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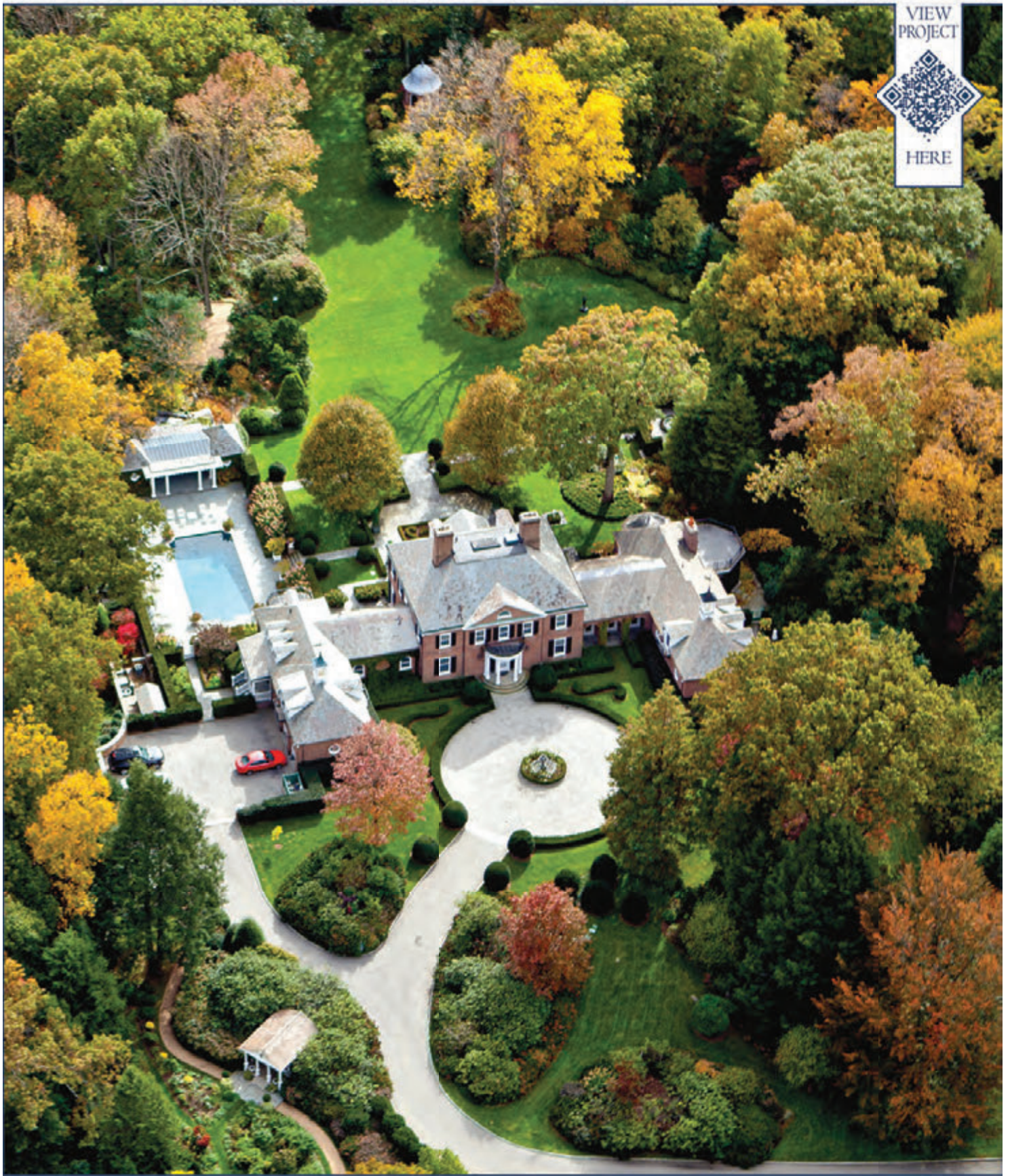
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FOUNDER'S LETTER



Dear Esteemed Readers and Valued Partners,

As we mark the 20th anniversary of Design + Decor Publications, it is with a profound sense of gratitude and reflective joy that we celebrate this milestone. Our journey over these two decades has often felt reminiscent of the classic fable of The Tortoise and the Hare—an allegory that mirrors our own evolution and enduring ethos in the world of luxury design and architecture.

In the early days, we approached our craft with a demur and deliberate pace, much

like the tortoise. We were guided by a steadfast commitment to meticulous detail and timeless elegance, choosing a path that embraced thoughtful curation over the whirlwind of fleeting trends. Our growth has been defined not by rapid gains, but by a steady and thoughtful progression, echoing the tortoise's enduring journey toward excellence.

As the years have unfolded, our commitment to showcasing the finest in design and architecture has remained unwavering. Like the tortoise, we have embraced a philosophy of quiet perseverance, believing that true luxury lies in the pursuit of perfection and the celebration of enduring beauty.

The support of our discerning readers, visionary architects, and innovative designers has been instrumental in this journey. Your enthusiasm and dedication have been the driving forces behind our success, allowing us to create a platform where exceptional design and architecture are celebrated with the reverence they deserve.

As we look to the future, we continue to be inspired by the values of the tortoise—steadfastness, integrity, and an unwavering commitment to excellence. We are excited to embark on the next chapter of our story, confident that our shared appreciation for the finer things will guide us forward with grace and distinction.

Thank you for being an integral part of our journey. Here's to celebrating the past and looking forward to many more years of shared passion and inspiration.

With heartfelt appreciation,

Shelley McCormick + Matthew J. Kolk

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GORGEOUS GOTHIC

A historic house is restored to its elegant roots.

CONVERSATION WITH **PATTI WATSON** ♦ WRITTEN BY **MERYL SIEGMAN** ♦ IMAGES BY **KYLE J. CALDWELL**



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Journeys into Design

WRITTEN BY **DANIELLE PORTER**

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1. AKDO Escape to the colorful elements of nature, with Botanicus by Allison Eden. Embodying Eden's signature, works of art with colored glass, Botanicus draws murals from the sea to the tropics, as featured in three patterns – Bloom, Leaf and Reef. 2. London Basin Company The Marnie countertop sink takes its inspiration from India, as a melting pot of vibrant pinks, blues and greens come to life against a backdrop of sky blue. 3. London Basin Company Feel yourself transported to the French countryside via the hand-crafted white Angelica countertop sink. Fine porcelain plays out through a delicate petal groove pattern topped with a golden rim and high gloss finish. 4. The Hudson Company Live Sawn White Oak is sourced from managed forests throughout Pennsylvania and the Hudson Valley. 5. London Basin Company The Sadie sink features a diagonal pattern of shallow triangular carvings against a sandy coloured background, it is inspired by the markets of Asia, and the cornucopia of decorative treasures that can be found there. 6. The Hudson Company Live Sawn European Oak is sourced from Northern Europe where the region's cool climate, rich soil, and meticulous forestry cultivate light brown tones with subtle, fine grain. 7. AKDO The gorgeous floral design of Botanicus Bloom Angelite brings a touch of femininity and grace to any space. Designed in collaboration with renowned mosaic artist, Allison Eden, Eden drew inspiration from the happiness found in nature when creating these glossy art glass mosaics.



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CHARTING THE COURSE

What's Next for the Luxury Real Estate Market?

WRITTEN BY ELENA SEROCKI

In the ever-evolving world of real estate, staying ahead of market trends is crucial for both buyers and sellers. To gain insight into the current landscape and what's driving today's high-end property market, we turned to Matthew Tallett of Brown Harris Stevens Real Estate in Greenwich, CT, a leading expert in luxury real estate. With extensive experience and a deep knowledge of trends, Matthew shares his valuable perspectives on the shifting dynamics of the real estate market, including inventory, new construction, buyer preferences and the impact of economic factors on luxury property values. Matthew offers a unique viewpoint on how these changes are shaping opportunities and challenges in the high-end sector. Whether you're an industry professional, a prospective buyer or simply curious about the state of luxury real estate, this conversation provides valuable insights and actionable advice.

D+D: What made you get into real estate? Why are you passionate about it?

Matthew: I've been following real estate since I was a young boy. Before internet exchange sites existed, I would read the classified ads in the newspaper and circle the homes that sounded the most fascinating, based on their description or size. You really had to use your imagination back then. I've always had a passion for homes. My grandfather was a builder, and I suppose it's always been in my DNA. I would pore over his architecture books and bookmark the homes based on their design, architectural details, flow,





size, style and overall creativity. I am passionate about quality, from the design to the physical build itself. I tend to gravitate towards homes that are thoughtfully laid out and have designs that can stand the test of time. I truly find beauty and possibility in many different design choices—from traditional classic homes to sleek modern homes. There is something for everyone.

D+D: What is your forecast for the remainder of 2024 through spring 2025?

Matthew: Unfortunately, I expect to see more of the same through the end of 2024, meaning tight inventory at elevated price points. These price points appear to be firmly established, and are likely to become the new norm. As we're in an election year, I anticipate that interest rates might drop, which could encourage more sellers to list their properties. However, given the backlog of buyers, I expect home sales to continue



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at asking price or above for homes priced under \$5 million. Moving into 2025, if interest rates remain in the 5% range, we can expect a hot spring market. Still, I don't foresee a significant increase in inventory compared to 2024. There just aren't enough homes in the area, and we aren't making any more land!

D+D: What is needed for the housing market to recover?

Matthew: We need a combination of lower interest rates, a stable economy and reduced volatility on Wall Street. While some locales will always remain strong, others undergoing gentrification or redevelopment require buyers to feel secure in their largest financial commitment. Right now, too many people bought while interest rates were at historical lows, so there really isn't an incentive to sell those properties. Some people are opting to rent out those homes and use the equity to purchase other homes. In addition,

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it would be helpful if there were less state and local legislation to build, along with stringent banking regulations.

D+D: Is there currently a shortage of housing inventory?

Matthew: Absolutely! Right now in the Greenwich, CT, market, there are only two months of inventory below \$5 million and six months above \$5 million; the ultra-luxury market is almost at a year of inventory, which is not a surprise. The immediate surrounding areas are very similar, with limited inventory.

D+D: What is the data on new construction homes?

Matthew: Fewer homes are being built, due to excess local regulations and higher costs. Spec homes are few and far between. A few that I have seen—not all, of course—often aren't built with the quality they should be. I understand from a builder/developer's perspective, as they have profit margins to reach, while some savvy consumers are looking at a million-dollar home with cheap cabinets and finishes, and aren't willing to spend that money.

D+D: What are affluent buyers looking for in their search for the right home?

Matthew: Depending on the demographic, it can be summed up in one simple word: turnkey. They want homes that are ready to move into and in excellent locations. This is why working with a local real estate professional is crucial. We can guide you through the different villages, neighborhoods and even streets to deliver exactly what you are looking for.

D+D: Is a crash of the housing market on the horizon between now and the spring of 2025?

Matthew: I don't believe so. There are still too many pent-up buyers and such a lack of inventory, coupled with a large population of people who purchased when money was cheap to borrow. Areas where you might see some sort of downturn are faraway markets that had too great of a spike in appreciation, whereas Greenwich and the surrounding areas have had a relatively steady and gradual incline in value.

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D+D: What effect do higher mortgage rates having on buyers and sellers?

Matthew: I think they adjust buyers' budgets and perspectives on what they can afford. In the more affluent communities, a large portion of the homes are still being purchased with cash. The middle- and upper-middle-class demographics might be offering with a mortgage, but the majority of people I've been working with are putting up healthier down payments and still bidding aggressively on homes. The unfortunate reality is that I have to advise buyers to bid up in many instances. The only space where I'm able to provide value is if a home is still available after three weeks; it usually means the home is overpriced or needs quite a bit of work that people aren't willing to take on. ♦

Resource: Brown Harris Stevens Real Estate,
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WRITTEN BY SHEHLA LUCANERA



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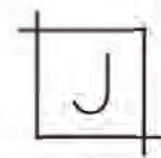
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In a world where design and technology often collide, Vanish Home Theater offers the perfect synthesis of beauty and innovation. More than just a product, it's a revolution in home entertainment—one that is transforming how we live, design and experience our homes.



Resource: Vanish Home Theater, Mark Motyl, Founder & Principal; Westport, CT ; 860.777.1146; New York, NY; 866.848.0505; vanishhometheater.com



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GORGEOUS GOTHIC

A historic house is restored to its elegant roots.

CONVERSATION WITH **PATTI WATSON** ♦ WRITTEN BY **MERYL SIEGMAN** ♦ IMAGES BY **KYLE J. CALDWELL**



The family room is thoughtfully finished with a Dunes & Duchess accent table, a Thibaut ottoman, Hickory Chair furnishings, and an antique rug. A Currey and Co. light fixture adds another layer of timeless sophistication.



