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A Life of Design: Interior Designer Makes Space Personal

Leisah Woldoff Jun 13, 2019



Valerie Borden founded Chimera Interior

Design in 1996. Opposite page: The historic lobby at Castle Hot Springs Resort, which dates to the late 1800s. Chimera Interior

Design gutted and completely designed the interior, including lighting, wall paneling, flooring, all furniture, art and accessories.

Photos courtesy of Chimera Interior Design

Before starting Chimera Interior Design in 1996, Valerie Borden collected vintage clothing and period furniture for several years, leading her to develop an appreciation for detail and workmanship.

Her work is highlighted in numerous publications, including “Better Homes and Gardens,” “Phoenix Home & Garden” and multiple architecture and home style magazines. Her projects have spanned several industries, including hospitality, retail stores, healthcare and even yachts.

Those who have visited Congregation Beth Tefillah’s new home in Scottsdale may have noticed her work, as she created the full interior plan for the facility, which was completed last year.

“The challenge was to retain the small community warmth and close-knit feeling, while envisioning the multiple uses and future growth of the facility,” she said of the project. “The most rewarding design is in the main sanctuary, where I was able to blend contemporary design with a sense of history and spirituality.”

She says this is one of two significant and meaningful projects she completed last year. The second was a three-year remodel of Castle Hot Springs Resort, a project that won her an ASID Design Excellence Award for a Historic Space.

This 130-year-old property, located just west of Phoenix, includes buildings dating back to 1896 as well as new construction, she noted. “I conceived of and completed design and install of the entire resort, including the main lodge, bar, restaurant and all guest rooms.”

What do you think would surprise people most about the interior design industry?

“Portrayals of interior design on TV are mostly inaccurate. Our work goes much deeper than the selection of colors and pillows. Interior designers must have in-depth knowledge of building systems, furniture engineering and construction, lighting design and human interactions within the built space.

“We strive to create environments that give a sense of well-being. Our interiors are subtle, comfortable, user-friendly, well-lit and built to stand the test of time.

“In many instances, great interior design goes unnoticed. We take this as a compliment, as interior design is about the end user, not the designer.”

How has the industry changed over the years?

“The meteoric growth of the internet over the past 25 years has completely changed both how I do business and how the general public completes projects on their own.

“In the olden days, I kept hundreds of samples and catalogs in the office. I also made use of local design showrooms. Now I go to trade shows once or twice a year to see products in person and do everything else online. My office is a fraction of the size, but my options have no limits.

“The internet has also empowered the general public to research and purchase furniture, art and accessories on their own. I view this as a good thing. Not everyone has the budget to hire a professional, however, they still deserve to live and work in a pleasing and productive space.”

What do you wish everyone knew about interior design?

- “My first piece of advice is to relax and enjoy the process. Let your design evolve and don’t force decisions.”
- “Don’t ask too many people for their opinions. Typically, their answers are based on their priorities and lifestyles. Their intentions are good, but don’t necessarily apply to your situation and can complicate the project”.
- “‘Buy the best and cry once.’ Yes, quality furniture can be expensive, but it will stand the test of time. All too often, we prioritize budget over quality. In many cases, after a short time the low budget pieces begin to deteriorate. Having shabby furniture defeats the purpose of creating a beautiful interior.”

What do you attribute to your success?

“Our focus is client-centered focus. We create interiors highlighting the occupants, not the design firm. We strive to educate and empower our clients, enabling them to be a central part of the design process. We take budgets and timelines very seriously. Above all, we create stunning and timeless interiors!”

What professional or personal

organizations are you involved with?

“I am a member of the American Society of Interior Designers and sit on the board of Congregation Beth Tefillah. Being active in the community is important to me.”

What’s your favorite part about what you do?

“My favorite thing about what I do is the fact that after almost 25 years, I still look forward to going to work every day. Each client and project is unique, encouraging constant learning and growth professionally and personally. I also love my clients! Interior design is a very personalized

profession, and as I get to know my customers, they begin to feel like extended family.

“My design is about the people using the space, not just the space. I take this responsibility very seriously and respect the difference good interior design can make in people’s lives.” **JN**

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