graduating, while holding a full-time job at a large firm, he received a call from an architect friend who had just landed the contract to design Fabergé's headquarters in New York. Felderman was invited to design the interiors. "I was basically put at a crossroads in my life," Felderman says. "I could either give up that security and what I thought was going to be a great future or take a risk and just do something temporary that was fun and offered a possibility for me to exhibit my creativity. So I took that risk."

He cites his design of both the Fabergé office (1970) and the company's corporate jet (1973) as the catalyst for starting his own firm in New York and for his future-facing approach to designing interiors. The Fabergé client gave him free rein to push the office into new territory, using fiber optics and neon for lighting, creating white light from colored cathode lighting, employing holographic images and perfume scents

for a virtual showroom, constructing a multimedia stairway, and selecting furniture from Europe to complete the immersive experience. "It was one of those moments in my life that was inspiring and ultimately became the foundation for everything that motivated me," Felderman says.

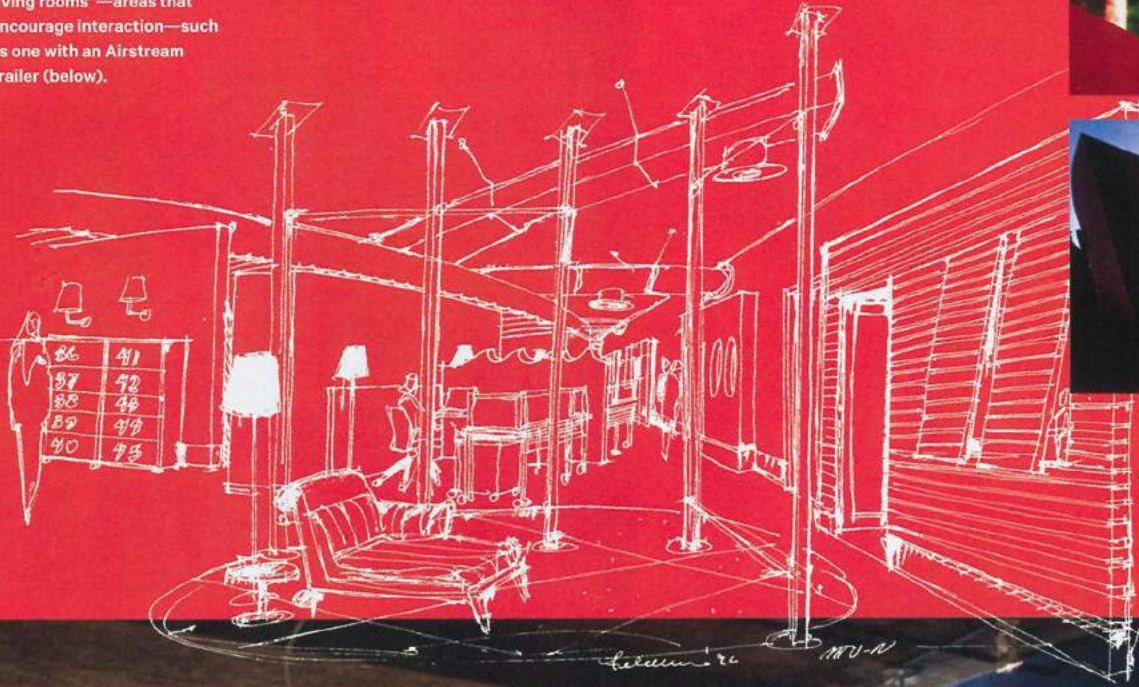
The jet also provided Felderman with the opportunity to innovate for a client who pushed for a futuristic look. Felderman sculpted the cabin with laminated honeycomb construction. He designed tables that disappeared into slots and used polarized windows that were later adopted by Air France for all of its planes. The jet won a slew of awards and caught the attention of Hugh Hefner. Felderman became friends with Hefner and designed some of the iconic Playboy Clubs in the 1970s, as well as Playboy's corporate offices in Los Angeles and New York. In Beverly Hills, Felderman designed a private Art-Deco-style supper club for Hefner, Touch Club (1981), and the original drawings from the Touch Club walls are part of the Whitney Museum of American Art's permanent collection.