Nestled between Narragansett and Newport, RI, lies the easygoing seaside community of Jamestown. Situated on Conanicut Island, this hamlet with plenty of small-town charm offers privacy yet access to the Northeast's major cities, making it one of the most desirable locations to live in the state. One neighborhood in particular, along East Shore Road, stands out for its fabulous views of the busy east passage between Rhode Island and Connecticut, where an ever-changing scene of large boats and colorful regattas provides constant entertainment.

It is here that a couple with teenage children purchased a historic Gothic Revival home. They took the unusual step of moving in prior to renovation to give themselves time to decide what changes to make and what features to add. When they completed their wish list and were ready to start work, they hired a local acquaintance whose interior design office was located in Jamestown. They couldn't have made a better choice.

Specializing in Historic Renovations

Taste Design Inc. is a full-service design firm founded and led by Patti Watson. The award-winning multidisciplinary company provides a comprehensive range of interior design services to its clients, but specializes in historic home renovation projects. With headquarters now in Middletown, RI, the 20-year-old company has been so successful that it recently opened a satellite office in Westport, CT, to better serve clients in Fairfield County, Scarsdale, New York City and Philadelphia. It is Patti and her team's experience in historical renovation, along with their keen eye for recreating the elements of historic architecture down to the last detail, that made Taste Design the perfect design firm for this renovation project.

Gothic Revival Recreated

Built in the 1870s, the four-bedroom, four-bathroom 4,400-square-foot cottage is sited on a one-acre lot with a private dock, three moorings and spectacular views of Narragansett Bay. It was built in classic Gothic Revival style that was inspired by medieval design, featuring pointed arches, a wraparound porch, a steeply pitched roof and decorative trim. "The lovely details that were so present on the outside of the house had been stripped away from the inside over the years," Patti explains. "The clients loved that it was a historical structure, and





In the dining area, the dining table and chairs are by Hickory Chair. The chairs are upholstered in Anna French for Thibaut and Zoffany fabrics.

The dining room light fixture was sourced from Visual Comfort. The cathedral ceiling made from mahogany beadboard brings warmth and coziness to the expansive space.

wanted it to live up to the original Gothic Revival home that it was. Our mission was to restore those details in key focal point areas.”

As a designer well-versed in original interior detailing, Patti was very familiar with the elements of a typical Gothic Revival interior, including lavish wallpaper, deep shades of blue and rich brown, original fireplaces, leaded and stained glass, bold and opulent fabrics, fringed and accessorized window treatments, richly patterned rugs, and dark woods such as mahogany for the floors, trim and wainscoting.

An Unparalleled Restoration

Taste Design was originally hired to renovate the entire first floor, which included the foyer, kitchen, dining area, living room, family room, parlor, powder room and home office. The owners were so pleased as the work progressed that they added the stairwell and second-floor hallway, master suite and bath to the project. “Our work imbued the home with rich, original details that had been removed,” says Patti. “We took our cues from existing original elements as well as from the charming ornamental exterior, and brought the same intricate level of detail to all areas of the home, matching inside to out once again.”

Detailed custom millwork, leaded glass transoms and stained-glass windows abound in this sun-filled historic cottage. A new hardwood floor was installed throughout the entire first floor, with several rooms featuring a border detail that would have been used during the original construction in the late 19th century. “We even went the extra mile and installed authentic, cast-iron floor registers on first floor,” Patti adds.



“The foyer is a special place,” she continues, “because from there you can look directly into the kitchen and breakfast area and beyond to the lovely water view.” Design features include grasscloth in a gold metallic paint and dark wood wainscoting, a historical detail that recurs throughout the house.

Chef’s Kitchen

While restoring and preserving the home’s heritage was the top priority, the clients, who were avid cooks, wanted a highly functional, state-of-the-art kitchen where the family could gather. “That was the one room that we changed dramatically,” Patti says. “We took the kitchen right down to the studs so we could redo the wiring to support the new layout. We created a coffered ceiling with a vaulted area above the dining space, installed custom cabinetry and quartzite countertops, added antique brackets to the upper cabinets, and replaced a door that wasn’t being used with a lovely oval window to let in light while providing storage space underneath.” In accordance with the owners’ wishes, the window offers a stunning view of the family’s well-tended flower and vegetable garden, used to supply the home with fresh bouquets and homegrown food.

The family chose to do without a formal dining room, replacing it with a welcoming dining area in the kitchen, surrounded by bay windows that face the water. But clearly the kitchen island is the focal point of the space. Patti explains the challenge its design presented, saying, “The clients wanted a roomy island in kitchen for the family to share meals around. But when you design a large island, it runs the risk

The home office features cabinets in navy blue, and a desktop and countertop done in mahogany to complement the floors. The decor also includes an antique rug, an antique console and silk drapes.



of looking modern, and we didn't want to take away from the historical interior." She ingeniously solved the dilemma by incorporating meticulous details intended to echo the look of the Gothic trim on the exterior of the house. "It adds interest and ensures the island doesn't seem oversized for the space," Patti adds. She also created a double-wide door to the kitchen to provide an attractive view as you look through the space to the bay beyond.

Grown-up Parlor

The adjacent parlor, once an eat-in dining room, picks up on the original nature of the home with its Gothic-inspired details. The clients had already purchased an antique fireplace with an oak mantel, which the design team repurposed and installed in the parlor. Mahogany wainscoting abounds, as well as leaded glass windows over each opening into the room. A custom humidor was built into the left side of the fireplace, and the ceiling was opened to create a cathedral ceiling with mahogany beadboard. The result was a grown-up room with a warm family feel.

Cozy Family Room

The family room also houses a fireplace, whose surrounding mantel was specifically designed to resemble one of the past. To reinforce the Gothic interior look, Patti and her team once again took cues from the home's exterior details. "The client was very fond of leaded and stained-glass windows," she says. "We worked







Coffered ceilings, wainscoting, custom newel posts and a reproduction balustrade finished the home with the historical detail that was likely to have adorned the house when it was first constructed.

with a local artist to create windows that flank the fireplace, made from a beautiful combination of leaded and stained glass.”

Historical Details Upstairs

“We designed the custom newel posts on the stairway the same way we did the legs on the kitchen island,” Patti continues. “They’re really special because they reflect the exterior trim of the house, which makes it the gorgeous Gothic Revival home that it is.” On the second floor is a bright and spacious primary bedroom suite, featuring custom built-ins, a fireplace and a private balcony overlooking the bay. “We added wainscoting to the stair hall, and leaded glass and lots of trim to restore the look the house once had before it was stripped away,” Patti explains. She chose authentic-looking wallpaper and sub-newel posts that bring some of the same Gothic Revival details found on the first floor to the second level.

“In the clients’ primary space, we were able to design a custom make-up area for her in hallway just outside her bedroom,” Patti continues. “We created it out of the wide hallway leading to bedroom, just outside the closet.”

A Job Well Done

With a charming wraparound porch and design details added to the interior to match the glory of the exterior, this is very much a family home. “It really lives up to the demands of a young, busy family with all the modern conveniences, while still giving them a historically inspired house,” Patti says. “Our positive collaboration with this client continues as we prepare to take on a second renovation with them, this one on Providence’s East Side. These return clients are collectors of historic houses, stewarding them into the modern area while honoring the significance of their history.” ♦

Resource: Taste Design Inc.: Patti Watson, Middletown, RI, Westport, CT, 401.423.3639; tastedesign-inc.com **Contrator:** Behan Bros., Inc., Middletown, RI, 401.846.1516 ; behanbros.com



CHARLES HILTON

DESIGNING SUCCESS

Journeys into Design

WRITTEN BY DANIELLE PORTER



D +D: How did you become interested in architecture?

Charles: Looking back, I suppose it was always in my blood. As a young child, I loved playing with building blocks, Erector sets, Lincoln Logs, and LEGOs. I would even cut up my mom's cardboard boxes to make little houses and build tree forts in the backyard.

In middle and high school, I got into shop and specialty classes—woodworking, metal shop, drawing and even oil and watercolor painting. At the same time, I found I was good at math and was very intrigued by all my science classes. I seriously considered going into pre-med, but with all the varying interests I had, I realized I had this creative piece of me to fulfill.

I had been working at local architecture firms for most of high school and really liked the work, so I looked into architecture schools. I figured, let's give this a go and see if it is really for me. I applied and was accepted to Penn State. After one year, I knew it was a great fit! I benefited greatly by complementing my college academic studies with real-world work experience.





D+D: What type of work have you primarily done?

Charles: Throughout high school and college, I worked with firms that did a wide variety of building types, including commercial, institutional and residential. Through those experiences, I learned what I liked and didn't like about each type of project. Commercial projects often felt too much like a business transaction to me, with their primary focus on budgets and schedules, rather than on great design. Institutional projects could be great from a design perspective—however, with the large committees and boards responsible for these projects, the design tended to get compromised to something no one could object to, and everyone could agree on.

With residential design, on the other hand, I loved working closely with one or two people who would be inhabiting the space—it's very personal and meaningful to them. Throughout most of the country, residential design has its challenges, too. It's not all big budgets and groundbreaking architecture. My early experiences guided me to seek out a community where there was a long tradition of fine residential design, with clients who understood its value and were willing to invest in it. I found that in Greenwich and the surrounding Fairfield and Westchester County areas. Ever since, we've specialized in high-end residential design here and increasingly around the country. I very much enjoy the diversity of different architectural expressions we are able to develop when we work in diverse places—it keeps our work fresh and interesting!

D+D: What influences and inspires you when you're designing projects?

Charles: I have an appreciation for historical architectural aesthetics and sensibilities—no one style in particular. My work is certainly inspired and led by traditional architecture, however, but executed in a modern way to live well for the future. For example, our floor plans have the classic rooms complemented by more modern-type spaces in a more open arrangement. Houses today are infused with a lot of indoor-outdoor living spaces and integrated with many modern building technologies for energy

efficiency and comfort.

Materially, a connection to nature through well-crafted products is important to our work—whether it's brick, slate or wood on the exterior or millwork, or tile, stone and metalwork on the interior. In the end, the ability to design and craft these materials and curate them into a high-quality, inspired space is the hallmark of our architecture.

We also get a great deal of inspiration from our clients and their passions. This is key because we're designing the spaces where they'll live. We always try to bring something unique and special related to the client into each home—gardens on all sides for an avid gardener, a fabulous entertaining kitchen suite for the social type, and even an intimate wine cellar for a wine enthusiast/collector.

D+D: Where do you see Charles Hilton Architects going in the future?

Charles: I've never been one to predict the future, but we certainly enjoy the work we do. We particularly love designing homes on waterfront settings—it's inspiring and invigorating as a designer to have this whole other aspect to the design. It would be great to pursue more of that work—from Long Island Sound to lakes and rivers.

We also find that the most successful projects integrate landscape, architecture and interior design simultaneously, so we will strive to do work where we can craft an environment and experience on a property that feels holistic and connected. Moreover, our projects are most successful when we have the right team. We're fortunate to have a solid team here at CHA and a great group of consultants who match that. We always try to pull together the right talent for each project.

It's a little like directing a movie: If you get the right actors for each role and then orchestrate the experience in a meaningful way, when you are done, you have yourself a hit! ♦

Resource: Charles Hilton Architects: Charles Hilton, Founder, Greenwich, CT, 203.489.3800; hiltonarchitects.com

JAN HILTZ ♦ CHRISTINE HILTZ





D +D: Please tell us about the path that led you to interior design.

Jan: My dad was an architect and vice president of an architectural firm in Connecticut. His approach seemed almost geometric or numeric, lacking creativity, and I grew up trying not to be of that mindset. When I was preparing for college, interior design was something I aspired to, but my dad didn't feel I could make a living pursuing it. Instead I went to a local university and received a business degree, which has served me well.

After college, I worked for the Xerox Corporation, when the "office of the future," with electronic memory typewriters, was just beginning. I trained administrative staff across the country, and with that came a bit of space planning—a foundational skill in interior design. You never know what learning experiences will be important later in your career. Once I had my first child, I left the workforce.

When I returned to work, I joined one of the first elderly continuing-care facilities in Connecticut. The vice president was overseeing a five-year renovation plan for the facility, but as she took over a larger role in the company, that job became too much for one person. I offered to take it on in exchange for a raise and tuition reimbursement for interior design training, and so began the path of fulfilling my dream in interior design. I worked there until I had my third child, and took off a few months before beginning part-time work with a major high-end furniture retailer.

The retailer invested in the design team's marketing and sales techniques—another foundational skill I readily embraced. I recognized early on that furniture isn't what gives a space that sense of life—it's the final layer of accessories, art and carpeting that creates it. I had such success that I won several national awards, and was asked to train other designers in this process. After eight years, it was time for me to grow. I began working for a small boutique firm, where I brought in a skill set, and the firm taught me how to run a business in the industry—it was a win-win situation.

When I started my own business, it was at the bottom of the recession, but I just kept going and growing. My husband is my partner, and it's been a wonderful experience for us. My daughter-in-law, Christine, came on board in 2015 to help with the growing workload and computer-aided design in particular. Since then, we've grown immensely and are thriving.

