

DESIGNERS CHOOSE THEIR FAVORITES

SEVEN ELITE DECORATORS TELL THE STORIES BEHIND THE INTERIORS THEY'RE PROUDEST OF. BY ARTIS HENDERSON

WHEN WE SET OUT to showcase the finest interiors in Southwest Florida, we realized: Who better to ask about great design than the designers themselves? We spoke to seven leaders in the area's design industry and asked them to share with us their favorite rooms that they have designed. Here, we give you seven exceptional rooms designed by seven standout designers, highlighting some of the best residential style along the Gulfshore.

PAMELA DURKIN of Pamela Durkin Designs selected an open-plan kitchen and great room she designed last year in Pelican Marsh.

"I really loved how it came out," Durkin says of the space. "This project started much smaller. We were going to change only the kitchen island and a master bath, but it ended up being a top-to-bottom, inside-outside renovation. So many people walk into this house and say it looks like brand-new construction."

Some of the architectural details Durkin introduced include columns in the front entryway to create the feel of having walked into a foyer, dark-stained wood beams in the kitchen to draw the eye upward, and a 300-bottle refrigerated wine wall.

"The clients are really into wine," Durkin says. "We were going to put in a smaller

50-bottle wine refrigerator, but then I convinced them that because wine was such a part of their life we should make it a feature. I like people to think about how they're living and to manifest that into some strong design elements. The wine wall doesn't take up a lot of room, and they are able to display the bottles different ways that look interesting. It's a point of conversation when the clients entertain friends."

Durkin also created a small seating area with a hammered-metal coffee table, comfortable piped swivel chairs and custom-printed photography.

"The gentleman is a jazz musician and a writer, and there was this big blank wall," Durkin says. "I suggested something strong there, so we added a molding detail and three large pieces of art, each 5 feet wide, 10 feet →





tall. They're really strong; we don't do anything halfway. The images of blue smoke are tied back to old smoky jazz bars from a long time ago. They're so beautiful and stunning, you see them from every room in the house. People stop and stare at it. We put those swivel chairs there because that's just a few steps from the bar, and they can sit there, hang out, have some nice conversation. Plus, it's the first thing you see when you walk in the door."

So, how did Durkin take her clients from wanting their kitchen island replaced to having their entire house redesigned?

"My part in a project is to make the outcome better than it would have been if I were not involved. When I walk into a space, I can see the final design already done. I feel it is my responsibility to make the client aware of ideas that will make a space as wonderful as it can be."



KIRA KRÜMM, principal designer of Koastal Design Group, says master bedrooms are her favorite rooms to design.

“The bedroom is a place where we relax and get away,” Krümm says. “It’s our own little personal oasis and sanctuary. To me, it’s a very special romantic space where you can recharge and relax. From a creative standpoint, it’s a very personal, private space, so when my clients hire me to design their bedroom I consider it a real honor.”

One of the reasons she loves focusing her design energies on the master bedroom is her deep appreciation for textiles.

“I especially love designing bedding,” Krümm says. “In the master bedroom, there

is opportunity for creativity with what I call casual bedding. People want an ensemble that is livable, that they can sleep with and enjoy. That’s why I created my Koastal Kollektion line that specializes in livable luxury bedding. Our sheets are made out of wood pulp, which is not only very soft but a sustainable material. Typically, when people shop for bed sheets they want the highest thread count they can find, but in Southwest Florida we need a lower thread count. A thread count of 400 or higher is going to be too heavy and won’t breathe as well as a 200- to 400-count.”

In designing the master bedroom for this Marco Island home, Krümm drew on her own professional design philosophies.

“I think a bedroom should be very yin,”

Krümm says. “A serene, peaceful, quiet place. In this master bedroom, as with most bedrooms I design, the color scheme is neutral and calming. There’s an earthy organic texture in the oak wood flooring, and the rugs are woven with leather and jute. There’s a beautiful texture in the wall covering with its metallic backing and a raffia overlay. It’s very pretty and has a reflective quality but with also an organic texture.”

And her biggest inspiration? The natural world of the Gulfshore.