In much of the 1970s and 1980s, Felderman split his time between New York and Los Angeles, completing several commissions for various entertainment companies, including Paramount, 20th Century Fox, United Artists, Avco Embassy Pictures, and Sony. In a story that sounds like it is out of a screenplay, one such project—an apartment for Columbia Pictures—led Felderman to Keatinge. In 1982, when the two met at a political fund-raiser, Keatinge mentioned that she had recently stayed in a "fantastic apartment" just off Central Park—the very one Felderman had designed for Columbia two years earlier. The couple had their first date at Touch Club, and that conversation was the beginning of a partnership that has literally taken them around the world before focusing on life in Los Angeles. "It's true. I moved to Los Angeles because I fell in love," Felderman says. "Well, that's not the whole story," Keatinge adds.

A Los Angeles native who holds a bachelor of science degree in urban studies from USC, Keatinge also studied acting at the American Conservatory Theater and had previously been an actress, worked on documentaries, and produced theater in New York and Los Angeles. She began working with Felderman in 1984, and they married in 1990.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ONÉAL COMPTON (TOP); TOSHI YOSHIMI (MIDDLE AND BELOW); RENDERING COURTESY FELDERMAN KEATINGE & ASSOCIATES; LOUIS REEBS (OPPOSITE)

In 1996, Felderman and Keatinge (top right) designed an office for MTV Networks in Santa Monica (middle right). The forward-thinking space established a precedent for creative offices and included "living rooms"—areas that encourage interaction—such as one with an Airstream trailer (below).



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“We decided to keep our firm at a size where we could enjoy designing and also raise a family. It wasn’t about how big we could be. It was about how much we get to enjoy what we do.”
—Stanley Felderman

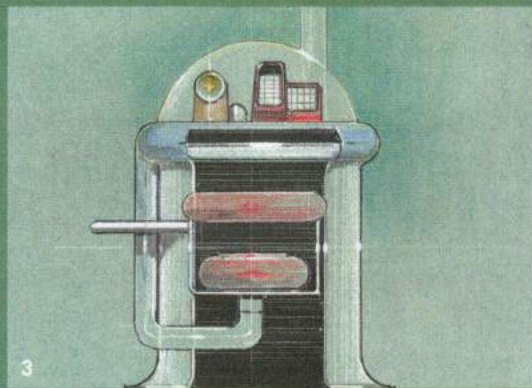


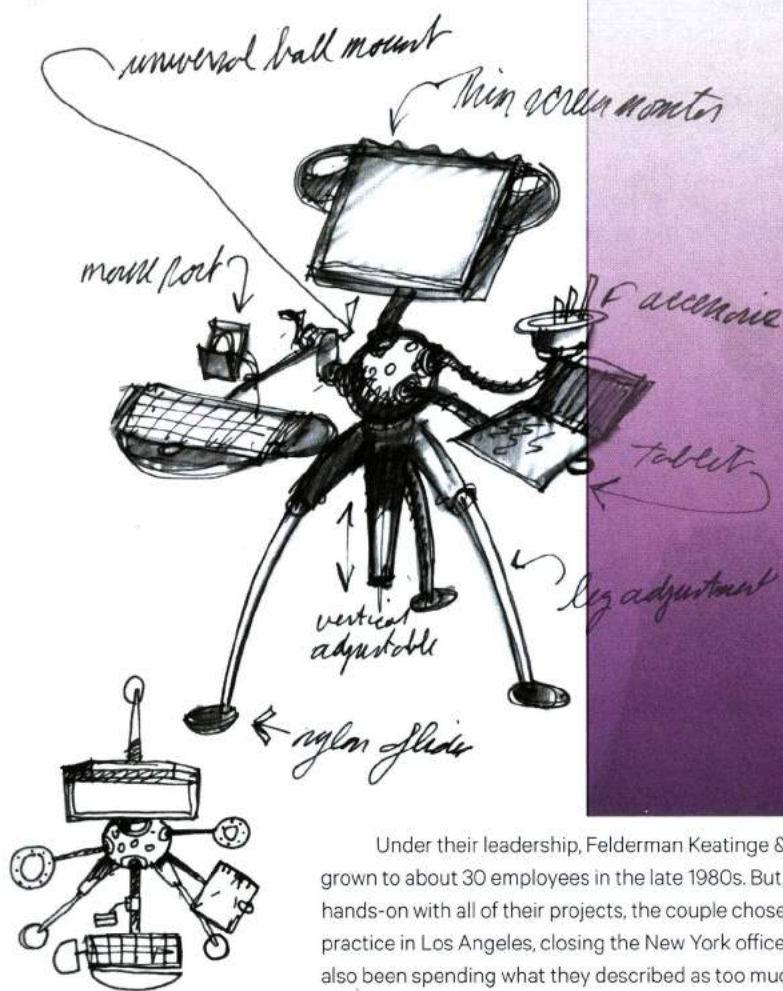
Felderman and Keatinge designed an office for Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman (1) in Century City, California, in 2005 that departed from the typical law firm look. For Interface America in 1999, the designers transformed a residence in Cartersville, Georgia, into offices (2) complete with guestrooms for visitors. The 1998 office for Universal Music Group (3) in Santa Monica, California, reflects that company's image transition from conservative to cutting edge. The couple (opposite, below) chose to focus on their Los Angeles practice and raising their twin daughters, Kate and Sara, in the home they designed together. The late architectural photographer Julius Shulman took the photo of Keatinge and her daughters (opposite, top) in their home.





