



AT HOME WITH

Faith Popcorn

The futurist living above the store, with plenty of
Old World comforts.

Faith Popcorn

 [nytimes.com/interactive/2024/05/09/realestate/faith-popcorn-futurist-author-home.html](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/05/09/realestate/faith-popcorn-futurist-author-home.html)

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Faith Popcorn, thought leader, trend-spotter and flamboyant futurist, never saw townhouse ownership in her own future.

In the early 1990s, Ms. Popcorn (originally Plotkin) was living in a small studio apartment with a Murphy bed, a rental turned co-op. She felt wonderfully comfortable there — until a friend from California, who “had this gorgeous place in Beverly Hills,” came to visit. “She embarrassed me,” Ms. Popcorn recalled. “She said: ‘You are moving! This is ridiculous.’”

The implicit message: Ms. Popcorn needed at long last to act like an adult.

Ms. Popcorn is happy to have it known that her consulting firm, BrainReserve, which provides marketing advice to companies like PepsiCo, Home Depot, Pfizer, American Express and Comcast, celebrates its 50th anniversary this month. These days, she works from home: The Upper East Side townhouse she bought in 1995 serves as home and headquarters.

Faith Popcorn smiles at the camera while sitting behind a desk that has two screens, a lamp and several notebooks on it, along with a plaque in front that reads “The future is female.” In the foreground is a dark red couch covered with pillows in bold, colorful prints. There are framed artworks on the wall behind Ms. Popcorn, between two windows with shutters.

“We’ve had so many different kinds of people here, company presidents and chairmen, no names but heads of countries,” Ms. Popcorn said. “We brainstorm. We think together.” And because many of BrainReserve’s clients run Fortune 500 companies, and many of those top executives are men, the house is decorated in a sort of corporate baronial style.

A sitting room with a circular sofa surrounded by armchairs, all upholstered in taupe velvet. On one side of the room is a mantelpiece, and on the walls are three classical paintings.



“I chose the furniture with the goal in mind of making men comfortable,” Ms. Popcorn said of the **custom-made sofas and chairs**, many tufted and all upholstered in velvet. “It’s not about big and small but about neutral colors.”

There is blue-gray velvet in the ground-floor entryway and taupe velvet in the second-floor living room, a space that can seat 18.



Ms. Popcorn owns more than 35 pieces of **Palissy majolica**, between the townhouse and her home in Wainscott, N.Y. She became interested in the ceramic style after reading about it in Proust’s “Remembrance of Things Past.” “I love animals of all shapes and kinds,” she said, “and Palissy’s vases and plates with snakes, fish, lizards and snails lying pondside celebrate abundant animal life.”

The Pullman kitchen between the living room and the dining room, one of three kitchens in the house, is hidden by a wine-colored velvet curtain.

A landing with wine-colored carpet, a silver bar cart on one side and floor-to-ceiling wine-colored curtains on the other side. In the foreground, stairs go up to the next floor, and on the far end of the landing is a dining room.



But the **silver bar cart**, about the size of a vintage Volkswagen, is out by the staircase, fully stocked and always open for business.

As soon as she found this narrow five-story stucco building in Lenox Hill, Ms. Popcorn was a goner. “It was like a canal house,” she said. “Beautiful.”

The real estate agent said it was in foreclosure. Ms. Popcorn said she didn’t have any money. But her company was doing well, and she ran the numbers: If she gave up her office space on Madison Avenue and moved operations to the house, she could swing it.

A wooden staircase with a dark blue carpet runner and a brass and silver railing, shot from the fourth floor looking down.

“I didn’t realize at the time that the house needed *everything*,” Ms. Popcorn said. “I made so many rookie errors. It was the longest closing in Citibank history. I didn’t have the guts. I thought, Oh, I’ll just lose the 10 percent deposit.”

An L-shaped kitchen with dark cabinets, dark countertops and dark wicker stools.