“I always make sure that I pull inspiration from outdoor surroundings—from the sky, from the sea, from the sand. That’s why people are here. They love the beach and the sunshine and the beautiful blue sky. It makes sense.”



DWAYNE BERGMANN of Dwayne Bergmann Interiors selected the kitchen area from a home in Gulf Harbor.

“I picked this as my favorite because it combines light, dark and a serene backdrop of sea salt. It has a mix of materials—high-gloss white pulls, exposed cut-rock backsplash, stainless steel and glass doors—but it’s not busy. It’s very calming; it’s very quiet. It’s simple yet luxurious.”

The design request came from a recently widowed client who had purchased the home with her former husband. It was decorated in a traditional Mediterranean/Tuscan style.

“They had the typical polished travertine, the arched columns, heavy drapery, faux mar-

ble, vines—the whole nine yards,” Bergmann says.

The client told him, “I don’t feel like my home is where I belong after my husband passed. I need a calmer living environment that feels like home.”

She wanted an open floor plan so that she could see the water from the front of the house to the back, and in place of the old Mediterranean style she requested a calm, quiet space with a touch of modern. With that directive in mind, Bergmann chose a sea salt gray for the walls and a neutral for the wood tile on the floor. He mixed in dark tiger wood with a high gloss, white polished stainless and glass cabinetry, and an accent color of soft violet.

“To this day I visit her frequently,” Berg-

mann says, “and every time I walk in, it makes you want to exhale and relax. It’s something about the sea salt with the lavender, light violets and creams, that gives that effect.”

One of the redesigned kitchen’s most notable features is a large marble slab specifically for making pasta.

“In addition to ‘serene and comfortable,’” Bergmann says, “the client told me, ‘My Italian background requires me to pursue the art of making fresh pasta. My only requirement is that I have a slab of marble that my friends can sit around, and we can have a bottle of wine and I can roll my noodles out.’”

It took a crane to bring the marble slab into the house, but the client makes sure she puts it to good use.



DESIGNER GLORIA BLACK of Freestyle Interiors chose this space from a home in Naples' Quail West Golf & Country Club. The couple who commissioned the design already owned a home in the community, but they were retiring and this new abode would be their dream home.

"I like to get a feel for my clients, to spend a little time with them at the beginning," Black says. "I pay attention to their personalities, their individual styles, even what they wear."

This couple, she says, were modern but also a touch classic.

"Like a high-end luxury vehicle filled with

amazing leather and wood finishes, extremely sophisticated and warm. I wanted each room to be unique. Since this is their dream home and retirement space, I knew that they'd be entertaining a lot of friends."

With that in mind, Black designed a bar space that feels like a commercial setting, drawing on her commercial design experience and background in hospitality design. The bar connects to the great room, which has the kitchen and leisure room as well as a dining area. Because all of the spaces are joined, Black sought to distinguish each one.

"I made sure that each space had a different

but relatable ceiling feature," she says. "The kitchen has floating beams, the leisure room has a custom textured frieze, and the dining room has tiered drywall."

For the bar itself, Black took the wood flooring used throughout the house and wrapped it around the bar.

"Everything is very geometric," she says. "The bar appears to project from its surfaces, from the wood-wrapped wall and ceiling to the floating cabinets and shelves. There's a two-tone look with bright whites mixed with a couple of different stains. It's inviting and sophisticated."





LEILI FATEMI of Leili Design Studio has chosen the bar area of a living and entertainment room.

“He’s a young client,” Fatemi says of the 30-something bachelor who requested the bar, “and he asked for a nice room for entertaining friends.”

For the bar’s focal point, an acrylic column layered with clear panels and colored LED lights, Fatemi drew inspiration from an earlier design.

“I was working in the Design Center on a project for an old condo, and the kitchen had these old iron columns that were required for support. The clients asked me, ‘Can you come up with something to cover the columns and use as a night light?’ I was thinking and I was sketching some ideas, and I had a bunch of paper in my hand and I started layering them and I said, ‘Oh, my gosh, imagine each layer of this paper would illuminate and stack on top of each other and cover the whole column.’”

When her young client saw a sketch of that column on Fatemi’s website, he requested something similar in his own home.