Christine: I knew at age 16, when beginning my college search, that I wanted to become an interior designer. I took a drafting class in high school and wanted to apply that to interiors, so I went to college for a degree in interior design. Upon graduation, I worked for a commercial furniture rep group and learned everything there was to know about furniture systems. I worked with architecture and interior design firms within my Connecticut territory, as well as with furniture dealers. The knowledge I gained was invaluable, but I knew that being an interior designer was my true calling.

After leaving the rep group, I joined a small residential interior design firm part-time, and the fire was lit—I loved working on residential interiors. Seeking a full-time opportunity, I joined a large commercial design company where I really began to dive deep into the world of design, from space planning for commercial offices to creating furniture specifications and tenant fit-outs.

I loved the firm and what I did, but the commute was unbearable, so I joined a small architectural firm closer to home as a lead designer. The project types varied from commercial to high-end residential, and I'd





work on producing full sets of construction documents and coordinate with the contractors and tradesmen to complete projects from start to finish.

Around this time, I started working weekends with Jan—my soon-to-be mother-in-law—to support her with drafting floor plans and cabinetry layouts. We had so much fun! A couple of years later, Jan made it clear that she hoped I'd join her full-time. She was awarded a huge project at just the right time for me to make the switch. We've really loved working together, and I feel lucky to be doing what I love every single day!

Q: What core beliefs or foundational principles guide your work?

Jan: First and foremost, it's quality. Society is wired to get things quickly, but the spaces we create are highly custom. That's not always a quick process, so we have to educate our clients in the value they're getting. We offer three levels of services to clients to ensure they have options to meet their budget, but none of them sacrifice quality. We feel comfortable knowing the design will last them for years to come because of this dedication.

Q: Do you have a particular dream or accomplishment as you look ahead?

Jan: Early on, when it was just my husband and me, we had a friend who thought our work and dynamic would make for a great TV show—and this was before all the hype on screen. It wasn't right then, but maybe in the future!

We truly want to continue growing and enjoying what we do. We have a great team and great subcontractors who we partner with and trust. We're specific about our process, our clients expect the best of the best, and we want to continue delivering on that.

Q: In the future, when you look back, how will you know you've succeeded?

Jan: There's always a moment when we have the big "reveal day"—just like on TV. The clients are ecstatic and they say, "Did you know it was going to look like this?" It's the best—even better when we get tears of joy. In those moments, we know we've done our job, and if that's our experience and history when we look back, it will have been a success. We love knowing we have helped our clients love their homes. ♦

Resource: Jan Hiltz Interiors LLC.: Jan Hiltz & Christine Hiltz, Westport, CT, 203.331.5578; jan-hiltzinteriorsllc.com



KATE GELFAND





D +D: How did you get your start in design? What was the journey to where you are today?

Kate: I've always had an affinity for the arts, which guided my undergraduate studies in art history and English. Upon graduation, my peers found career paths as teachers, librarians or gallery assistants, but I had a hard time finding a natural fit. I struggled to find a practical application of my artistic pursuits until I discovered interior design, and was accepted to George Washington University's master's program in interior design. That program was a deep dive into the technical skills of drafting and detailing, giving me the foundation to do all my own drafting and computer-aided design work. My family is from California, and it was around the time I graduated that my husband and I had the opportunity to move back. I took a design assistant role working under Ohara Davies-Gaetano, an acclaimed West Coast residential designer. I gained knowledge and experience working on high-end luxury residential—secondary residences, vacation retreats and international work. One project even took us to Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, which was incredible! It was hands-on experience in a small firm, where I adapted perspectives on all aspects of interior decoration, residential construction and project management.

Eventually, my husband's job moved us to the East Coast. At the time, we had one child and another on the way. To keep my design mind fresh, I did freelance drafting for several area designers. One fall day, I was coming home with a roll of drawings in my hands, and my neighbor, who happened to be a developer, asked me what I do. I mentioned my background, and he shared an opportunity that would later become the project that put me on the map. Early that following year, I fully designed and completed a full set of drawings for a six-townhome complex in Greenwich. It was through that project that I met and cultivated business relationships that I continue to maintain to this day. Those connections and referrals have been the foundation of my growing business. I'm now going into my sixth year in business, and am so passionate about the future of Kate Gelfand Interior Design.

D+D: How has your experience in art history influenced your perspective on interior design?

Kate: During my undergraduate studies, I studied art history in Italy for a year, working alongside Harvard art historians in the Villa I Tatti, a private Renaissance Art Research Institute in Fiesole. This experience truly shaped me more than any prior experience—so much that the insignia in my logo is derived from a Florentine motif. When it comes to interior design, I like to think that everything I do is, in some way, rooted in traditional design. My aesthetic tends to be clean, yet not overly modern. I am often told it exudes a subtle California vibe that beautifully coexists with traditional principles of proportion, balance and symmetry. This very much stems from my time studying the Italian Renaissance and Italian art.

D+D: Studying there sounds like a dream come true. Are there any dream accomplishments you hope to achieve in the future?

Kate: It was, and the experience truly fueled the wanderlust within me. Looking ahead, I'd like to incorporate more unique pieces from around the world into my designs. To me, accessorizing a home is a personalized study of my client's lives and passions. It's about curating a collection of objects and moments that are mean-





ingful and speak to who they are. I do the occasional trip abroad, and will collect small tokens to incorporate into my work, but that next level—where I travel to Belgium, France and Italy, and salvage architectural elements to integrate intentionally for a project—would be a dream. I envision sourcing doors, mantels, architectural elements and antiques from markets around the world, incorporating them into the homes I help design and build. I want to create unique, noteworthy and special moments that are embraced by the design of a home in a permanent way.

D+D: If you could write your future, what would the next 10 years look like?

Kate: We just expanded the office, and I certainly foresee our team growing, while we grow our clientele and array of projects. When it comes to the industry, my satisfaction comes from the lasting relationships with my design partners and clients, not necessarily the accolades or awards. This business of home is so precious and intimate. I am profoundly aware every day of how special it is to be involved in creating a place of refuge for my clients.

My dream for my company is not to be labeled with a specific aesthetic or consistent design signature, but rather defined by a high level of quality, thought and detail—which ultimately becomes recognizable as our brand. I'd like to continue fostering relationships with my design peers, be challenged by interesting projects and clients with unique sensibilities, and be inspired by expressive and soulful interiors. ♦

Resource: Kate Gelfand Interior Design: Kate Gelfand, Founder, Greenwich, CT, 203.485.0413; kategelfand.com

DIANE RATH





D +D: Let's start with your journey. Can you tell us about the path that led you to this moment in your career?

Diane: Before design, I was an educator, and I had built my own business as a learning specialist in New York City. After about 10 years, my husband and I moved from New York to coastal Connecticut, and it became an opportunity to decide if I would rebuild that business or start over and do something entirely different. It was a pivotal moment for me to decide how I would move forward into the next chapter in my life.

I was raised by a single mother, also a business owner, who would come home and find the house completely rearranged—by me. I almost couldn't help myself. Even in my friends' homes, I would question why their living room, for example, was set up in a particular way, and usually the parents allowed me to rework the furnishings and decor because I was insistent, young and perhaps overly opinionated.

Design was always a part of me, but it wasn't until we moved to Connecticut that I truly understood it could be a career option. After much contemplation and the unwavering support and encouragement of family and friends, The Rath Project was born. Initially, I worked with friends and family, gaining experience and building a client base. What I found astounding was how applicable my prior experience was in this new venture. The design side of things came easy, almost intuitive, but the business side could be more challenging. Having already built a business, I had the skills and knowledge I needed to support consistent growth within the company while also focusing on design.

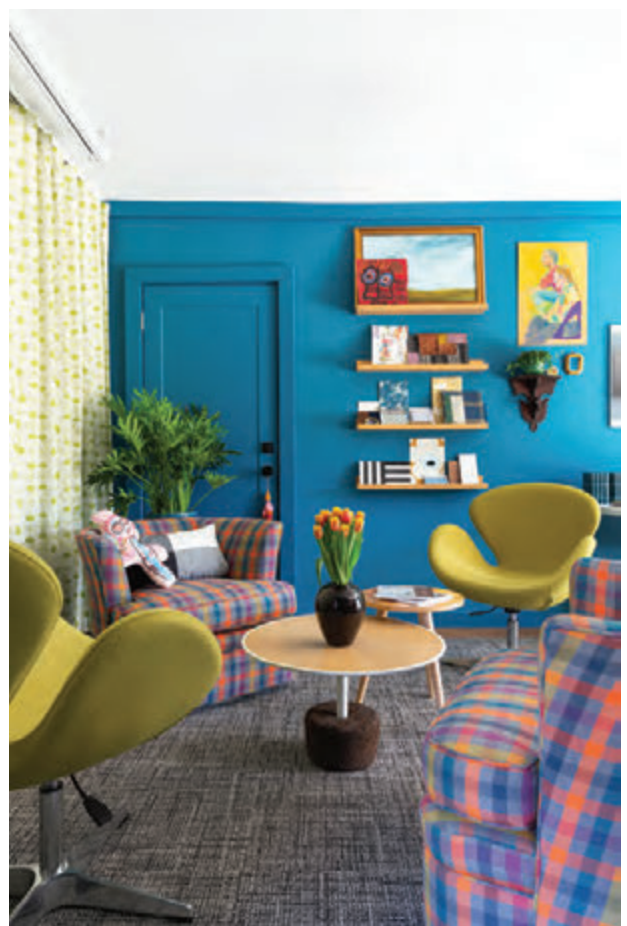
Since starting The Rath Project, I feel fortunate to have been able to assemble a small but skilled and creative team. We want to create impactful design, but we also have families and know the importance of functionality in the home. Every space we design is grounded in the notion of creating beautiful spaces where people can live their lives.

D+D: It sounds like design has always been a part of your life. How has your environment influenced your aesthetic and style?

Diane: Aesthetically, my style is a bit different from that of traditional coastal Connecticut interior designers, but it's something I'm proud of, particularly because clients come to us knowing we put this spin on things, and they're seeking it out. The aesthetic developed from a unique set of influences throughout my childhood and my years in New York—both upstate, where I grew up, and in New York City, where I spent the best parts of my early adulthood. This aesthetic has really established us in this niche within the industry. While we don't have a particular "stamp" we need to impart on each and every project, we do have an approach to design that brings a sense of style to the individuality of each client. From color integration and pattern play, to going bold in otherwise mundane moments—that's what we're known for. We don't rely on neutrals as a color palette but, rather, we inject color and personality into spaces, presenting our clients with solutions they may not have originally considered. We believe that a home should feel collected and natural—whether it features a vintage chaise lounge from a relative, or something the client found at a thrift shop and fell in love with, the home should reflect the people living within it.

D+D: Developing and thriving within that niche is an accom-





plishment in itself. What will success look like when you look back at the end of your career?

Diane: A dream of mine is to be able to work with clients throughout their entire lifetime. You hear stories about designers who establish relationships with their clients and guide them through every stage of their lives, and then do the same with their children and grandchildren. It's a testament to their design skills and to the relationship. I think it would be really something to look back knowing I have not only experienced a lifetime of design with these clients, but that these relationships are the foundation of a successful business I can pass on to the next generation. Longevity—that's the accomplishment.

D+D: With that in mind, what does the next decade look like for you and The Rath Project?

Diane: Over the next 10 years, I aspire to continue growing the firm. It's important to me that we do so without losing the integrity of our core values, however, so I imagine it will always be somewhat small. That growth may occur in a more unconventional way, too—perhaps another arm of the company that delves into some kind of product design, like textiles. That vision stems from a goal of mine to make design accessible to everyone without sacrificing the quality of the product or aesthetics. ♦

Resource: The Rath Project: Diane Rath, Principal Designer & Owner, Fairfield, CT, 518.542.6268; therathproject.com

LAUREN VALLARIO





D +D: Please tell us how your journey began.

D Lauren: My career actually started in the corporate world, before I ventured into the creative realm. While working as an executive recruiter in 2004, I realized that my passion was elsewhere, and I embarked on a nearly decade-long journey into the design industry and building this company. Within the first year, I found myself simultaneously working at a luxury plumbing fixture showroom in Connecticut, studying at Berkeley College in New Jersey, and living in New York as a first-time mom with an infant. It was such a great experience, but very difficult to continually balance.

After two years of a challenging schedule, I focused on working full-time at the showroom and put school on hold. I enjoyed working with so many talented designers, but noticed that I hadn't met any who were specifically trained in kitchen and bathroom design. It was then that I recognized the opportunity to create my niche, and decided to pursue a degree specifically in kitchen and bathroom design at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh.

I had my second child during that time, and I was finally ready to hit the ground running with my business, in 2013, when a showroom client approached me with an offer to manage construction projects for her company while I started up. It was an invaluable opportunity to have a steady income while building my business, and I enjoyed the partnership. The position provided immense insight into all facets of a project, allowing me to perfect how I integrate my design services, too. After we worked together for about a year, my design business started to take off, and I went



out completely on my own.

