



THE NJM DESIGN ADVISORY COUNCIL (clockwise from top left): Kingsley Knauss, Anna Maria Mannarino, Shella Rich, Meryl Stern, Diane Durocher, Karla Trincanello, Beth Insabella Walsh, Iveen Fromkin and Virginia Zonfrilli.

DESIGNING New Jersey

Our team of award-winning designers shares the latest wisdom on wine cellars, wallcoverings, master suites, kitchens—and that elusive niche to stash the doggie's leash.

BY LAUREN PAYNE

Each year, *New Jersey Monthly* brings together members of the New Jersey chapter of the American Society of Interior Designers for a roundtable discussion of home-design trends. At this year's roundtable—held over lunch at Boulevard Five72 in Kenilworth—nine award-winning interior designers shared their wisdom about trends in technology, green design, outdoor living, multifunctional kitchens and downsizing. Here's what they had to say.

NJM: How is the economy affecting the way you do business?

Anna Maria Mannarino: My clients are more careful than ever in making decisions. They are looking for deals if there are deals to be had.... Our job is to bring them good design, but we have to be very conscientious about the numbers. If I can show them a better deal, then I will do that.

Kingsley Knauss: I used to be ferociously loyal to particular vendors, but the client has gotten more savvy and they're doing a lot more pre-research before they're hiring a designer. They're doing online searches and getting to know the vendors. The consumer is Internet-savvy, so designers have to be more Internet-savvy.

We're finding new sources, but we're also reemphasizing the importance of hiring a designer. We're doing the master planning.

Beth Insabella Walsh: We must put forward to potential clients what good design can do for them. It's something we've never really had to talk about in the past.

Ivee Fromkin: [The client is] saving money by using a designer. You may have saved money finding that sofa in North Carolina, but you still have to put it in place.

Diane Durocher: I had a client who bought an entire living room and dining room of furniture off the Internet, and the scale was all wrong and she hated it. She came to me and I said, "Let's not re-do." I was

able to move the furniture around, and ultimately it wasn't so bad. With a little bit of tweaking we were able to fix it. So yes, I have clients who are doing an awful lot of shopping on their own. They're bringing me in as a consultant. And I have other clients who won't go out and buy a dishtowel without me.

Virginia Zonfrilli: What we do is a very specialized set of procedures to make sure their orders come in correctly. When you release that responsibility, there's lots of room for errors.

Sheila Rich: You have a design budget for a house, but then there are so many decisions to be made. It can be overwhelming. What we're selling is a design concept. We don't give ourselves a haircut, and it's not because we don't have

scissors. So there's a skill set that we bring to any budget. There are people who understand that.

NJM: What kinds of projects are people doing now?

KK: We've been doing renovations where the mudroom is so important. And everyone wants a great room, a big open space. The living room never gets used. It's not important anymore.

DD: I have a Donna Reed room. There are still a lot of clients who like that. You walk through the formal living room and dining room, then you're in the real part of the house.

NJM: How important is the home office?

The Designers

Diane Durocher, Diane Durocher Interiors, Ramsey; Ivee Fromkin, I. Fromkin Interiors, Monmouth Beach; Kingsley Knauss, KBK Interior Design, Westfield; Anna Maria Mannarino, Mannarino Designs, Holmdel; Sheila Rich, Sheila Rich Interiors, Monmouth Beach; Meryl Stern, Meryl Stern Interiors, Haworth; Karla Trincanello, Interior Decisions, Florham Park; Beth Insabella Walsh, Insabella Designs, Red Bank; and Virginia Zonfrilli, VHZ Design Group, South Orange.



From left: Virginia Zonfrilli, Diane Durocher, Meryl Stern, Beth Insabella Walsh and Anna Maria Mannarino.

SR: If it's for a mom, it has to be part of the kitchen; she's planning car pools and schedules. If it's an at-home business, then it needs to be a separate room.

Meryl Stern: I've done a mom-off-the-kitchen—it has the wrapping paper, etc. All of her jobs in one place, just off the kitchen.

Karla Trincanello: That brings up organization, which is very important. Everyone is looking for a place where the wrapping paper is going to be, and the cards and other things. You can still have a sofa bed in there. It doesn't have to be an extra room; it can be part of the office.

SR: It used to be that moms would be in the kitchen making dinner and kids would be in their rooms doing homework. Now all that has changed. It's all done on the computer. Kids need a bit of a home office. They need to be visible. The kitchen really has become command central.

KK: I think that parents are figuring out that the desk in the kid's bedroom isn't really practical. They need to be in close proximity to the kitchen. You're helping that child when you're multitasking. The kitchen really is command central.

NJM: What other rooms are getting a lot of attention?

DD: Master suites are also very important.

SR: It's a big-ticket item if you're planning a state-of-the-art bathroom with body sprays and everything... You're going into that project knowing it's going to be expensive.

KK: I try to soften the blow. They don't need the custom linens. In general, I've been finding ways to help the client even if they can't afford it. I give them a choice and let them decide if they want to go forward.

DD: I've been doing the same thing. A lot of my clients have dogs that sleep with them, and kids. They want to throw the linens in the wash.

KT: That brings up the importance of the



From left: Sheila Rice and NJM home and garden editor, Lauren Payne.

pets—they're part of the family. This is an important trend. The family wants the pet to have a space in the house.

MS: We need to get to know the family enough to know what it is they need. How they live. That's the value of hiring a designer. Where's the leash going; where's the dog-food bowl going?

