

# KINFOLK



## INTIMACY

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Photography: Cecilie Jørgen

Copenhagen’s queen of color makes the case for “weird” shades and dark rooms.

JAMES CLASPER

## Josephine Akvama Hoffmeyer

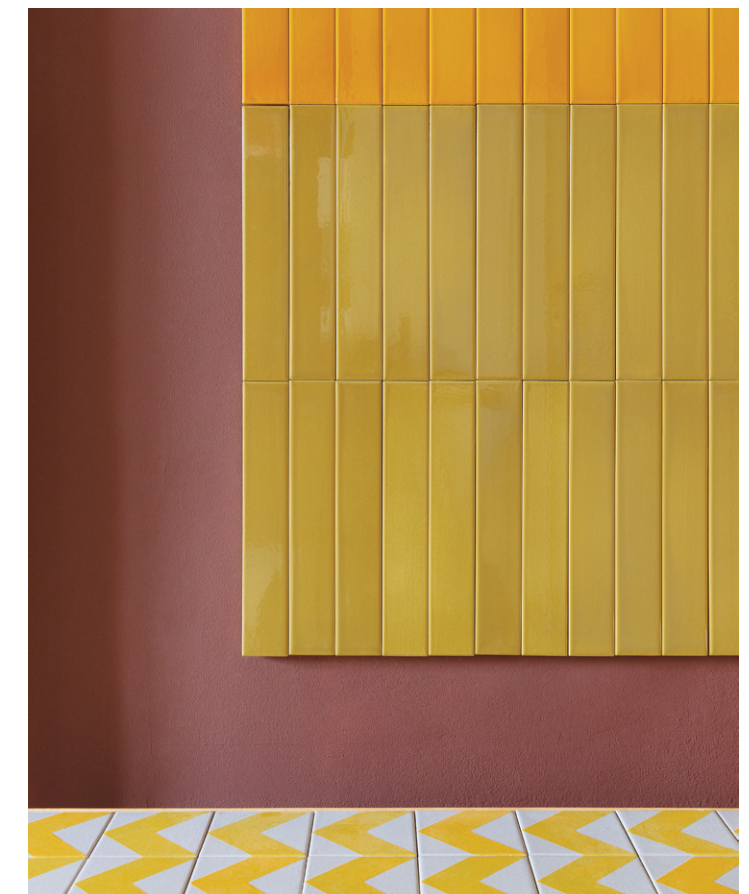
Josephine Akvama Hoffmeyer is an equal opportunity designer. “There’s no such thing as an ugly color, a bad color or a beautiful color. And I don’t have a favorite color,” says the creative director of File Under Pop, the Copenhagen-based design studio she founded in 2015. Its name is a nod to Hoffmeyer’s past: A former professional singer, she once performed backing vocals for Joe Cocker and Rick Astley. Equally fitting, the 64 colors in File Under Pop’s paint collection take their names from popular songs (Think: Raspberry Beret, Pale Blue Eyes and Purple Haze). Along with hand-painted wallpaper and tiles handcrafted from Sicilian lava stone, File Under Pop’s paints comprise the “bag of tools” that Hoffmeyer uses to transform spaces for top-drawer clients such as Hermès and Mikkeller.

**JC:** *Why are you drawn to working with colors?* **JAH:** Because of the emotional tensions and the harmony or disharmony that you can create with them.

**JC:** *Harmony’s an interesting choice of word.* **JAH:** Well, I love music and I used to sing and write music. Music is all about chords, notes, harmony and tension. They are all the ingredients you use to make music, and I use them in my work today.

**JC:** *In terms of combining colors?* **JAH:** Yes, but also combining tiles and colors. When you’re creating a space, you need to weigh how much tension to give one object compared to another. Right now we’re sitting in a room with three different shades of green, and I’ve used this weird little yellow—it’s called Sahara Sand—to spice it up. It’s like music, how you use different instruments. Like maybe you want horns to say this or a guitar to say that at an important moment in the song. When you talk about color, it’s important to discuss texture and the material you’re working on or around. The object, its shape, the material—it all works together with the color, and that’s how it gets to be super-sensual or extremely powerful, or whatever it is you want to express. Look at the wooden panel above the door. It’s got a matte finish that makes it look edible—like the glazing on a cake.