D+D: That is quite the journey. Was design always of interest to you?

Lauren: As a child, I didn't even know interior design was a career option, but I've always been connected to it. In my younger years, like most designers, I always loved moving things around in our home. I also loved working on projects around the house with my dad—he was a machinist and handy, so I would try to help him. When I began this new career path, I tried many things, but I was always drawn back to the design field in various ways. While unconventional, the path has equipped me with a unique perspective and a deep understanding of both the business and creative sides of design that benefit our team and our clients.

D+D: As you look ahead, what dreams do you have for yourself and your business?

Lauren: As a business owner, I love the intimacy and size of the team I am working with now. It's common for firms to get so large that the principal designer isn't as





hands-on anymore in the design work, but the size we are now allows me to be involved, and that's how I'd like to keep it. As a designer, I would love to be a part of something that truly impacts the industry. Ideally, it would be a dream to collaborate with a brand or manufacturer to create something that makes a difference in the industry. It would be great, for example, to be a part of developing a product that solves a functionality issue in bathrooms or kitchens, and could positively impact people outside our own projects, even in a small way.

D+D: What a beautiful accomplishment that would be—to impact and benefit the entire industry. Can you share a bit about your design philosophy?

Lauren: When it comes to the design itself, our philosophy is rooted in functionality. Of course, the space will be beautiful and aesthetically aligned with our clients' goals, but, ultimately, it should be optimized and designed to enhance the everyday lives of our clients. This element of practicality at every level can easily be overlooked in design, but it makes all the difference.

On the process side of things, the experience of designing a space is just as important as the design itself, and should be as enjoyable as the outcome. Interior design is, ultimately, a service industry, and we want our clients to look back and say, "That was so much fun—we can't wait to work with you again."

And it's not just our clients. This is our work, it's what we do, and we want to enjoy the process, too. It's what keeps us excited—to learn and grow as designers! As a team, we're lifelong learners—always looking forward while learning from experience and ensuring we're good partners to everyone on the project. We appreciate the unique insight that each team member brings to the table, including the manufacturers, contractors, fabricators and installers. We have the opportunity to enhance the experience and outcome for everyone by respecting, acknowledging and learning from the unique expertise that each team brings to the project. ♦

Resource: Lauren Vallario Designs: Lauren Vallario, Principal Designer, Stamford, CT, 845.654.1888; laurenvallariodesigns.com

JONATHAN GORDON





D +D: Can you share a bit about the journey that led you here?

D Jonathan: Interestingly enough, interior design was not my first career. I went to school for engineering, with the dream of designing amusement park rides; I succeeded and started a company doing just that. At 30 years old, through a series of unfortunate events, I lost everything. I had my dream career and everything I'd ever wanted, but had to completely reinvent myself. Both my grandmothers said I should go into interior design, and while I thought it was a crazy idea, a career counselor agreed it would be a viable direction for me. I studied for my certification at Fairfield University in Connecticut, and began looking for an internship. This was in 2013, and it was a tough market. The industry hadn't fully recovered from the crash, and I received rejection after rejection, and I didn't understand why. I wasn't even asking for pay—I just wanted experience. One day I was exasperated and asked point blank why I was rejected. The response I received was not about



my skills or education, but about my physical self. Essentially, I didn't fit the mold the industry sought—I didn't "look like" a designer.

This was both defeating and infuriating. Just after that incident, I spoke with my professors about quitting the field completely or starting my own firm. They insisted that some firm would want me, and said that starting my own firm wasn't a good idea with such little experience. Ultimately, I knew this was my life, and I intended to take control of it. In 2014 Design by the Jonathans was established. I'd like to say it was easy, but it was an uphill battle for three years to build a client base and figure out who to talk to and how to make connections that designers need—something you typically learn in an internship.

By 2018, things were looking better, and when 2019 rolled around, we were doing so much work that I had to hire.





The rest is history. Today, we are a thriving team doing work we're proud of and loving what we do every day.

D+D: That's quite the journey. Did that experience shape your core beliefs or principles when it comes to your company or your design?

Jonathan: Certainly. That initial experience seeking an internship, along with all the stereotypical bad boss stories, created a baseline of what I would never want to be or do. I learned from these experiences exactly how I would not want to run my company. At our firm, there is a clear non-bullying mentality that permeates, and we don't tolerate disrespect on any level—whether it be clients or our own team. It seems like common sense, but it's very important. Treat others as you want to be treated.

When it comes to design, it's working hard, doing good work and really listening to the client. Our philosophy is that it's our client's home, and we have the privilege to help them make it into a space that is unique to them and reflects their individuality. We strive to bring that vision to life every time with the quality and detail that our professional expertise allows.

D+D: Looking ahead, are there any particular goals you've set or dreams you'd like to achieve?

Jonathan: Well, interior design was never my path until it suddenly was, so my goals may be a bit more free-form than most people's.

We just accomplished a goal with an office expansion to another state, and we stay very busy. More than anything, being able to grow the business while maintaining the quality of our work is really what I want—it's a simple goal. Perhaps another goal would be finding more opportunities to get our work out there through publications, awards or other means, although it's all in service of the primary goal. We have some truly astonishing projects in the works, and it's nice to share them and contribute to the industry in that way.

D+D: When you look back in 10 years, what would you like to have accomplished?

Jonathan: If we've been able to translate the wants, needs and desires of our clients into spaces that are more than the sum of the parts and serve their lives in a meaningful way, that's an accomplishment in and of itself. We have a hardworking team who take their work seriously and love what they do. It can be a tough industry, but if we look back and know we found joy in the work, delivered high-caliber design solutions and made our clients happy, that's success. Everything else is commentary. ♦

Resource: Design by the Jonathans: Jonathan Gordon, Lead Designer, New Haven, CT, 203.557.3205; thejonathans.com

NICKY JAMES



D +D: Please share a bit about your journey to the industry. Was interior design always your vision? Nicky: My dad was a contractor, so I inevitably grew up around a lot of construction when I was young.

In my teen years, I would spend each summer working with him on jobsites at the Jersey Shore. Watching the design-build process so closely at such an influential age, I fell in love with it. At the same time, I knew the construction side was definitely not the best fit for me, but the design aspect resonated quite a bit. When it came to my career, I often thought fashion or architecture. I didn't know much about the world of interior design, but somehow my parents always knew that would be my path. I went to New York University and studied in the Fine Arts program. My projects started to naturally tailor themselves toward interior design. While many designers start with interior design and integrate art, I inverted this approach, and it's turned out really well for me. I worked at a couple firms out of college—my start was designing nurseries—but, about four years ago, I had



the opportunity to go out on my own, and I took a leap.

D+D: How has your unique path shaped your approach to interior design and your project work?

Nicky: Instead of walking into a space with an interior design eye, I go into a room with an artist's headspace. I think about how you want to feel when you walk into the room, and my mind pulls together layout, color and style of design. Engaging in discussions with my clients to understand their personality and how they live is so important to my design process. One of my favorite parts of my job is pulling this vision out of those conversations and collaborating on creating a mood for each room. As a designer, I use minimal materials and color tones. Cohesiveness in the background of my aesthetic is key—it gives that consistent experience from room to room, and it makes connections between different spaces. Sometimes clients think that a beautiful space can't be incredibly functional, but my design





lives in this effortless middle ground to bridge that gap. My design creates a really livable experience; it's a big part of what I do in my work.

D+D: What do you see in your future—in your business or as a dream accomplishment?

Nicky: I've done a lot of renovations, which means designing within an existing space, and sometimes ripping down walls to move things around. I love this—design problem-solving. It's so fulfilling. But my dream would be to work with a client on a new build. The idea of taking clients from a piece of land to building their dream home, getting to know them along the way, and being a part of this huge moment in their lives—that would be phenomenal.

Over the next decade, I envision tightening up our process and perhaps letting people in on some of the crazier, behind-the-scenes aspects of the company—whether that be a day out shopping, sketching and ideating space, working with a client, or engaging through social media. Separately, my colleague Leigh and I have decided to create a whole new company: designing a small furniture line. It's something I've always wanted to do, and when he came on board, it was a no-brainer to do it together. Stay tuned.

On the more aspirational side of things, I'd love to find a way to bring design to people who can't necessarily have access to it. It's always in the back of my head how I can make a bigger impact, and perhaps use interior design to contribute in some way.

D+D: What do you hope your clients take away from their experience of working with you?

Nicky: Design is a long game—an experience. You've got to do it right, and that can take time. I create really close relationships with my clients, which not only results in creating amazing spaces together, but enjoying a fun process along the way. As a general piece of interior design advice, I tell clients that if you see something that speaks to you, if it's in your budget and will fit in your home, buy it and we will make it work. It's that collected feeling of repurposing existing furniture, adding fresh new pieces, shopping for great accessories and displaying artwork you love that makes the room. ♦

Resource: Nicky James Interior Design: Nicky James, Owner, Stamford, CT, 908.868.1794; nicky-james.com

Photos by: Lofy Studios

LISA DAVENPORT





D +D: Please tell us about your journey into the field of interior design.

Lisa: My journey was not a traditional route. To say creativity runs through my veins would be an understatement. I am the eldest daughter of an accomplished fine artist, and I started my education with an associate's degree in graphic design, with a concentration in fine arts. My first job out of college was a brief, two-week stint with an advertising company, where I quickly understood I was not meant for life in a cubicle.

I made the leap from a cubicle to a job as a visual merchandiser with Bob's, a clothing store. Here, we had tremendous creative freedom, creating and building displays and sets. These designs were quite literally works of art to showcase clothing, shoes, hats and jewelry. I loved the role, but the team lead was rather difficult, and our team diminished quickly. During this time, I ran into a friend who told me about a role that was available at a paint store. Despite my lack of knowledge about the trade and product, the owner took a chance on me. A few months in, I helped a customer put together a bathroom update—fresh paint, wallpaper and a coordinating valance. Two weeks later, she came into the store with photos she had printed to show me the outcome. She was thrilled, and her excitement was infectious—that was the moment I knew this was something I was



I still worked for the paint store during my time in school. The owners expanded and spun off a 6,000-square-foot design showroom division and, a few years later, I was made a partner. We serviced clients and trade members for 15 years, until I opened up LDD Interiors in 2012. After four years, we expanded to a second office in Naples, Florida, and have projects up and down the East Coast.

D+D: Is there a set of core values that you maintain at LDD?

Lisa: Yes, there is. We also believe that design should be an experience—I want every client to feel as excited as that woman did when she came to show me

meant to do.

Within 18 months of this newly found role, I was married and had my first child. I'd decided to leave the job and to be Donna Reed—and vacuum in my pearls—but I realized that was not in my bloodstream. I craved the experience I had discovered with that first bathroom refresh. My hunger to learn and grow only expanded, leading to my enrollment at Paier College in Connecticut. I worked hard, taking two to three classes while working three days a week, raising a family and being a wife. (Yes, I have a very supportive husband.)

Remember where I started with a graphics and fine arts education? Well, this made for beautiful presentations while I was taking these classes. I experienced a pivotal point in my education with one professor, Pierre. He interrupted my design presentation and said it was absolute garbage. At that point I had straight As, a beautiful portfolio—but he called my bluff, and he was right. I was so skilled artistically, I made anything look good, but he saw the core of it. Pierre gave me the opportunity to re-present the project I had invested four weeks working on. Now, I had only a weekend to do so. It was hard, I was stuck, and I didn't know what was wrong with it. Admittedly, I was defeated.

We met early on Monday, and Pierre said, "You have raw talent; we just need to train you to get out of your own way." We sat for three hours and dissected the project. I didn't allow my ego to interrupt the process—it was a formative moment in my evolution as a designer. What he taught me that day was how to build my own internal critic, who would hold me accountable throughout my career.



photos of her bathroom. To do this, we dig deep and focus on our core values: We are “Committed to Creativity”—not just in aesthetics, innovation and design, but in solutions, budgets and process. We are “Honest to Goodness.” To be so, we understand and value relationships, we are trustworthy, and we are not afraid to be a bit vulnerable—to admit we are not perfect and want to continually improve ourselves and our skillset. Finally, we are “Authentic Storytellers.” We spend time getting to know our clients’ and our vendors’ story—their history—and then we tell their story through design.

D+D: Authentic storytelling—that’s beautiful. As you look



ahead, what do you see on the horizon for LDD?

Lisa: At LDD, we strive to bring our clients more American-made products and to celebrate American craftsmanship. On the horizon is the completion of a renovation of what we affectionately call the “Little House.” This is a passion project, where we are—as much as we are able—building and sourcing with products that are American-made. It is to show people that it’s not cost prohibitive to use American-made products! It is more than a little house that is exquisitely designed and cleverly appointed—it is Americans at their finest. This is what it means to be American; it is my American Dream.