The 2010 design of Drago Centro (1 and 2) in downtown Los Angeles was inspired by the Rialto Bridge plaza and marketplace in Venice, Italy. Felderman designed the mural in Drago Centro as well as in the law office for Kottler & Kottler (4) in Los Angeles in 2013. In the early 1970s, Felderman illustrated an idea for an ATM (3). In 1996, Felderman and Keatinge developed a concept for Steelcase called the "Office of the Future," which included "Spiderman" (drawings opposite), an adjustable device to hold a laptop and phone that is reminiscent of the sit-stand desks of today.





Under their leadership, Felderman Keatinge & Associates had grown to about 30 employees in the late 1980s. But, preferring to be hands-on with all of their projects, the couple chose to focus on their practice in Los Angeles, closing the New York office in 1993. They had also been spending what they described as too much time on airplanes, not just to New York but also long hauls to Asia, where they had a number of projects throughout the 1990s, like the convention center in Dalian, China (1992); the Samsung headquarters in Seoul, South Korea (1996); and the Shibuya train station in Tokyo (2001). "We decided to get off those airplanes and keep our firm at a size where we could enjoy designing and also raise a family," Felderman says. Their twin daughters, Kate and Sara, are now 15. "It wasn't about how big we could be," he says. "It was about how much we get to enjoy what we do."

The artist and the problem solver

The couple's simpatico approach shines through in work completed across a spectrum of clients and scales—from offices for entertainment companies, corporations, and tech firms to restaurants, residential projects, and product design. Their singular balance between imagination and pragmatism originates with each of their strengths and insights. Felderman is the artist. Keatinge is the problem solver, the one who makes sure the projects stay true to who the clients are. Together, they author projects that surprise and inspire, approaching each one as a work of art in progress to be ultimately completed by the users.

In a sense, they are design futurists. Eschewing trends, they have practiced ahead of the curve by listening closely to and their clients. This is most evident in a project that had a profound influence on the future of both their practice and workplace design as we know it: MTV Networks' office in Santa Monica, California (1996).

Their design for MTV established a new precedent for playful, forward-thinking, environmentally responsible office space, long before LEED existed or open offices became the norm. One of the most widely published office designs ever, MTV's office would set the tone for all of the Internet company workplaces that followed. "It was really an unusual project, and they let us do a lot of things that, at the time, were

not common," Keatinge says. "MTV gave us the program, and we said, 'OK, that's nice. Now we're going to go interview everybody.'"

Felderman and Keatinge prefer to develop a deep understanding of the culture and aspirations of the client, from the leadership to the facilities people and all of the different occupants in-between, enabling them to design interiors to be flexible and malleable to people's needs. That may be considered a norm today, but it was a radical departure from the cubicles and closed offices of 20 years ago. In an approach they call "fuzzy borders," the MTV interior was not only flexible enough to allow furniture to be rearranged but it was also about making it easier for people to get out of enclosed offices, move around, and enjoy what Felderman and Keatinge called "living rooms." These spaces were created with large movable walls that opened up conference rooms.

"At that time, we had been going to different innovation and technology conferences that weren't design related," Keatinge says. "We started asking, 'What would the office of the future be like? How would people be working? And how do people want to work?' We began to see how people were going to come out of their offices, and they were going to start interacting more."

At one of those events in the mid-1990s, at the invitation of Ray Anderson, the founder of the carpet company Interface, Felderman and Keatinge saw Mikhail Gorbachev speak about Green Cross International, the global environmental organization. His speech, and the couple's relationship with Interface, were pivotal moments that changed their perspective on design.

