

Designing Women



From left, back row: Jessica Tompane, Pat Marshall, Nancy Suzanne Smith, Charlotte Jensen, Sandra Wagenaar. Front row, from left: Kristin Kostamo-McNeil, Corine Maggio, Karyn Frazier, Linda Cunningham, Beverly Feldman

Last month, *Coronado Lifestyle* pulled together a number of interior designers, including those based in Coronado and some based in San Diego who have done significant work in Coronado. We asked them about their trade, the interior design process and the rewards of a job well done. We found it's impossible not to catch the design bug in their collective presence!



Corine Maggio

Q: What led you into interior design?

Corine Maggio *Corine Maggio Natural Designs*

I graduated from the Design Institute of San Diego with a degree in Fine Art and started my business in 2011. At first I thought interior design was pretty fluffy; then I started realizing how powerful design is. I'm really grateful to be working in this field. I love my clients and love coastal style!

Nancy Suzanne Smith (Allied ASID) *Nancy Suzanne Smith Interior Design*

I was a medical office administrator for a large cancer-care group. With three children to raise, I didn't have the luxury of working in my passion. But once they were grown, I went back to school for design. I do almost exclusively residential work. My husband is a licensed contractor, so we do a lot of structural work. I've been working in Coronado for five years now, and we get more and more referrals.



Linda Cunningham (left), Sandra Wagenaar

Pat Marshall *Côtier*

My passion for decorating led me to open Côtier, which is French for "coastal style." We reflect the classic casual style from coastal settings throughout the world. I grew up in a Navy family and lived Washington D.C. and Ohio and my passion for home décor has followed me throughout the country.



Charlotte Jensen

Beverly Feldman, ASID *SPACE San Diego*

When I was 12 years old, I moved to a house where I had a desk, a bed and a typical closet. I thought this room is so stupid! So even then, design was my passion and I've found good design *does* change people's lives. We specialize in multi-functional furnishings and help many couples who are downsizing.



Karyn Frazier

Kristin Kostamo-McNeil *Anne Rae Design*

I was a marketing major at Michigan State and was aimlessly wandering through business school. A dorm-mate introduced me to interior design courses, and I entered the program three years into college. It was my *Aha!* moment, with birds chirping and clouds parting.

Jessica Tompane *J Hill Interior Designs*

I was a business marketing major at University of Colorado; also a Spanish major. I would daydream about what I would do with my life. After working in the corporate advertising world, I started shadowing other designers who gave me wise counsel. I pursued education in technical design including drafting, computer design and sustainability. I loved business, but I had a deep creative side, so the mix was perfect.



Kristin Kostamo-McNeil

Karyn Frazier *Bungalow 56 Interiors & Events*

Thirteen years ago, I started working in the fashion industry with wardrobe design and buying and merchandising. I ended up partnering with Jessica Nicolls, a good friend since high school. She went to design school in Sacramento, and I ran two interior design firms in Tahoe. We started Bungalow 56 last December. *(Editor's note: Nicolls was on vacation in Hawaii and wasn't able to join the roundtable.)*

Charlotte Jensen, FASID *Charlotte Jensen & Associates*

I graduated from a Big Ten school with a fine arts major. When I attended, there was no interior design degree; you'd have to be part of the home ec department, and I would have died before I did that. *(Laughter erupts.)* I worked for the original homebuilder in Rancho Bernardo, then started taking interior design courses. After 10 years of residential design, I started my own firm. I'm the first fellow in San Diego

to be honored by ASID (there are now three in the county), and I passed the NCIDQ the first time. I've also been president of NCIDQ. *(Editor's note: The National Council for Interior Design Qualification protects public health, safety and welfare by identifying interior designers who have the knowledge and experience to create interior spaces that are not just aesthetically pleasing, but also functional and safe.)*

Sandra Wagenaar, ASID *Wagenaar Design Group*

When I was in college, women became teachers, nurses or social workers, and I became a teacher. I taught first grade for three years, then switched to adult school so I could work part-time. When Proposition 13 passed, I lost my job because I wasn't tenured. I went back to school and took art and interior



Jessica Tompane, Nancy Suzanne Smith

design classes, loved it and started my business 29 years ago. I've always worked in residential — I like the hand holding and I like to get to know my clients and their friends and family. I have a lot of people say, "You're still working? 'Yes, it's fun!' I tell them. My husband, an architect, hence "Group," is still working, too.

Linda Cunningham (Allied ASID) *Coronado Floor and Window Interiors*

My husband and I used to be custom builders in central Oregon and recently moved to Coronado where we now live in the Cays. I worked with the previous owner of Coronado Floor and Window while I went to school to get my design degree. Since buying the company last year, we've added new floor, wall and window coverings and paint selections. We work mostly with residential and small-office clients.

Caroline Murray, ASID *Caroline Murray & Associates*

I received a bachelor's degree in fine arts at San Diego State University, then apprenticed with a Coronado interior designer, Wessie Davis, a graduate of the New York School of Interior Design. She had a great design studio



photo by Kristofer Reynolds

Caroline Murray

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*El Mirador lobby at
Coronado Shores by
Anne Rae Design*

and an eye for antiques. We would always go to furniture auctions in Los Angeles. (Editor's note: A scheduling conflict prevented Murray's attendance in the roundtable, but she later answered some of our questions.)

Q How does the interior design process begin?

Maggio I like to meet every client in person, and I love doing a free consultation. It's really important to make sure that the client likes me and that we'll have a good working relationship and that I can see the work that they need done. Sometimes a client doesn't understand exactly what the process is, but I can come in and see how comfortable they are and how knowledgeable they are about what's about to happen to their home and to propose an idea on how to go about it. Then we can talk about timeline and budget. That initial meeting is really important so that they aren't going into it blind.