During the pandemic, Oregon-based interior designer Garrison Hullinger and I hosted a podcast called “Coast to Coast.” It was a great way to share what we’ve learned about the business of design, and we had a great run for a few years. Mentorship is not new to me; I would like to expand upon it and work with designers, sharing with them a support network. We can all give back at any stage in our career. It will only help the growth of those who follow.

Design is a serious business, but we can’t take ourselves so seriously that we get in our own way—part of that formative lesson I learned in school. Life and design are a journey. The road map you’re following today may well change tomorrow, and that’s okay. Be open to where the road takes you; I promise you’ll love the ride. ♦

Resource: LDD Interiors: Lisa Davenport, Middlefield, CT, Naples, FL, 860.316.5718; liddinteriors.com

BRENDA MACLEISH





D +D: How did your journey into interior design begin?
 Brenda: I've always been interested in anything design and creative—my brain just works in color, space and style. I grew up in South Africa, where there was no educational path for interior design, so I went to college to become a first-grade teacher. After a few years, I moved to New York, where I started studying interior design and then switched to fashion school. I spent years working in cosmetics, and stopped formally working when I had my kids. I always did something creative,



though, like hand painting and selling glassware, baking and decorating children's birthday cakes, and engaging in other creative outlets. Ultimately, I saw an ad for California Closets in the New York Times "Help Wanted" section. I love to organize, so I took a chance! I went in for the interview, and I wasn't sure if I would like it, but after shadowing a few designers, I found I absolutely loved it. I just had my 23rd anniversary with the company, and I still love what I do. It's a great mix of what I love—it's design, it's sociable, it's flexible and it's very fulfilling. I see these wonderful transformations, and



I get to improve people's experiences in their homes, as well as collaborate with talented designers. I just really love it.

D+D: How wonderful to find a role you love so much! What inspired your creative journey?

Brenda: My mother was always redecorating our living and dining rooms in ways you'd never expect. I remember our living room was featured in an interior design magazine because the colorway was so unusual—that was an amazing moment for her. She had an incredible eye and great taste, and was influential in her community. Looking back, I think her creativity and confidence were among my biggest inspirations. I spent much of my life taking art classes and exploring different creative outlets.

D+D: Do you design by any particular ethos or principles?

Brenda: It sounds obvious, but it's often missing in a client-designer relationship: collaboration. Bringing transparency and honesty to the table allows clients to be a collaborative part of the decision-making and design experience. This means it's not about me selling them a set of cabinets or built-ins, it's about an open discussion that brings us to the right solution for them.

I work to consistently toe the line of form and function—that's a big part of what I do. A space should be beautiful and it must be functional. Finding that balance comes from understanding every aspect of the project, budget, neces-



sities and ideals. From there, it's about collaboration and communication with the client until we strike the perfect balance.

D+D: As you look ahead, what dreams do you hope to achieve in your career?

Brenda: I'm not competitive with other people, but I'm quite competitive with myself. Every day and every project, I push myself to try something new, take a chance and think outside the box. I believe that perspective and mindset will help me continue to grow and make the most of the experiences and opportunities that cross my path. The truth of the matter is, I've worked on so many types of homes and spaces that I feel I've done more than I'd

hoped to, and built my skills, knowledge and understanding along the way. I feel very content in where I am right now, and proud of what I've accomplished to date. So, perhaps the most important accomplishment is to continue to love my journey and what I'm doing, and grow it in new ways. This work feeds my soul in so many ways; it'll be exciting to see how that can expand. ♦

Resource: California Closets: Brenda MacLeish, Design Consultant, Westchester, NY, 914.592.1001; californiaclosets.com

MELISSA ADAMS





D +D: Please tell us about your journey and what brought you to this point in your career.

Melissa: I went to Syracuse University for textile design, and I spent the beginning of my career designing textiles for companies that designed and produced home furnishings fabrics. It was an interesting career, working with the furnishings market in that way, and then with luxury hotel chains, where we had influence on more than just the furnishings, looking at all aspects of the room. I started working with Calvin Klein, and the job morphed





into bedding, bath, accessories, pillows and table items—so it really expanded into more product design and showroom layouts. Then I left the industry to have my kids, and as I was doing work around my own house, I hired an architect who saw a talent in me and wanted to offer my services to his clients. I started taking courses, learned a lot on the job, and had wonderful mentors along the way—and that was the beginning of my career and my company. Since then, my services have expanded from interior design into construction project management—it's ever evolving.

D+D: Do you believe your foundation in textile design has uniquely shaped your approach to interior design?

Melissa: I do. The more experience I gained in the industry, the more I realized that everyone has unique strengths in the field. I found color sense to be one of mine. I attribute that to my time in textile design, when I would be at the mills needing to match colors with a precision that could be described as synonymous to “perfect pitch.” One benefit of that experience is that I am able to make a big change in a space with very little, maximizing the impact of the work I do. The other aspect of interior design that textile design has influenced is tile patterning. It's just a different medium. Considering repeating patterns, scale and color, and ensuring it reads how you want can be a challenge for many, but it comes quite naturally to me.

D+D: What a great way to see things. Has your dream always been something in the creative field?

I grew up with a mom who wasn't an interior designer, but she was talented and had a beautiful aesthetic. Her friends would ask her to help them do work in their homes. She had an incredible sense for mixing fabrics and paints, and perhaps that inspired me. I also spent much of my childhood dragging furniture around

my room to rearrange it, and I still do that to this day. I suppose it was an early inclination to space plan and see how different arrangements in the space made me feel. So, yes, something along those lines existed within me, but I'm also an artist. My portfolio going into college was in fine arts, including drawing and watercolor, so I was looking specifically at degrees in the arts college at Syracuse. Interior design wasn't offered, but textile design was, and so began my journey.

D+D: What are your plans for the next decade? What dreams do you hope to achieve?

Melissa: In the past, some decisions were made based on the pressure of the world around me—whether it was taking on a business partner or a particular project—which didn't serve me or the business well. Those were big learning experiences, and since then I've gained a stronger understanding of myself and the business, making for a better experience for myself and my clients.

Having multiple projects going on that are different from one another—whether in design stage, aesthetic or scope—is something I enjoy creatively. Expanding both the outdoor room design and project management aspects of what our company does aligns with the business plan as well as that creative diversity.

Other than that, I'm an artist with an innate desire to create—painting and art hobbies are still very much a part of who I am. I'd love to integrate that part of my life into the business brand in some capacity—whether through a featured artist opportunity, or by creating a collection within my own business. ♦

Resource: Adams Interior Design: Melissa Adams, Owner, Hopewell Junction, NY, 917.886.6666; aidesignny.com



ANTHONY DEROSA





D +D: How did you find yourself in the construction industry?

Anthony: My mother was a realtor, and when I was 13 years old, she got me a job with a small contractor, working on houses she was selling. I'd spend my Sundays with her at open houses, learning about each home. I had that job throughout high school until college, when I started working for a bigger contractor in the summers. We would put in street infrastructure and build subdivisions for communities of 30 or so houses at a time in Fairfield County, CT.

When I was 19, still in college, I started my first construction company. I would essentially work for insurance companies, rehabbing homes after fires, throughout Connecticut. I'd board them up, clean them up and remodel them. It was primarily a summer gig, but because it was my company, I'd hire all my friends, and the entrepreneurial spirit was born. Out of college, I closed that company and started working at a bank, which lasted about two months. I quickly realized that sitting behind a desk wasn't for me, and I opened my second construction and remodeling company in Fairfield County. I enjoyed doing that for a while, but eventually I wanted some stability, so I worked with a headhunter and found a position as a project manager in Greenwich.





In 2008, I was 30 years old, and the owner of the company retired and left the company to a couple of us. I did that for about two years, but ultimately wanted to build something under my own name. So, in 2010, I started DeRosa Builders and partnered with my brother. We're going on 15 years now, and it's been quite the journey.

D+D: Doing it under your own name has such a purpose. What values do you instill in the work you do?

Anthony: It sounds simple, but we go by the golden rule. Even when I'm bringing new hires into the company, it's important to me to know their skills, but equally important to know how they treat people, how they are with their family, and how they treat other families. After all, the work we do is intrusive into our client's personal space and lives for a year or two—sometimes more—and it's important that we respect our clients, their families and their homes.

Communication goes hand in hand with that—continuously communicating with our clients on progress, changes or delays. Keeping people informed is just classic goodness, and that's what we stick with.

D+D: Where do you see your company going in the next decade? What dreams are you hoping to achieve?

Anthony: It may sound a bit cliché, but you always hear people say, "Those were the good days," and I have such an awareness that these are the good days. If a career typi-

cally spans around 30 years, I'm halfway through, and I'm happy with our team, how we're growing, and the recognition we're receiving for our work and our brand.

It is important to me to continue to build this company and build a legacy that can be passed down to the next generation. If it's my kids, that's great, but I mean for even some of my employees, who dream of continuing this company when the time comes. In the next 10 years, I'd love to continue to build the company to prepare for that. Increasing our involvement with development is a step in that direction, providing quality luxury homes.

There's nothing better than when our clients walk in for the first time and are blown away by the home—the design, the craftsmanship and the execution and quality of what we do. Construction is a tough industry; we tell our clients at the beginning that this process will always ebb and flow. There will be highs and lows, from finances to schedule and everything between, but our goal is to be a trusted partner, to be fair, to communicate and to do right by them. So when we get that reaction at the end, it keeps us going to the next project. ♦

Resource: DeRosa Builders, LLC: Anthony DeRosa, Owner & Operator, Stamford, CT, 203.769.1804; derosabuilders.com

PRUDENCE BAILEY





D +D: How did you get into interior design?

Prudence: I pursued interior design later in life, when I went from being a stay-at-home mom to joining the workforce. I didn't have a background, formal training or even connections in the industry, but I had a gift and a desire to start my own business.

It began when my ex-husband and I bought a home in Darien, CT, and I worked with a designer to develop three of the core rooms in the home. It was an enlightening experience: I discovered I had this strong perspective and perception for design, as well as a keen sense for color, pattern and spatial awareness. I pushed the designer's usual approach and infused my own aesthetic into the design.

In the family room, I selected a set of green chenille sofas—it was a true statement moment. The design came together so beautifully. The dining room was even featured in East Coast Home + Design's "Amazing Transformations" issue in 2013—that was a remarkable moment for me. With my newfound confidence, I continued and completed the remainder of the home on my own, which was no small feat at 6,000 square feet, and I enjoyed the process.

As it all came together, I found that many of our friends and guests were asking me to help them in their homes. Whether it was styling shelves, moving furniture, or redoing a room that just didn't feel right and they couldn't figure it out, I would help them. Around this same time, I was looking to start working again, and while I had a strong résumé in sales, it was hard to find a position after 10 years of raising children. It was then I thought that maybe I could put my sales and design experience togeth-





er, and so began Prudence Home & Design.

D+D: Interesting! Was something creative always in the cards for you?

Prudence: I was always an artist—since I was young. In college, I majored in graphic design and illustration, and received a minor in business. When I lived in New York, people would come to my apartment and tell me how much they loved the space, but it didn't occur to me that creating spaces like that could be a career—I was far more into fashion and things of that nature.

D+D: How has your background influenced your process and approach to design?

Prudence: The actual design process is informed by my experience in finance and software sales. It's quite structured and creates a systematic workflow to create these spaces in a way that works well for all team members. This is quite important to the experience; interior design is a luxury business, and it should feel luxurious each step along the way.

The design aspect is inspired and influenced by the artistic side of me—the visual designer within is brought to life when I'm looking at space and can visualize it with my mind's eye. I have an innate sense for color and what I would call a near-photographic memory for it. I can look at a fabric sample, for example, and without having it in front of me, I am able to pull together the colors and patterns that work with it. While I think much of this is intuitive, it was certainly honed as I studied color theory and other aspects of art during school.

D+D: What do you look forward to achieving as you progress through your career?

Prudence: There are so many things I'd love to accomplish. Someday having my own fabric and wallpaper line would be a dream—to bring color and pattern to life in my own unique way. We're in the works of starting an ecommerce site this year. It's very boutique and curated with some of my favorite things—maybe in 10 years or so that becomes a brand unto itself. Maybe those two dreams speak to one another. Other than that, continuing to build our team is on the horizon, while ensuring our work is just as high quality with aesthetic integrity as it is today. ♦

Resource: Prudence Home & Design: Prudence Bailey, Founder & Principal Designer, New Canaan, CT, 203.859.9499; prudencehomes.com

DOUGLAS GRANETO





D +D: How did you get your start in interior design?

Douglas: I studied art history in college and presumed I would find a career within the art world, so I'm not far off. After I graduated, my first job was working with an interior designer, and I absolutely loved it. When I moved to New York, I was fortunate to work with interior designer Tony Ingrao for almost 10 years. It was a wonderful experience of discovery and learning about the world of interiors. In 2006, I opened my own design firm in Greenwich, CT, which I've thoroughly enjoyed developing and growing.

D+D: Did studying art history come from an interest in art specifically, or was it more of a creative interest?

