

BACKSTORY

CAROLINA VON HUMBOLDT

By Shelley Wolson

AN ARTIST HELPS CREATE A NYDC DIFFA BOOTH TO REMEMBER



Clockwise from top left: Installing the NYDC booth by Coffinier Ku Design, coffinierku.com, for the DIFFA Dining by Design event; the finished booth ready to go with kimbuk slab tables from Tucker Robbins, chairs from McGuire, and custom benches made by Munrod Interiors with Kravet fabrics; table set with Kravet fabric napkins and floating orchids in Global Views bowls; an inside view showing how the painting work created a classical feeling in a nontraditional way, set off by an Arteriors chandelier, Profiles mirrors and Orrefors glassware.

Carolina von Humboldt is an exquisite trompe l'oeil painter, who turns bare walls into masterpieces. Von Humboldt has been painting since she was a little girl, and has turned that talent into an amazing career. She worked as a young textile designer for D. Porthault and Eliakim in Paris in the '90s, and it was there that she developed her interest in painted surfaces. She began her vocation creating intricate wall designs for houses on Mexico's Pacific coast, and in between studies in Paris and courses in Rome and Milan, her reputation grew.

Since moving to New York five years ago, she has become one of the most sought-after trompe l'oeil artists. She specializes in this technique as well as contemporary and traditional faux finishes. You'll find her work in homes across the country and all over the world, as well as in hotels such as the Four Seasons.

No project is too large or too small, and she has done everything from back-splashes and small walls to entire resorts. Whether the job is a specific client request or an original idea of her own, von Humboldt has worked with many successful architects and celebrity clientele to produce beautiful results. She finds her work constantly exciting: "always a new story, a new adventure, and a different place, light, and atmosphere."

So when it was time to find the right person to paint the NYDC booth for the 2011 Design Industries Foundation Fighting AIDS (DIFFA) Dining by Design event, Etienne Coffinier and Ed Ku of Coffinier Ku Design knew who to ask. "Jim Druckman did us the huge pleasure of asking Ed and I to design the NYDC booth for DIFFA," says Coffinier. "He showed us an inspirational picture of Christian Bérard's work for Guerlain, but it had to seat 20 guests. We worked on the concept of a garden pavilion, an 18th-century folie, that would

be temporarily built to host one very extraordinary dinner al fresco. I drew a very classical architecture design that had to be treated in some fresh and irreverent way. All the 18th-century style columns, moldings, and flutes were to be nothing but a suggestion thrown by a brushstroke. Fortunately, we knew the right person to call for help: Carolina von Humboldt."

Coffinier says he knew von Humboldt would understand the concept of a very "classicist but fresh, new, and lighthearted design. It had to be sketchy but precise, whimsical but on a very grounded basis. This is why we like working with Carolina, she gets it. She gets it before you even say it, she has the flair for the right answer, the right mood, and her execution technique is masterly. She always amazes me."

Von Humboldt was thrilled to be asked to help. "The site was by itself extraordinary, since the studio was located at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. To get there was already a whole experience," she recalls. "The construction of the booth had been perfectly accomplished and I started painting the decor with the colors I had previously prepared free style, which I believed was to be the theme of the whole project." She adds that one of the best things she enjoys about her work is that every project is different from the previous one, and this one was no exception. "The additional difference this time was that the whole booth had already been constructed and shipped to the DIFFA site. I generally paint *in situ*, but with this project there was an extra 'movement.'" The result was extraordinary.

You can check out the rest of her portfolio at her website, carolinavonhumboldt.com.