DD: I've had clients ask me about flooring. They want to make sure that the dog won't scratch up the floors.

NJM: Are wine cellars still hot?

SR: I'm getting ready to do one now. It used to be wine was refrigerated in the basement, but now it's more the main part of the house and it's a collection that more people want to show off.

IF: If people are hiring designers, they really want to show off their homes, so there's more entertaining. The Food Channel stimulated home entertainment. People are staying home and entertaining people there.

KT: Men have been brought into the cooking. They want more gadgets, the commercial-grade stove, the pot fillers, the warming drawers and all that.

KK: The men care about what size the flat-screen TV is and the rainforest showerhead. That's what they care about.

NJM: How educated are your customers about green design?

MS: I think there are many who still don't get it. They want to do the best they can, but they don't know how to do it.

SR: But we have to bring it to the table, show what the benefits are.

AMM: We have to educate them, but they want to do something. Something as simple as what can be re-used, refurbished. Not just throwing things out, but re-using them. On a job I just did, the client really wanted to do something green, and we polished up and re-used all the granite. We took down walls of mirrors and cut them and re-used them. All clients are happy to know that they're doing their part, even if it's small.

KT: It's a badge of honor to be able to say, "I did this. I was able to do that."

DD: A lot of fabric manufacturers have recycled lines. They're sustainable, made from recycled polyester, and they're really beautiful. So you're not sacrificing style. There's carpeting, too, made from soda bottles. And re-claimed wood flooring.

*"They say
your hairdresser
knows you. Heck,
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as your designer
knows you."*

—DIANE DUROCHER

KK: Is a paper cup or a ceramic cup a better product to use? It's hard to judge. Go for the short term or the long term? With a lot of products, they love the idea of going green but it's still cost prohibitive. And the standards aren't set, so it's sometimes hard to judge the investment. It will change, but we're still on the leading edge of that.

VZ: There will come a time where it won't be a question of going green, but that you have to. It's an evolutionary process.

BIW: We're going to see more mandating by the government, mandating some percentage of a project being green. And then the homeowner will get some sort of [incentive] for doing that.

“We don’t give ourselves a haircut, and it’s not because we don’t have scissors. So there’s a skill set that we bring to any budget.”

—SHEILA RICH

NJM: What’s the one idea, product or trend that has changed design the most in recent years?

SR: The flat-screen TV has changed everything about the way you do a room.

IF: I think it’s the paint. Everything has changed about that. It’s washable, it’s better than ever. There are wonderful colors and they cover in two coats. It’s fabulous. Better than wall covering.

DD: The multifunctional kitchen. We’ve done a couple of kitchens that have fireplaces. And they’re incorporating sitting areas, and they have a command central where there is a desk and a computer.

MS: The biggest change is all the different types of technology. Desktops—who is using them and how are they are using them.

BIW: Digital imagery. We’ve seen so many great textiles, wallcoverings, even tiles that you’ve never seen before. The end product has so many cool looks.

AMM: Wall covering. It’s not your grandmother’s wall covering. Or your mother’s. When I bring up wallcovering, clients often say, “Oh, no”—then I show them a few things and they’re amazed. There’s so much that’s available; there’s wall covering with crystals on it, there’s cork and bamboo. You can add so much to a room by just doing an accent wall. It’s a good bang for your buck.

DD: And then there’s flocking. It’s pretty fab. It came and went, but it’s coming back.

IF: Outdoor living. It’s major.

KT: Outdoor furnishings, kitchens, fire pits, TVs, fans, shading, fabrics, heaters—it’s all there. You can live out on your

patio a lot more of the year.

KK: It’s less resort-like, too. You don’t just have primary colors anymore. The palates are beautiful, more versatile.

NJM: Downsizing is an important trend. What challenge does it present, moving to smaller spaces?

VZ: One of the things I’ve found is we are instrumental in the project management as much as the design elements. We’re coordinating the move, the installers and coordinating all aspects of the project, helping them figure out what to get rid of. We can bring them from point A to point B.

AMM: It’s more emotional. It used to be that it was just older couples downsizing. Now, it’s sometimes hard because the client has to move to a smaller house. They have to get rid of things. It involves a lot of hand-holding.

MS: People realize they don’t need that much space. It’s more cost-efficient. They don’t need the bigger homes.

KT: The 55-and-over homes are so well arranged. They fit these changes in lifestyle.

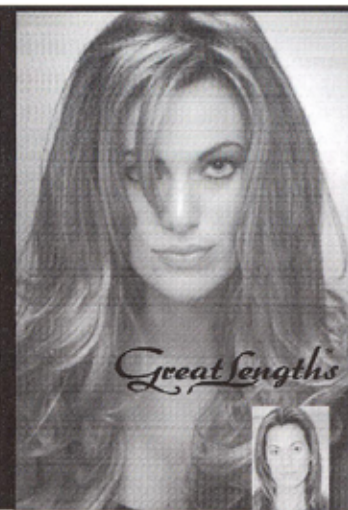
NJM: Ultimately, what does the designer bring to the table?

DD: We’re saving [clients] from making costly mistakes. That’s the benefit of hiring a designer.

VZ: We save them money. We save them time. They don’t need to take the time away from their lives, their children.

DD: We sweat all the small stuff for them. We guide them. We get to know them and their lifestyles. They say your hairdresser knows you. Heck, not nearly as much as your designer knows you. ■

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