Douglas: I always knew I would be in a creative field; I just didn't know which one. At a young age, before I understood interior design as a career, I was interested in architecture. My math skills weren't great, though, and I figured that wouldn't work out. Later, I envisioned pursuing fine arts in college, but I very quickly realized my artistic abilities didn't support that as a career path. I even considered acting, but it wasn't the right fit, and I lacked the experience necessary to pursue it.

Ultimately, I chose the academic route with art history, and I received a rich education that expanded from art into the history of architecture and furniture. I loved the curriculum. I particularly fell in love with the history of furniture. Furnishings and designers like Elsie de Wolfe, Eileen Gray and Milo Baughman inspired me. No matter the era or period, I was simply fascinated. After graduation, I discovered interior design as a career path, and it spoke to me like nothing else had.

D+D: How have your creative interests influenced your core beliefs about interior design?

Douglas: The influence of art history may seem unrelated, but it's so connected. Art is synonymous to interior design—the way it gives you a sense of mood, coloration and experience. Consider Renaissance art: all those aspects are clearly detected in the paintings. Jump to mid-century modern American furniture from the 1950s, and it fits right in with art being produced by artists like Jackson Pollock.

There is great artwork from every period that aligns with great design and great furniture, and there is a symphony of beauty in bringing them together in a singular space. We build on that primary aesthetic or style through decor, mixing and matching eras and styles, based on feature moments or elements in a space. Most of our clients have a preferred style, but we layer in these details from complementary eras and aesthetics to pull it all together.

Synchronicity is the other aspect that comes to mind. Much as it is a key aspect of art, that holistic and cohesive visual should be the experience of design. It starts for me with a clear understanding of what the clients are looking for and learning what speaks to them. From there, it's about visualizing the space from the ground up.





I think of a space in terms of fashion: if you have good shoes and good hair, the rest just elevates and adds to the look. So, we start foundationally with the larger swaths of material—flooring, ceiling and walls—and speak to the exterior architecture to create a holistic experience.

D+D: What do you envision for the future of your company and career?

Douglas: I'm working on a book on design and spaces. The idea is to use my designs to showcase how to combine personal tastes and aesthetics in different ways. It will be a study in how good design complements the way people live. Aside from that, I truly feel we have great projects and great clients, and the size of our office—small but strong—is ideal. The dream is to continue developing our relationships with our clients, and delivering at our current level of quality and design. ♦

Resource: Douglas Graneto Design: Douglas Graneto, Principal, Greenwich, CT, 203.622.8383; douglasgraneto.com

KAREN BERKEMEYER





D +D: Did you always have an interest in interior design?

Karen: Interestingly, my mother was an interior designer, but she never really pushed me in that direction. My father, on the other hand, was a chemist, so I've always had this blend of creative and technical influences. When my husband and I bought our home, we both had a passion for collecting art, and that naturally extended into how we approached our renovations. I became deeply involved in selecting products and materials, but it never crossed my mind this could evolve into a career.

D+D: What was the path that led to where you are now?

Karen: After earning my master's degree in mathematics, I became a high school geometry teacher and taught for 11 years. While expecting



my first child, I started working part-time at a local tile and cabinetry store. It was there that my career truly started to take shape. At the time, there was only one kitchen designer at the store, and when that person left, I stepped in—even without any prior experience. I had great mentors and quickly fell in love with the process. My background in geometry was surprisingly useful—it allowed me to view the design and layout process like a logical problem to solve, and my natural sense of aesthetics enhanced my work.

Eventually, in 1994, I purchased the company. As we grew, we noticed the need to offer more, so we introduced countertops and plumbing products in-house. About 10 years ago, clients started asking us to handle everything for them, which led to our evolution into a one-stop design shop. That's when we rebranded from "Ceramic Design" to "Karen Berkemeyer Home," reflecting the full scope of our services. That shift was a pivotal moment for us and, today, we're a close-knit team of six who work seamlessly together.

D+D: What principles guide your designs to ensure they meet

the high standards of Karen Berkemeyer Home?

Karen: We always focus on classic principles like symmetry and balance, but technical precision is equally important. The kitchen is a high-traffic space, so every element must function perfectly. Even something as small as ensuring that a drawer opens without hitting another one can make or break the usability of the space. Communication is key to our process. Kitchen and bath design can be incredibly technical and sometimes overwhelming for clients. We make sure to break everything down, explaining each detail and the reasoning behind it. When clients are involved and understand every part of the design, they feel more confident and satisfied with the final outcome.

D+D: What's next for Karen Berkemeyer Home?

Karen: I'm focused on continuing to build on the strong foundation we've created—our team is highly skilled and detail-oriented, and we work incredibly well together. One thing that sets us apart is our service model. Each client has one designer for everything—cabinets, countertops, plumbing and tile—so there's consistency



throughout the process. Not many others in the industry offer that. Looking forward, I'd love to expand this one-stop shop approach even further, specifically into lighting design. Bringing that final element under our roof would allow us to provide a complete, whole-home design experience for our clients. That's the direction I see for the future of Karen Berkemeyer Home. ♦

Resource: Karen Berkemeyer Home: Karen Berkemeyer, Owner & Designer, Westport, CT, 203.454.0032; karenberkemeyehome.com



CHRISTOPHER PAGLIARO

D +D: Let's talk about your journey into architecture. Did you always know you wanted to be in the field?

Chris: I was always creative—more artistically than technically so. As a child, I used to build “villages” by laying out washcloths all over our hardwood floors, so they looked like properties, and the exposed wood floor served as the streets. Even at that age, I had this vision as to what a community was and wanted to feel like. In high school, I received a scholarship to a visual arts school in New York, but I had a vision of myself as a struggling artist, and that wasn't what I wanted. I chose instead to pursue architecture, so I applied to a variety of schools, and I was accepted.

I attended the Catholic University in Washington, D.C., and it was a wonderful exploration of architectural theory. But, as with many architectural programs, the practical and technical application of the theory was lacking. So, I finished college on a Saturday and started working on a Tuesday, but I was hesitant, knowing that if I walked onto a construction site, I'd be less informed than I'd like to be. Like a musician understanding how each note would affect the symphony, I desired an understanding of how each line I drew would affect the structures I was creating.

I started working at a small firm in Westchester County, NY, that was known for its technical skills. I learned quickly that the best way to do anything was to steal with your eyes and ears. Throughout the week, I attended every zoning and planning board hearing I could to watch the process and listen. On Saturdays, I went to





construction sites to watch them carry lumber and build, learn about framing, and speak with tradesmen to learn each craft.

A few years in, we started a design-build division, and that gave me immense opportunity to learn the interplay of design, bid, construction, contracts—everything. The design piece was inherent to me, the education honed it all, and my professional experience brought it all together. I've landed in this niche that I love, doing lifestyle custom residential work—mostly on the water—and the clientele we work with is phenomenal.

D+D: Is there any particular dream or goal you'd like to accomplish?

Chris: I love what I'm doing; I have already become more than I ever anticipated I would. I've always lived by the Sunday rule: if I ever get to the point that I hate Sundays because I know I'm going back to work the next day, then it's time for a change. In 38 years, I've never hated a Sunday, so that in itself is quite an accomplishment. If I can continue like that for rest of my career, I'll be satisfied.

D+D: What is one of your favorite parts of what you do?

Chris: I adore collaboration. Working with





homeowners or other professionals is a great exercise in learning and growing. Recently, I had a client who had an idea about how something would come together; it wasn't great, but I could sense he was onto something. The idea was there, but the execution wasn't quite sorted. In that moment, I began thinking several steps ahead to find a way to make it work. I spend a lot of time with my colleagues. We travel together and socialize, and I always joke that if we were musicians, we'd be recording together to create the ultimate song. We all approach the problem differently but, ultimately, we are better as a band than as an individual. It's funny that as you go through your career and age, you recognize there were areas where you thought you'd grow and become an expert—sometimes you never do, but your team balances that out.

I think this mentality is part of who I am, but also the byproduct of having an excellent mentor. He would challenge me to think in new ways and assess the problem, and this allowed me to take risks in purposeful ways. We were designing a compound for a client in Mystic, CT, and I went to meet with him to share the design. I said to him, "I can't show you this house unless you promise not to fire me, because it's kind of out there." He promised not to, I showed him, and he said, "Build it." That kind of outcome is a culmination of all the theory, practice and understanding that came together throughout my career. ♦

Resource: Christopher Pagliaro Architects: Chris Pagliaro, Principal, Darien, CT, 203.838.5517; christopherpagliaroarchitects.com

LINDA RUDERMAN





D +D: How did you find your way into the interior design field?

Linda: From fashion and textiles to interiors—I've always had an interest in design. As a young child, I would occasionally go with my grandfather to the textile mill that he worked at in Scranton, PA. I recall how much I loved being surrounded by the fabrics and ribbons, and by the time I was five years old, I could confidently tell the difference between wool, cashmere, cotton and linen! My father was a machinist at the same mill, and my mother was a seamstress. She made all my clothes—as long as I would cut out the patterns, that is! It kept me very busy custom designing everything I could, and I enjoyed taking details of one pattern and combining them with accents from





another. I really started to put my own spin on things through that experience—much like the design I do today.

At 16, I started a side job of installing wallcovering. I had quite the clientele base, thanks to neighbors, friends and the network of the two friends I did the business with. And, of course, my dad would pitch in, too. We would go to the paint store, select options and come up with all these creative ideas. At the same time, I was taking art courses and college prep courses, but also metal shop and wood shop, and I even learned pottery and ceramics.

When it came time for college, my family dreamt of something practical, like nursing or teaching, but I wanted to go to art school. I did go to nursing school and spent a few years as an OR nurse out of school, but felt uninspired by it. At that time, airlines were hiring, and I was accepted by United Airlines and spent as much time as I could travelling. It reinvigorated that creative spark in me, and I took independent design courses. I also went on several architectural design study tours throughout the world, including Italy, France, Spain, Africa and everywhere in between.

I worked with an architectural firm for over a decade before I went out on my own, in 1990. Over time, people started recognizing my work and wanted to hire me. The size of the studio has varied over the years, but we are happily settled in at about eight people now. The firm was originally located in New York, and moved, in 1996, to Greenwich, CT, where I had an office for 28 years. In 2022, I relocated our office to Boca Raton, FL, and we continue to do work nationwide.

D+D: How did your journey shape your beliefs and principles

related to design?

Linda: I feel strongly that there is no right and wrong in design; there is immense subjectivity. That being said, I always go back to classic architecture—symmetry, balance, scale, proportion. They're all hugely important to every room. While you can learn it, some of that is inherent—intuitive even—in your assessment of a space and how to design it in such a way that it is successfully supportive of a living experience.

D+D: You've done so many things and been to so many places—what's the dream or plan for the future of LRI?

Linda: I've been fortunate to have a diverse portfolio of projects, and to have met wonderful people along the way—clients, manufacturers, artists and tradespeople. Working with all aspects of the interior design experience has been a dream.

As I look ahead, there is a lot in the pipeline to be excited about on the project front. Professionally, I appreciate our ability to be involved in the Design Leadership Network—to learn from colleagues and share experiences, while continuing to learn and grow as the industry inevitably evolves. For example, artificial intelligence design is here, and it's up to us to determine how we can use it to benefit both the firm and the client without losing the humanity of the work we do in the process. Finding that balance will be delicate, but important. ♦

Resource: Linda Ruderman Interiors : Linda Ruderman, President & Owner, Boca Raton, FL, 561.565.5002; lindaruderman.com

DIANE DUROCHER





D +D: Can you share with us your journey into the field of interior design?

Diane: Interior design has always piqued my interest. When I was very young, we updated our family home, and I was able to witness the positive impact that new wallcovering, furniture and reupholstering had on all of us—even my skeptical grandmother, who hated change. My Uncle Joe owned an upholstery shop as well. His and my aunt's home was so beautifully decorated; the welcoming atmosphere made it a delight to gather there with family and friends. In my teen years, I gravitated toward magazines such as *House Beautiful* and *Architectural Digest*, drawn to the design from front to back, and would often visit furniture and antique stores—neither behavior seemed typical for a teen at that time. As I readied myself for college, I found there were not many schools offering interior design programs at the time, so I focused on fine art, commercial art and business classes.



It wasn't until 1993 that I entered the interior design program at Berkeley College, which had just opened its new campus in Bergen County, NJ. I was thrilled. The proximity of the school to my home gave me the ability to be the mom I wanted to be to my three children, while pursuing my dream career. It was more than I could ask for. So, with three kids, three years of school and the support of my husband and family, I was on my way—and 30 years later, I can genuinely say I still love what I do!

D+D: The home renovation and your uncle's shop seem like pivotal moments. Did they inspire you to pursue interior design?

Diane: My Uncle Joe was an accomplished upholsterer, and I adored seeing the transformation from worn and weathered to new and beautiful. It certainly inspired my mindset of reupholster, refinish and repurpose—a hallmark of my business.