But, Ms. Popcorn continued, “I squeaked through somehow, and then I was so happy because a couple of years later, I adopted my first daughter.” Later, she adopted another daughter. Their childhood portraits, painted by Joe Duffy, an artist and designer, are on display in the dining room on the second floor.

In the foreground is a black wood dining table with brown chairs. Leaning against the white walls in the background are two colorful paintings of Ms. Popcorn's daughters. More art sits on the mantelpiece, along with a horse sculpture and potted flowers.

Ms. Popcorn bought the **Warhol prints** from the writer Fran Lebowitz. "She must have needed the money," Ms. Popcorn said. "I know they were for sale, and at the time I didn't have any money. I really did not have money, and I think Fran wanted \$1,000 a piece for them. But a friend told me, 'Buy them.' Everything seems cheap in retrospect."

Two Andy Warhol paintings featuring grapes and bold colors hang on a black wall that has black banquette seating behind a wood dining table. On the left are doors to a terrace that has another, smaller dining table with chairs.

Ms. Popcorn is fond of saying she lives above the store. In fact, her bedroom and study are above the living room and dining room, the site of business meetings and business meals.

A room that has a four-poster bed with beige linens, a stone mantelpiece with a TV mounted above it, and doors to a terrace that looks onto the street.



There's more **Palissy majolica** above the fireplace.

When Ms. Popcorn was worried about taking on the expense of the house, her sister told her that their grandmother, who had owned several buildings in Lower Manhattan, would have wanted her to have it. That fortified her to complete the transaction and to undertake a comprehensive renovation.

Standing on the terrace, she said, “At some point I realized that my bedroom here was at exactly the tree line of where it was when I stayed at my grandmother’s apartment.”

Doors to a terrace that looks onto a quiet street of rowhouses.

In the '80s, Ms. Popcorn accurately foretold the trends of “cocooning,” the desire to isolate from a scary world, and “icon toppling,” the rejection of pillars of society like government and religion. Another term she coined, “cashing out,” from the early 1990s, recognized the eagerness to find work/life balance — and to leave the corporate world altogether. And Ms. Popcorn came up with “AtmosFear” long before climate change and Covid-19 became front-page news.

Visitors to the home seem to expect something straight out of tomorrowland. “Everybody who comes here is like, ‘Oh!’” Ms. Popcorn noted. “Maybe they’re surprised it’s retro. But I didn’t want clients to be in something that felt like a spaceship. I felt I should put them in an unchallenging, comfortable place not defined by time.”

A study with a desk, a red velvet couch, a red velvet armchair, a stone mantelpiece with many ceramic dogs on it, several large wooden bookcases and a coffee table stacked with books.

It’s clear from the look of her study on the third floor that Ms. Popcorn, too, prizes comfort. **Throw pillows crowd the sofa.** More velvet — here, it’s claret-colored. Several pieces of majolica are on the mantelpiece ...



... along with **ceramic Japanese Chins**, a tribute to the seven members of the breed Ms. Popcorn has had over the years.



Behind her desk are **photos of Judy Garland**. “When I was young, people told me I looked like her,” she said.

Guests tend to fall into one of two categories: friends running away from their own homes (there’s a very nice guest room with a compact kitchen on the top floor) or clients buffeted by ill winds and tough choices.

“We’re helping them reposition their companies,” Ms. Popcorn said. “No matter what decade you’re in, the future is painful because the future means change. It means rethinking things. Sometimes it means they have to buy new technology. It means figuring out if they have enough of this or that thing.”

Ms. Popcorn likens her house to a refined version of the Factory, Andy Warhol's New York City studio. "I love the fact that he worked there, he entertained there, he was crazy there," she said. "My feeling is that if you love your work and you love your life, there is no need to separate them. It's one big, beautiful thing."

Ms. Popcorn, with short red hair and magenta lipstick and wearing a dark floral pajama set, stands smiling on the terrace with her hand on the railing, looking down the street.

