



Ana Donohue Interiors

THE DESIGNERS' CONNECTION

ADAPTING AND GROWING IN A CHAOTIC TIME

One of the keys to success as an interior designer is establishing a bond with your clients, getting to know them and how they live or work to ensure you create space that fits their needs. How do you do that in a world of quarantines, face masks and social distancing? Enterprising designers in different parts of the country have put their creativity to work to find solutions that enable them to go beyond surviving to grow their businesses during difficult times.

VIRTUAL CONNECTIONS

Zoom meetings, conference calls and virtual presentations are as much a part of the business as traditional mood boards and fabric samples for today's interior designers. Ana Donohue of Ana Donohue Interiors in Massachusetts and her team have adapted to the new normal by offering expanded remote design services to their clients and doing more advance prospecting and planning.

"We're up front with our clients that they might need to do more of the on-site management, but we can still make it work," says Donohue, who credits her staff with being on top of pivoting to work with clients remotely while still providing upscale service. "We tell our clients that we probably won't be able to show them as many pieces and that they have to be comfortable with not being able to sit on a piece first.

But we are fortunate to work with reps who provide tremendous feedback and send samples. I even learned about new programs to source fabric and I re-established a connection with a carpet company I haven't used in years and learned they have a whole new business concept."

Monet Masters of Forbes+Masters in Georgia concurs that virtual business was important to many of their clients, so they expanded the e-design aspect of their business.

"We've been fortunate to stay busy," she says. "We always offered virtual design services to clients who might not have a big budget or who just needed a revamp, but it was a fraction of the number we have now." >



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Forbes+Masters

CREATING CUSTOM OPTIONS

No matter the region of the country, clients are interested in updating spaces in their homes to be more useful for working or learning from home or, in some cases, more of a respite from the stress of the outside world. Both design firms have been tasked with creating home offices to accommodate more working professionals. “That’s probably the number one request whether it’s an interim project or a whole house renovation,” says Donohue.

Full-service design for Forbes+Masters is usually a whole home or at least three rooms, but Masters says while clients typically focused more on the common spaces in their homes before, they’re now paying more attention to spaces like turning a loft into a homework room or redoing their master bedroom to create a personal retreat.

SOURCING CREATIVITY

Finding product during a pandemic could be problematic, but it doesn’t have to be for designers willing to be resourceful. Tavia Forbes of Forbes+Masters says they have been making more custom pieces—which is one of their specialties—and communicating with clients to understand there could be delays with availability. She says they’ve been fortunate to have vendors at AmericasMart who are as eager to help as possible. “They want to be open and stay busy just like we do,” she says. “Other than some delays in availability, we haven’t had to change our sourcing.”

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ANA DONOHUE

For Donohue, sourcing goes beyond finding products for her design clients. She also has a small retail shop at the studio. “I love to find new artisans in Atlanta and smaller companies with unusual accessories. I found a wonderful vendor for linens that I couldn’t find at other Markets,” she says. “I’m looking forward to getting back to discovering those interesting items both for the shop and for people’s homes.”

FINDING SILVER LININGS

With all the chaos and change, there have been positives and beneficial takeaways, too. “I still came to the office every day, by myself, and followed up on leads and reached out to people who we’d been unable to work with before—a lot of work I just didn’t have time to do before,” says Donohue. “But it set us up for months to come with new contracts and helped me realize how important it is to take a breath and make time to focus on that aspect of the business.”

Masters and Forbes are focused on client relationships. Forbes says, “Everyone knows the design business is personal. You’re in your clients’ homes; you become connected. After the first shut down, our clients reached out to us to see how we were doing. Being reminded of that connection has been more important than ever.” ■

MEET THE DESIGNERS



Ana Donohue is the owner of Ana Donohue Interiors in Melrose, Mass. With a diverse background in travel, tourism and sales, she brings an eclectic perspective to her work.

Since 2002, she’s worked with her team on award-winning projects ranging from city residences to mountain top retreats, each with meticulous attention to detail and a desire to find unexpected elements that capture the essence of every client’s personal style.

For more information, visit anadonohueinteriors.com.



Tavia Forbes is principal interior designer with Forbes+Masters in Atlanta, Ga. After growing up in New York and receiving her degree from Stony Brook University, she pursued a career in event and floral design in Atlanta. She then transformed her love of design, construction and beautiful things into full time interior design working with commercial and residential projects across the country, connecting with each client on a personal level and jumping in to add a custom creation whenever she can.

Monet Masters is principal interior designer with Forbes+Masters in Atlanta, Ga. She brings a lifelong passion for organizing, staging and decorating to her career. After graduating from SCAD with a degree in Interior Design, she’s pursued commercial and residential projects as well as furniture design and project management, all while building a noteworthy portfolio of eclectic work garnering exposure in top national shelter and lifestyle publications.

For more information, visit forbesmasters.com.