The other major influence and inspiration was my Aunt Jan. Everyone has that one person in their lives who exudes style in an indescribable way, with classic effortlessness, that we mere mortals are in awe of. For me, it was Aunt Jan. She and my Uncle Bob lived in a 100-year-old Colonial with chestnut trim, tall windows, warm hardwood floors—it was stunning. There was one Thanksgiving dinner, hosted at their home, that is imprinted in my mind. The ambience was perfect—from the cabbage-rose wallcovering and





matching pinch-pleat drapery to the brass chandelier and crackling fire. Everything was in perfect harmony and contributed to the experience of that delicious meal. We sat around that dining table for hours, telling stories and enjoying each other's company. It was then that I truly understood that a well-designed home is not just a beautiful backdrop, but an active contribution to our lives—to how we live, work and entertain our family and friends.

D+D: What's in store for the next 10 years?

What is your dream accomplishment?

Diane: I hope to continue to design beautiful interiors for fabulous clients and inspire the next generation of interior designers. Our firm supports the student design community through internships, mentoring and the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID), and continuing that legacy is important.

My involvement in ASID has enabled me to be a better designer, leader and business owner. I've enjoyed many positions over the years in ASID leadership, including president, committee chair and parliamentarian. While I'm stepping aside for the next generation of leadership in that organization, I'm always willing to lend a hand and get involved when the opportunity calls.

D+D: When you look back on your career, what in particular will signal success for you?

Diane: Being in this business as long as I have, I've had the opportunity to redesign and update my clients' homes. I always lean on the principles that are foundational to my career—repurpose, reupholster, refinish—while integrating new pieces for an updated ambience. Working with clients and seeing their children grown up with children of their own is a rewarding connection to have in this deeply personal work we do.

The most difficult part of what we do is when the project is complete, and we quietly moonwalk out the front door. It's a bittersweet moment, as we've formed such close relationships with our clients during the design process. If I look back and I can still say the same thing when it's my time to moonwalk out of the office for the last time, it'll have been a success. ♦

Resource: Diane Durocher Interiors: Diane Durocher, Lead Designer, Ramsey, NJ , 201.825.3832; dianedurocherinteriors.com

CHRISTOPHER SHEA





D **+D: Did you always want to be in the construction industry?**
Chris: Interestingly, there is a photo of me standing in front of the Christmas tree when I was five years old, beaming with happiness and holding a hammer. So, I was at least that young when my parents recognized that spark and interest within me.

I suppose you could say that building and creating is inherent to who I am. I was always fascinated by construction as a child. Having grown up in Connecticut, I built tree forts in the woods, dams in the streams, and bridges to cross brooks. I truly enjoyed working with my hands and being outside.

D+D: How lucky to have the spark so early! How did that interest transition into your career today?

Chris: In high school, I had the most wonderful mentor—Mr. Bacon. He was the wood shop teacher, and I found him so inspiring. I took wood shop and drafting classes with him all four years. In the summers, I worked as a carpenter and could always be found tinkering with things—anything to build. I would even pop into local developments and start talking with the contractors, carpenters and tradesmen, just to learn about what they did. I received a bachelor's degree in construction management, and after college I pursued a career as a project manager. In the Hartford area, I worked on Class A commercial offices and retail and institutional projects. I really got my feet wet working on the University of Hartford University Center; it was complex and intricate, and I loved it. Luckily, my boss saw something in me, and he allowed me to take charge of that project. I was this young guy managing all these experienced construction professionals. He was an amazing mentor who provided opportunities for my growth while teaching me about the business of construction. I worked there for a few years, and then at a couple of other construction companies, where I gained valuable experience before I decided I was ready to do it on my own in 1998.

We're now in our 27th year of business, and we specialize in high-end residential remodels and additions and new custom homes.





D+D: Twenty-seven years—incredible. What’s the secret to keeping the momentum for so long?

Chris: Our focus is customer service and getting the job done in a no-nonsense, efficient way. That focus extends to our transparency practices—we’re very open and honest with our clients, and we respect their wants and needs when it comes to their space. It’s important to us that our clients enjoy the process and love the final product. We take the time to understand their lifestyle, and we leverage our expertise to tailor the construction process to their exact needs, and to optimize their space for their desired living experience.

We also have a stellar team that is skilled, knowledgeable and diligent in their efforts; this company wouldn’t be successful without them. We’re collaborative, and I endeavor to empower them to help me make this company the best it can be. When your team is treated well, your clients are treated well, and it shows what your culture is. We’ve worked hard to create a great workplace for our team, and I think that shines through in the work we do.

D+D: What does the next 10 years look like to you?

Chris: By the end of that time frame, I hope to be looking at retirement and passing the company off to the next generation to take the company along for the next 30 years. Between now and then, I have a few key areas of focus for myself and the company. The first is keeping up with technology. It’s constantly evolving, and we’re at the forefront of all the new technology. We weave it into the fabric of our homes, and they are as up-to-date as possible. We know our clients are looking for optimized homes—providing modern conveniences and energy savings—and technology can help them get there. Another focus is giving back to the community. I’m vice president and treasurer of the Fairfield County Home Builders Association, a member of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry, and a certified green professional. I genuinely enjoy giving back. For all I’ve learned from my mentors—from those carpenters on the construction sites in high school, my first boss who gave me a shot, and everyone in between—I feel very fortunate and wish to share that experience and knowledge with the next generation.

It also occurs to me that there might be an opportunity to teach part-time at a local college, and educate the next generation of builders with real-life experience—not just with a textbook. I’m passionate about the work I do, and to share that would be a tremendous opportunity. ♦

Resource: DOMUS Constructors, LLC : Chris Shea, Managing Partner, Norwalk, CT , 203.852.6789; domusllc.com



PETER SCIARRETTA



D +D: We understand that Hemingway Construction is a family business. Please tell us about its history.

Peter: My father, Sal Sciarretta, was born and raised in Italy. Even at the young age of 10, he had a fond appreciation for stonecutting and masonry. He came to America to have a better life. He received an education and worked as an engineer at Clairol by day, and in the home building industry by night, before founding Hemingway Construction at the young age of 32.

It still amazes me that he started this company with the simple intention of providing for his family, yet now it is a three-generation company that will continue to provide opportunity for our family and many others for years to come. That young immigrant boy from Italy has certainly accomplished all he set out to do and more, in having a good life here.

Dad passed away three years ago now, and it is never lost on us that we are carrying on his legacy. I always joke that if I can only learn what my father forgets, I'll be just fine. He was a man of integrity and a quality control freak, which is the highest of compliments in our industry. It's because of him that we build houses the way we do—with passion, top-tier craftsmanship, and an attention to detail that's often missing in the building industry these days. We miss him, and we're grateful for the family he led and the company he built.

D+D: Was joining the family business always the dream for you?

Peter: As a young child, I remember going to job sites with my dad, so I always had an appreciation for the process and warm memories of that time with him. Later, I went to Babson College, MA, for business, without a particular direction, but having been inspired by the company he built. When I graduated, it just so happened that Hemingway was awarded the largest project of my dad's career: a 28,000-square-foot home—and he was looking for staff members. I rose to the occasion and joined the team. As dad said, I was educated and now I needed to learn. I worked with architects, designers, subcontractors and everyone in between to learn the ins and outs. I committed my heart and soul to that project for the better part of three years.





I recall leaving that job site energized—invoigorated by the creativity the build took.

That's when it sank in—we're not just building houses, we're building the backdrop against which these families will experience their lives. From vibrant parties to quiet movie nights and everything between, these homes need to be built well and built right. This business—it's very personal. I leave a little piece of myself behind with every project. I felt inspired that day—I was all in, and have been with the company ever since.

D+D: How has your journey influenced how you do business?

Peter: We're a family business, and families respect one another and are responsible to each other. We adopt the same approach with our clients: we are honest and transparent, and we take ownership of our role in a project.

My father always said, "If man can make it, man can fix it." When a project is under construction, the buck stops with us, and we don't deflect that. The architects and engineers are the masterminds, the subcontractors are the sculptors of space, and we bridge the gap of this masterpiece with effective communication.

Nothing is black and white in what we do. We're always learning and always educating—with our clients, the architects, the craftsmen—it's inherent to our process. If a detail can be interpreted in a couple of different ways, we address it with everyone and facilitate communication to achieve the best solution.

D+D: What dreams do you have for the future of your career and company?

Peter: The big dream is—like my father—to have a succession plan, so maybe it becomes a four-generation company. The way we work now, we're a finely tuned machine, where every cog in the wheel knows just how to work and properly support the greater whole. It's important that legacy always continues. Aside from that, we love the work we do and we love our clients. The biggest compliment we get is when a client calls us and says, "You built my home 20 years ago—boy, was that fun. Let's do it again." If we can continue that experience for us and our clients, it will have been a career worth its weight in gold. ♦

Resource: Hemingway Construction: Peter Sciarretta, Chief Executive Officer, Greenwich, CT, 203.625.0566; hemingwayconstruction.com

COURTNEY CHESSEN

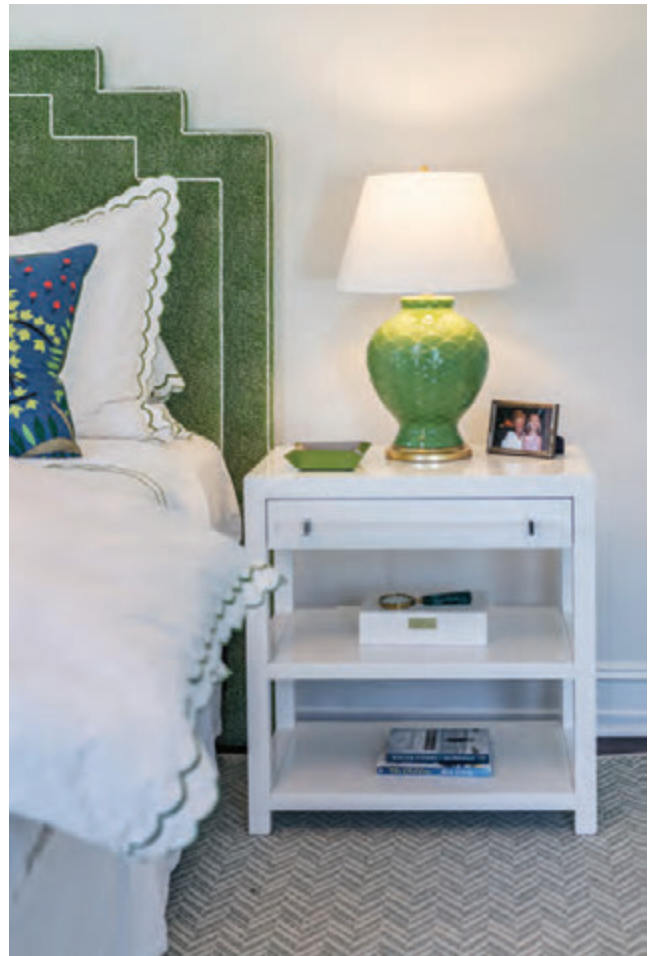




D +D: How did your journey in the interior design industry evolve?

Courtney: I had been working on Wall Street in New York and Buenos Aires for about 10 years, and planned to return and attend Columbia Business School. But over that summer, I took some classes at the New York School of Interior Design, and fell in love with the industry. We had moved to Darien, CT, and started having kids. I began to do a bit of interior design on my own, but felt strongly I needed to apprentice. You don't learn this business in school, and there are really no rules.

My ex-husband got a job in Chicago, and as I was walking my child to school, I would pass this very high-end boutique. I walked in one day with the thought of working there, maybe getting a discount and learning as I went. Right place, right time—it just so happens the designer had just lost her assistant. I worked as her assistant for two-and-a-half years before I felt ready to go off on my own.





My partner and I opened a shop in a nearby town in 2015. It was doing well, but the design business really took off from word of mouth. I fell in love with the whole project approach—plumbing, hardware, millwork, materials. There are so many aspects that bring a different experience each day—it's very satisfying.

Right before the pandemic, we opened a retail store in Darien, hoping I could design here and at the store in Winnetka, IL, once my kids were grown. I moved back to Rowayton, CT, this September, and will be opening my design studio. I have a great store in Chicago and lots of clients, so I will go back and forth, and be able to maintain my great wholesale pricing. I am loving the design work we're able to do here, and the clients are wonderful.

D+D: Wall Street to window treatments—what a shift! Were you always a creative person, or was this a new endeavor for you?

Courtney: Creativity was always a piece of who I am. As a child, I built my own Barbie house and used all the wallpaper scraps to decorate it. I did have designers in my life—a friend of my mom's and my aunt—so I've had a knack for bringing together fabrics, colors and wallpapers for as long as I can remember. That has grown over the years, but I think the key is the strong background I have in finance, which helps me run my business efficiently and spend more time on the design side.

D+D: How has your experience influenced your perspective on curating a home design?