Learning from Green Cross International, they reutilized materials and furnishings from the existing MTV office. "We even went to flea markets to get used furniture that we later redid for MTV," Felderman says. "When we heard Gorbachev and Anderson, it was like a light bulb went on, [and we realized] that we are custodians of our environment and that we need to be concerned about how what we use today can be recycled and reused tomorrow." Twenty years and many projects later, this remains a major driving force behind their work.

Not long after the completion of MTV, Interface hired the couple as consultants to help envision a future for the company that was larger



The Burbank headquarters of Legendary Entertainment (1), completed in 2013, includes a painting by Felderman that depicts characters from the company's movies within Pittsburgh's skyline. Conceived as a think tank, the Los Angeles office for iCrete (4), completed in 2010, supports the development of green products related to concrete. Felderman produced drawings such as this one (2) in 2001 depicting a new Shibuya train station in Tokyo. And his 2002 rendering for Top Cloud (3) illustrates a futuristic environment proposed for South Korea.





The New York office of Core Media Group (above right), producers of *American Idol*, melds East and West Coast sensibilities, emphasizing light, views, and openness. For the 2013 project, Felderman Keatinge & Associates designed custom workstations and private office furniture, including a conference table that transforms into a ping-pong table.

than carpeting. Felderman and Keatinge traveled to all of Interface's operations and made recommendations that would transform the company. "Why don't you become the true "interface," we said," Keatinge recounts. "We came back with this concept we called 'coopetition,' about being part of something larger, where companies came together and shared in something positive." The idea was to work with other companies to make systems that could interact so that clients could choose the elements they needed. It made business sense but also advanced a larger goal of sustainability. As a result, Interface went on to collaborate with furniture companies such as Steelcase, Herman Miller, and Haworth.

In the 1990s, the pair designed a variety of products, including chinaware for Sasaki, glass and lighting for Venini, and furniture for ARC International. While in Europe at this time, Felderman and Keatinge learned about the emergence of Bluetooth technology, and this prompted the couple to start conceptualizing the "untethered" office, in which people would no longer be working at desks, and computers would start to behave like phones. Sound familiar? As a result of their work with Interface, they were hired by Steelcase to envision the office of the future. "It's kind of a joke now, because this was back in 1996, and they wanted us to envision the office of the future for 2002," Keatinge says.

The conceptual design that they developed for Steelcase had inflatable walls and movable ceilings for acoustics and privacy, adaptable furniture systems, voice-controlled environments, and a device that people would stand in front of, which they called "Spiderman," that would hold a laptop and phone. The idea is strikingly similar to the sit-stand desks we see today. "We were very much interested in this idea of working vertically and that computers were going to move from horizontal to vertical. So, for this, furniture had to be adjustable," Felderman says.

All of this innovation and experience has gone into recent projects, like the New York office of Core Media Group (2013), the company that produces *American Idol*, and Legendary Entertainment, for which Felderman and Keatinge have designed many different

facilities, including a headquarters in Burbank, California (2015), as well as custom furniture and fixtures. As a gift to Legendary's CEO, Felderman completed a 12-foot-by-6-foot painting that depicts characters from Legendary movies, including *Godzilla*, within the skyline of Pittsburgh, the CEO's hometown.

From fine dining to the entertainment industry

Felderman and Keatinge's range of work has also included restaurants, such as Drago Centro (2010) in Los Angeles, inspired by the Rialto Bridge plaza and marketplace in Venice, Italy. One of their long-time clients, Disney, entrusted them with the redesign of soundstages as well as The Land pavilion at Epcot in Florida. Currently, they are working on two Disney commissary interiors in Burbank.

"We recently finished offices for P. Diddy's Revolt TV, which is a new project for him. So we really had to brand it and figure out what that company was going to be." For this, Felderman developed about 20 large-scale artworks based on screen grabs. Today, the couple is also designing a restaurant in the newly renovated Petersen Automotive Museum in Los Angeles and beginning a project with a major film company to conceive an entire campus, including a new building, landscaping, and art. "It's the kind of project I've wanted for a while," Felderman says.

In all of their work, client relationships are key. "We have some great clients," says Keatinge. "We talk a lot about the journey that we go on with our clients and the transformation that happens for them both culturally and environmentally, as well as the transformation that happens with us along the way."

Looking back to the initial Fabergé commission, as well as his chance first encounter with Keatinge, Felderman acknowledges the power of opportunities. "If there is any [message for young designers], it is to take risks," Felderman says. "Opportunities only come once. There are many options, but you never know when that one moment is going to change your life." ■