



An example of a "Mediterranean style" bedroom designed by Kira in 2005



TRANSCENDING TRENDS IN THE NEW AGE OF KOASTALIZATION

For those of you who have been in the Naples area for the past two decades or longer, you have witnessed the transformation.

Like many, I grew up visiting southwest Florida, spending summers and holidays in Naples and Marco Island at my father's seasonal residence. Later, after graduating from college and starting my Interior Design firm, I decided to relocate and make this place my home. Shortly after moving here from Virginia in the year of the millennium, I met my husband and like they say, the rest is history.

THE DISCONNECT

When I began my life here as an interior designer, I was puzzled by the disconnect between what seemed to be a casual lifestyle and the formal architecture and interior style of the homes that defined Naples and the surrounding areas. Coming from the Northeast, I had grown up around many styles of homes from traditional to contemporary. I studied, lived abroad, and traveled throughout Europe, the Caribbean and South America. Here, I was amazed to find a newly developing area with

architecture that represented buildings from "the old world." Don't get me wrong, Italy was (and is still) one of my favorite countries in the world but this was Florida! I think it all started with the Ritz Carlton. That was the first major iconic hotel that put Naples on the map, so to speak. I wish I knew what they were thinking. Yes, it was impressive and beautiful, but it seemed so out of context in this subtropical climate. No one minded at the time, and it was celebrated. As developers like Aubry Ferrao and Jack Antaramian started building high rises on the beachfront and gated communities abound, this "Mediterranean style" architecture dominated.

I remember thinking that this place was paradise but perplexed by why, in my opinion, it was being turned into a European style "Disneyland" for affluent adults. However, for an interior designer, this age of building and development meant great opportunity and initially, I admit I was participating in this make-believe. I was designing elaborate homes and condos dripping in detail, working for the biggest developers in town, and winning awards for my work. But the more I became aware of



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“Everyone was living large. This whole town had “drunk the cool aid” – *in this case limoncello.*”

how wrong it felt the more it bothered me, and I knew I had to try to influence change.

By this point, Florida was experiencing a boom and was becoming a worldwide attraction for vacationers. While Miami’s East Coast style was recognized for minimalism, modern innovation, and vibrant color, greatly due to the influx of Latino culture,—just a few hours away— on the West Coast Naples had been defined with dark wood, jewel tones, heavy drapes, and ornamentation. Magnificent mansions and fancy condos were being built to impress. But the wealthy people living in these formal abodes were still wearing flip-flops and shorts! No offense but Naples was not a formal cosmopolitan city; it was a small casual coastal community. After working so closely with many clients, I understood that they were all coming here for the sunshine and beaches, the beautiful climate, and a relaxed lifestyle.

The disconnect between the homes and the lifestyle was so obvious I just couldn’t continue to go along with the charade. I had witnessed how influential the regional design magazines had been on the consumers, so I set out to meet with each of them. I arranged appointments with each publisher and went in to present my case. They all agreed with me and said if you give us a project representing a “new style,” we will be happy to print it. The problem was I didn’t have any clients that were interested in change at the time. The real estate market had reached its peak. Everyone was living large. This whole town had “drunk the cool aid” – *in this case limoncello.*

Then the recession hit... and for a while, decadence was not being celebrated.

THE BEGINNING

I started out at the beginning of the millennium with my design studio in the Trade Center area. At the time it seemed like a logical place, surrounded by the building industry, but it was, let’s face it, an industrial park and a reflection of how old Florida began. By 2007, Naples was experiencing the recession, and I was looking for a new place to hang my hat. The Miramar Design Center was a beautiful new state-of-the-art building, just off 75. This massive building with more than 45 furniture and design showrooms catered both to the industry and the public. Due to the lack of quality local projects, I was doing a lot of international design work by this time, so it didn’t seem to matter that the Design Center was in Estero and not in Naples. With the projected growth in our area, it seemed like the right move and an auspicious idea.

Since my firm was by appointment only, I chose the third floor away from the showrooms where there was still a lot of empty area in the adjacent spaces. The

building was looking for ways to draw in the public and temporarily fill the empty space. Since I was the only resident interior designer in the building, management asked me to help develop these areas into a showhouse for interior designers utilizing the resources available in the design center. I got to work immediately on the space planning with the idea that it would be laid out like a home with an entry area, living area, kitchen, bedrooms, bathrooms, etc. I also helped invite the top designers in our area to participate.

Each designer selected the space they wished to design. We were given creative license to design the space with our own vision so that each room would be unique and different and display a variety of styles and design solutions.

This was the moment to spearhead my plan to influence changes in the area’s interior design scene! This was my chance to make a statement, to gain the attention of the market, with my cause. It was an opportunity to create a dialogue with the public and a platform for me to express the philosophies that I had developed over the prior fifteen-plus years as an interior designer.

Kira’s 2009 Miramar Design Center Showcase “The Shanghai Room”



THE NEW ERA

I selected the Master bedroom which is my favorite room in a home to design. This room would represent my philosophy that your interior should be timeless and a reflection of your own unique style. I was a firm believer that neutrals were the preferred palette and the best approach to selecting background materials. I wanted to make a standout statement with my showcase room, so I decided to design a bedroom that was completely void of color. It is hard to imagine now, but at the time this was a completely new approach, as no one was designing in neutrals. I drew from my own personal experiences and inspiration and because I was doing work in the enchanting city of Shanghai, I gave the room a touch of Eastern influence and named it The Shanghai Room. While curating the décor, it was important to maintain balance and harmony. I collaborated with my father, who was an accomplished abstract painter, to create art specifically for the space. I asked him to provide two square paintings in his painting style with the palette inspired by a handful of shells and sand.



"new style" Palermo Penthouse completed in 2013

Timeless design over a decade later - completed in 2021



The experience of designing this space was not only liberating but very meaningful to me. It was the beginning of a new era, breaking away from the old aesthetic standards, and transcending trends. The new age of coastalization had begun.

It was time to develop a new style of interiors that represented the essence of southwest Florida! Interiors that connect with our surroundings and designed to reflect our way of living. Although it is a coastal community, it is after all an affluent town with an appetite for style.

I understood that for most who have primary or vacation homes here, they have come to celebrate the best years of their lives and want their homes reflect their success. I used terms like livable luxury and casual elegance to describe the interiors my team and I were creating. Sophisticated, well-appointed quality homes that reflected each unique client. Considering each interior as a composition, I set out to achieve balance and harmony in each and every space.

Much like curating – I felt that this design philosophy enabled me and my team to help our clients by giving them options that met an established criteria while guiding them to optimal aesthetic results. Of course, there will always be imitators, but we were innovators, and this was authentic design that will stand the test of time.



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