**JC:** *Do you have any rules when it comes to colors? Are there any that you would never use on, say, the ceiling?* **JAH:** No—it depends on the sum of everything. It depends on how the light gets in, whether the room is facing north or south, whether there’s a lot of furniture, and so on. It’s also a question of how you’re going to live in that space and what function you’re







looking for. For example, I love to sleep in a very dark, warm color in my summerhouse, because when I go there, I want to be quiet. I don't want to do too many things. I want to have my slow life.

**JC:** *How do you describe yourself?*  
**JAH:** I'm very curious and I'm also brave, because I don't mind going all the way to the edge of things. I trust that everything will fall into place. That's quite important for my work. I never graduated [from Parsons School of Design in New York City], so in a way, I'm an autodidact. I developed a strong sense of creative intuition, which gives me a lot of freedom not to be too dedicated to a certain code or scheme for how to do things.

**JC:** *Do you often challenge your clients to be braver too?* **JAH:** Some are afraid of colors because they've seen them up against white panels and white ceilings, which the colors stand out against. So you have to push and challenge them. They'll say, "We have a very dark bathroom, absolutely no daylight gets in, so we need to find a very light color for it." I think it's better—or at least I try—to say, "Why? You're not going to be in there long and you can always work with the lighting. And isn't it beautiful to go with the darkness?" Most of the time I succeed in getting people to think about what could be done differently to what they expected. Because what we expect is

often what we've seen or what other people tell us.

**JC:** *Tell me about your studio and where it's located.* **JAH:** We're in a beautiful, historic part of Copenhagen. The queen lives nearby, there are beautiful parks and museums, and the seafront is right here. Every day I go into our big meeting room, which has these huge windows, and looks out at the Marble Church, where it says, "Life, Truth and Jesus." I'm not really religious, but it's a good way of connecting with something bigger than myself, with some kind of universal force.

**JC:** *What else do you draw inspiration from?* **JAH:** Nature. I walk a lot, I go winter bathing and I have a summerhouse where I go to connect with nature and be completely still and silent. I'm also inspired by art exhibitions and by traveling.

**JC:** *Copenhagen is renowned for its astonishing light, which must also inspire you.* **JAH:** That's true. I love to work with matte finishes. In fact, our paint has 1% of shine, which maintains and holds the light from outside—daylight—in a beautiful and honest way. The most important thing in the world for me is honesty. Honesty is 80% of beauty, if you want to define what beauty is. If you have a very shiny surface, it will reflect light and not be as honest. Matte finishes stay as close to the reality of your true experience of the

light as possible. Most paint producers today try to make their colors as stable and as even as possible. They want their colors to look more or less the same from nine in the morning until five in the evening. I like the fact that colors are alive, that they can change and that they can work together with the light.

**JC:** *The stereotypical Scandinavian look is monochromatic—lots of whites, grays and blacks—yet there was much more vibrant use of color in Denmark around the midcentury. What happened to the Danish love for colors?* **JAH:** First of all, I think everything that once was still is. It may be that it's hidden or just not as obvious. But it never went away. Second, people in Denmark are much more vibrant and much more outgoing than I remember from my childhood. I do think there's a new awareness of how we connect with and interact with colors.

**JC:** *How much does the Scandinavian sensibility influence you?* **JAH:** It's relevant and important to me. I find the Scandinavian mood very simple and quite honest, in a broad sense. We're very down-to-earth people. So that simplicity and coolness is half of me, but I also have African roots, from my father—from Ghana. So I have some craziness, some wildness, and I try to make the two sides meet.

Last year, Hoffmeyer teamed up with Italian designer Elisa Ossino to rent an apartment in Milan which the duo uses as a livable showcase for their design studio, H+O.

# Features