Courtney: Growing up in a traditional house has instilled in me a desire to create homes where every room can be utilized and still be beautiful. It's not about having a fancy dining room that you can't go into, or a living room that can only be pristine. We work with families with real lives, and the spaces need to be family- and user-friendly.

We use a lot of neutral, stain-proof big pieces, so there is flexibility in the accessories over time. This allows a space to grow and evolve with the family. Whether it's through color or style, there is a lot of opportunity to add that personal touch as time goes by, when the more permanent pieces are neutral.

This desire for a livable or relatable experience goes beyond the home. It is translated into every interaction and the design process with our clients. We're not pretentious—we are relatable, communicative and accessible. Communication of the process, budget, expectations and experience is fundamental to how we work. Design is fun—it's inherently a fun thing to do, and I want our clients to enjoy the process, too.

D+D: What do you look forward to over the next 10 years of your career?

Courtney: Certainly, growing the design business in Darien and the surrounding area. We've built a brand for ourselves, we've built a great team in both locations, and we're positioned for growth at this point. I've been away from Connecticut for 12 years, but have a lot of great connections, colleagues and friends there. Knowing that many families move from the city to have that suburban experience in Connecticut fits what we do, so I'm looking forward to it. We work with most of our clients in stages, and end up working with them for years on their starter houses, their next house and even their second homes all over the country. ♦

Resource: Mandarin Home: Courtney Chessen, Owner & Lead Designer, Darien, CT, 203.767.3303; mandarinhome.com

TARRYTOWN HOUSE ESTATE

JEWEL OF THE HUDSON VALLEY

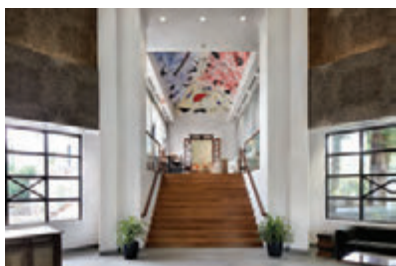
WRITTEN BY SHEHLA LUCANERA

Nestled in Westchester County, NY, on the eastern bank of the Hudson River, the charming village of Tarrytown has enchanted opinion leaders and people of influence for many decades. Washington Irving, author of the short story “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” bought a home in Tarrytown in 1835 and described the captivating beauty of the lush surroundings in poetic verse.

The true masterpiece of the Hudson Valley, however, is the celebrated Tarrytown House Estate, built in the 1820s and known for hosting intellectual gatherings starting in the 1920s. Thanks to its then owner, philanthropist Mary Duke Biddle, the Tarrytown property became a popular meeting place for movers and shakers to exchange ideas within the estate’s ornate drawing rooms. Eventually, Tarrytown House Estate was established as the first executive conference center in the U.S., and today celebrates 60 years of accommodating vibrant and outstanding social gatherings, cultural events and corporate functions. Standing as an architectural wonder amid undulating greenery, the Tarrytown House Estate has developed into a spectacular center of unsurpassed hospitality. With luxury dining at its famous Goosefeather restaurant, expertly hosted weddings on the scenic grounds and elegant hotel accommodations, the Tarrytown House Estate may be New York’s best kept secret.

Exceptional gatherings are hosted here throughout the year by companies from around the world. These organizations recognize the importance of providing a perfect setting for a winning conference, confident that the elaborate surroundings will encourage team building and boost





optimism, confidence and productivity among their employees. The luxurious grounds and comfortable accommodations put guests at ease and promote dynamic conversation and connection, while the talented Tarrytown staff draws on its many years of experience to guarantee that each conference is flawlessly executed.

Tarrytown House Estate is noted for hosting magnificent, picture-perfect wedding events. Guests who have never before visited the beautiful venue quickly fall in love with the storied grounds and architectural marvels from the “Golden Age of Glamour.” While the spellbinding location and ambiance set the stage for fairytale ceremonies, the wedding experts who work at Tarrytown House Estate ensure that the magical memories will last for generations. The estate’s renowned Goosefeather restaurant is a culinary phenomenon, led by Chef Dale Talde, who has appeared on the reality TV shows *Top Chef* and *Chopped*. Talde’s exquisite Hong Kong-inspired Cantonese delicacies include succulent noodles, juicy dumplings and irresistible family-style barbecue. Unable to secure a table at this highly desirable hot spot? Order room service to feast on crispy chili-garlic soft-shell crab and other delights from the comfort of your private suite.

Whether you’re a wedding invitee or a history enthusiast taking in the pleasures of this iconic locale, the ultimate relaxation experience awaits you at the end of the day. The Estate King Guestrooms, Suites, King House Mansion and private Cottage Rooms all provide sophisticated decor, exceptional attention to detail and every imaginable comfort. Located in the lovely Hudson Valley, only 25 miles from the bustle of Midtown Manhattan, the Tarrytown House Estate offers architectural beauty surrounded by a picturesque landscape. For successful business conferences, memorable weddings, and luxurious dining and hospitality experiences, the historic estate is a jewel of a destination that surpasses all visitor expectations. ♦

Resource: Tarrytown House Estate, Tarrytown, NY ; 914.591.8200;
tarrytownhouseestate.com



TOP-FLIGHT SERVICE

Apollo Jets offers the utmost in comfort, convenience and safety for air travelers.

WRITTEN BY SHEHLA LUCANERA

The acclaimed private jet broker Apollo Jets offers its clients the perfect balance of scrupulous dedication to safety and the highest level of personalized luxury service. Need a private aircraft to fly to a domestic or international wedding, evacuate due to an approaching storm, or arrive in style at a corporate retreat? One call to Dean Giasi at Apollo Jets will have you and your team boarding in as little as two hours, with a simple hold on your credit card.

CEO Al Palagonia and President Dean Giasi, who head the team at Apollo Jets, have seen their firm grow in popularity and prominence, thanks to its meticulous customer service and rigorous safety standards. Indeed, the service is often sought out by celebrities, renowned musicians and professional athletes. Private aircrafts are not just for the famous: they are accessible to anyone wishing to enjoy a luxury flight experience. Apollo Jets expertly connects clients with private aircrafts of all sizes, and can accommodate one person, a small wedding party or a large corporate group. When chartering a private flight, the client maintains optimal privacy and enjoys flexible flight timing and privileged services—all while knowing the aircraft has exceeded all flight safety standards of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

Apollo Jets is proudly certified by global aviation safety leaders ARGUS International and Wyvern Consulting, guaranteeing safety standards that surpass FAA requirements. The difference is in the details, explains Dean. “Apollo Jets requires twin-engine aircraft for all flights, plus two pilots always, no matter how small the charter,” he says. These non-negotiable operation standards squarely put client safety first, providing



DEAN GIASI



total relaxation for clients during their travels.

Unapologetic regarding pricing of the service, Dean maintains that cheaper private aircraft can certainly be brokered elsewhere, but Apollo Jets agents strive to deliver the best service on all levels—offering peace of mind, which can be hard to put a price on.

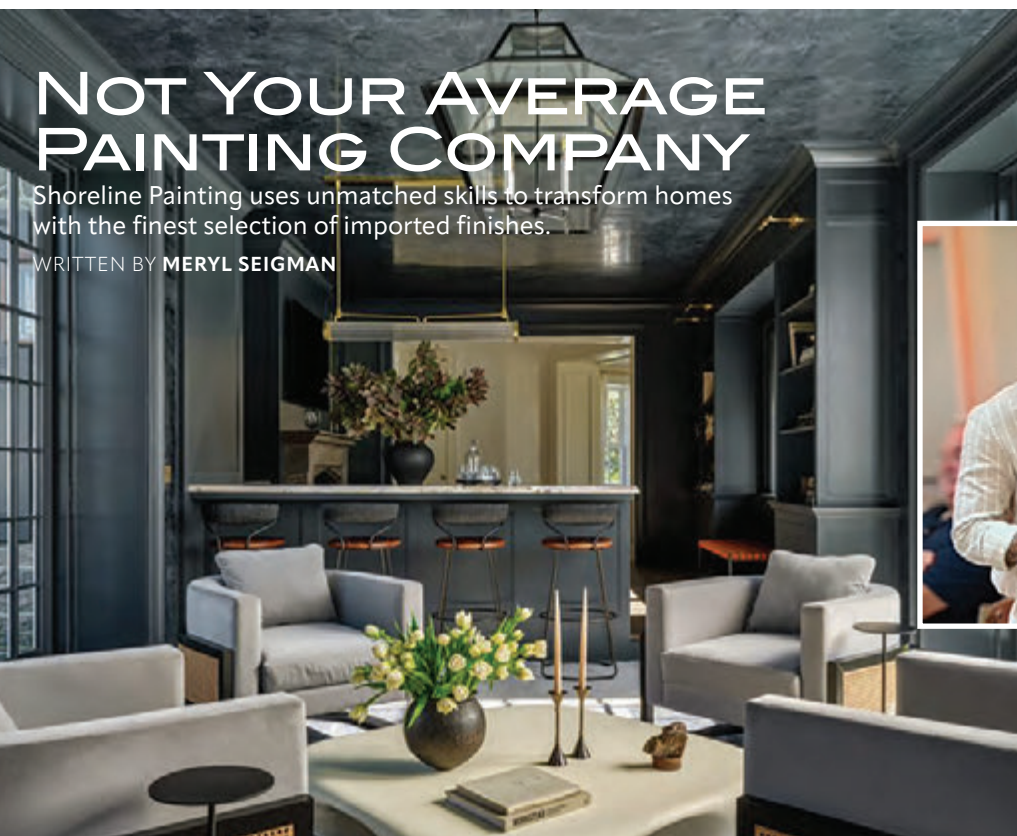
Private jets are a wonderful flight option that has revolutionized travel. They save you time while ensuring your privacy and keeping your group together. Personalized service and flexibility tailor the flight to your schedule. The company's booking professionals can help you secure the private aircraft you want, which range from helicopters to light jets to jumbo jets. A direct call ensures you speak with someone to help broker your luxury flight, making the booking process as simple and enjoyable as possible. ♦

Resource: Apollo Jets, Al Palagonia, CEO, Dean Giasi, President; New York, NY; 917.567.0184; apollojets.com

NOT YOUR AVERAGE PAINTING COMPANY

Shoreline Painting uses unmatched skills to transform homes with the finest selection of imported finishes.

WRITTEN BY MERYL SEIGMAN



You own an exceptional home—it deserves an exceptional paint job. Whether your project is indoors or out, the company to call is Shoreline Painting & Drywall, Inc., of Norwalk, CT.

With 50 years of experience in the business, Shoreline is dedicated to providing the highest quality of interior and exterior painting services.

We caught up with Michael Italiano, the company's vice president of sales and marketing, who has been with Shoreline for more than 13 years. Michael revealed what makes Shoreline the go-to company for luxury home finishes, including first-class painting, home maintenance, Venetian plaster and other white-glove services.

Setting the Standard

Shoreline Painting specializes in high-profile home improvement projects that demand particular attention to detail and the finest quality of products. From the initial meeting to the final consultation, the company approaches each project with a comprehensive mindset, overseeing every phase to deliver outstanding results time and again.

As a Fine Paints of Europe Certified Master Painter, Shoreline offers a superior selection of imported paints and finishes. "Our company distinguishes itself from other residential painters by specializing in high-end, luxury finishes," says Michael. "Our team of painters is not only highly trained, but is also exceptionally skilled in a variety of techniques, providing a range of specialty paint finishes that are applied to perfection. We understand that a top-notch paint job starts with meticulous preparation and requires expert application."

Staying Current

Shoreline prides itself on staying abreast of the latest trends and

technologies in the field, which are constantly evolving. "Our painting expertise truly sets the benchmark for cutting-edge trends in high-end residential painting," says Michael. "Whether it's high-gloss finishes, Venetian plasters or any emerging techniques, Shoreline leads the way in delivering exceptional quality. As new trends, ideas or colors emerge, we carefully evaluate them to ensure we fully understand the latest developments and meet the demands."

Strong Client Relationships

Another key to the company's success is its close collaboration with its clients. "A beautiful finish is meaningless if it doesn't align with what the client truly wants," Michael explains. "We start by taking the time to sit down with our customers to fully understand their vision. Next, we go through a thorough sampling process to ensure the finish and color are exactly right. Once we have a clear game plan and all paint variables are decided, we execute the job with precision, which is the hallmark of Shoreline Painting."

Committed to the Bigger Picture

The company is as attentive to the outside world as it is to its discerning clients. Michael describes its mission by saying, "Our commitment is twofold: first, we prioritize using responsibly sourced products from trusted brands. Second, we ensure that everyone on our team adheres to best practices in executing all procedures." Shoreline offers high-end clients a dedication to quality, an eye for innovation, and an unwavering commitment to their satisfaction, ensuring their homes receive the exceptional care they deserve. ♦

Resource: Shoreline Painting & Drywall, Inc., Michael Italiano, Vice President of Sales/Marketing; Norwalk, CT; 203.302.1086; shorelinepaintingct.com

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concept to completion



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INTERIOR DESIGN | PROJECT MANAGEMENT



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