“I did not have plans at first to build a bar there,” Fatemi says, “and then when we got to the point that we remodeled everything I said, ‘Let me think how I can use that column somehow in this room.’ I started sketching, and I asked, ‘What about an L-shaped bar and I can use the column in the corner?’ He told me, ‘Leili, do whatever you have to do. I just want that column.’”

The bar itself is made of concrete with acrylic inlays and LED lights beneath the clear panes, and there are three silver pendant lights that hang from the drop ceiling as a way to connect the top and bottom of the space. The column can be adjusted to a range of colors—blue, purple, yellow, red and white—and is also set on a dimmer.

Fatemi chose this space as one of her favorites because of its uniqueness.

“One of the things that my client said to me a few times was, ‘I want something that no one else has in Southwest Florida,’” she says.



JENNIFER STEVENS of the Romanza interior design firm has chosen a living room in a home that she designed in the Cortile neighborhood of the Mediterra community in Naples.

“The big inspiration was the size of the room,” Stevens says. “It’s very spacious, and because we had media addressed in other areas, I saw this as a primary entertaining space. The room is open to the kitchen, and there’s a lot of room for mingling at a cocktail party or enjoying more of a family night with parents, kids and grandkids piling on the sectionals.”

Stevens chose a light color palette with large-format 24-by-48-inch porcelain tiles on the floor, white walls and furniture in neutral tones. She also strove for organic tex-

ture details by including hammered bronze sculptures in the style of Giacometti and placed them in front of walls outfitted with a muted metallic finish wall covering.

“One of the things that I was going for was a mix of textures—the hammered bronze sculptures, the wood inlay on the walls, the upholstery—and a range of finishes to give interest and visual texture in a space that is largely very light and very white,” Stevens says.

Originally from Michigan, Stevens has spent more than 30 years in the design business. Her work is now focused exclusively on residential spaces. She selected this room as one of her favorites because it fits her own aesthetic—even if that isn’t always the goal of a good designer.

“Personally, I like a more sophisticated, contemporary look,” Stevens says, “but part of my design philosophy is that my job is to help clients interpret how they want to live. For some people, that might be more contemporary. For some people, that might be more of a Florida look. I have the opportunity to create a wide range of looks and color schemes. I recently walked into a former client’s home that I did eight years ago, and I’d forgotten how colorful it was. My normal M.O. is not a lot of color on big surfaces. Yet the space felt really nice and timeless. It was a perfect example of what I love about what I do—helping clients synthesize a life of bigger homes and travel down to the most meaningful mementos of a lifetime.”

WHEN NAPLES-BASED designer Renée Gaddis received the commission for this room in the Aqua high-rise condominium in Pelican Isle, she found inspiration in an unexpected place: the art markets of High Point, North Carolina. There, at the Charles Harold Gallery, she discovered the two pieces that grace one wall of this living room and became the stimulus for the entire space.

“This room is so calm and soothing,” Gaddis says. “As soon as you walk in, it’s like, ‘Wow, I want to sit on every piece of furniture in there.’ It’s beautiful and it’s comfortable.”

Gaddis achieved this calming effect through tone-on-tone neutrals in a variety of materials and textiles. When it came time to select the furniture pieces for the room, she decided to incorporate works from fellow independent designers and furniture makers, such as Bradley Furniture and Kravet.

“The concrete and metal cocktail table is from Bradley Furniture,” Gaddis says. “She’s a designer who started her own business several years ago. We both are in similar positions—we set out on our own, and we’re the main designers at our firms. I love purchasing from her. And the Kravet family has been such

a supporter of Renée Gaddis Interiors. Their dueling daybeds fit perfectly with the Bradley side tables.”

When Gaddis discovered the pieces of art in High Point, she sensed immediately that they would be the right match for this room.

“I had already designed another place for this couple, and I knew their style well,” Gaddis says. “I felt like those two pieces of artwork would be perfect for them as a couple.”

She was right. They loved both the art and the overall aesthetic of the room. So did Gaddis.

“I was just as in love with this space as they were,” she says. “I wish I could live here, too.”