Jensen I suggest that clients pull pictures from magazines. Many times they've been collecting for years. We'll flip through the images at the first meeting and I'll see there's a consistency in what they've chosen.

Kostamo-McNeil I always meet onsite and see what the project is. I have them think about everything we've said and ask them to let me know what their budget is. Ninety-five percent of the time they say they don't really have a budget.

Wagenaar There's always a budget; they just don't want to say what it is. (laughter) They have a limit.



Côtier



Caroline Murray often adds chinoiserie, to her design, such as hand-painted wallpaper. "It means of the Oriental taste," said Murray, "and it came about in the 1700s when the British and French first saw the Royal Palace in Peking [now known as the Palace Museum in the Forbidden City in the center of Beijing]."

Frazier Designers get a bad rap because clients think if they give you a budget they're afraid you'll go over it. People sometimes don't realize what it costs to remodel a kitchen.

Tompane We start almost immediately with a client questionnaire. A husband will say one thing — usually that it's all his wife's decision. But inevitably, he'll have definite ideas about functionality but they literally have never discussed it! So this questionnaire forces the conversation.

Q Have you done any work in high-rise projects, such as Coronado Shores?

Frazier They are awesome buildings to renovate and we've done several, but there are many challenges. Each building only has one elevator that can be used and you have to tape down plastic from the elevator to the condo to protect the carpet and take it up every night.

Wagenaar Clients need to know it will take a little longer and it will cost more because it's more work for them in a high rise.



Beverly Feldman, SPACE San Diego

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Jensen The Shores were built in the '70s and they're concrete on the floor and concrete on the ceilings with concrete columns. With just eight-foot ceilings, seven in entry halls, there isn't much space between the ceiling and whatever space you want for lighting and ceiling details. All construction has to be approved by the building manager and the building department.



Lobby at La Playa Tower, Coronado Shores by Charlotte Jensen & Associates



Corine Maggio Natural Designs

Kostamo-McNeil I have found you need to make sure you have a great relationship with the building staff.

Jensen From approximately May 15 through Sept. 15, construction isn't allowed in that complex; it's slightly different in each building. So, summer time is design time; winter is execution time.

Kostamo-McNeil That's why planning ahead is so important, extremely important.

Tompaine People don't realize that design is so frontloaded, meaning that you have to come up with a design, which takes the majority of your time and then you have to order things, and you need to allow for significant lead time. For custom, it can be anywhere from four to 16 weeks and that goes with furniture as well. And if you're talking about something imported, I would say at least 12 to 16 weeks. With Shores clients, that's not that uncommon. You don't want the project to be held up because you're waiting for tile to come in.



Living room in La Playa Tower, Coronado Shores by Charlotte Jensen & Associates



Nancy Suzanne Smith
Interior Design

Q How do you make sure you are creating the design that reflects your client's preferences and not your own? On the flip side, do you have a "style" that you are known for?

Smith We have to listen really well. Clients will often say they know what they want but they really don't know from A to Z. We have to push them slightly out of their comfort zones. They'll say they like beige, but not realize there are so many shades and interpretations of beige.

Wagenaar I ask a lot of questions and listen to what they say and look around to see what they have. I'll ask, "Do you like this? Do you want to change this?" The husband will say, "It all looks good and the wife will say, "I want it *all* to change." (Several "been-there, heard that" comments and accompanying groans are heard.)

Feldman It's our job to bring our clients' visions into harmony.

Marshall At Côtier, we do more decorating than structural design. Our clientele is attracted to the style they see before them in our boutique and then our designers can meet with them at their home if they'd like.

Feldman: I send clients to different websites to look at products and we communicate back and forth to hone in on exactly what is right for them.

Murray I'm known for a classic understated and elegant look. People seek me out for that look that includes a rich layering of collected accessories and antiques — furniture and carpets that give a soft, unexpected rich look, like it's always been there.

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Q When is it the right time to hire an interior designer?

Kostamo-McNeil If there are any renovations going on, interior designers need to be one of the first people on your team and definitely prior to making space-planning decisions. For example, we are knowledgeable about placing outlets in places a contractor wouldn't put them.

Frazier Lots of times clients don't know whom to call, and the first person they call is the contractor. People often think hiring an interior designer is not needed, but it can cost them more or delay a project if a designer is brought in too late.

Jensen A client may think an interior designer is a luxury expense (or a contractor may tell them that). But the fee might save them money in the long run because they would have an advocate.

Feldman I was hired by clients for a remodel in Northern California. We were her very first call and she said, "We want to work with someone who knows how we *live* in our home." Then the rest of the team was brought in.



J Hill Interior Designs

Q What about art?

Feldman We always talk about art right at the beginning of a project.

Jensen If you don't have it budgeted early, there's no money left. I start putting it in the budget as a line item for every room, even if it is reframing.

Kostamo-McNeil Artwork conjures up so much emotion in people...

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*Bungalow 56
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Jensen Yes, it does! Even in my institutional projects.

Frazier We had a client and the only thing she didn't want us to do was the artwork. I remember the shock and dismay when we walked in her home and saw the art she had chosen: wrong scale, wrong color.

Jensen If clients don't have any artwork, it is our challenge to help them see the possibilities. Even posters can be major art; everyone has a place to enjoy something within their space; most people are afraid to take the step because they don't want to spend money on something they think is wrong and they don't feel qualified to make a decision on the composition. We help them illuminate it...

Wagenaar And we can help them frame it properly! You can put a \$5 piece of art on the wall with a great frame and make it look like you've spent thousands. And scale is so important: having the right size for the space. Most people are afraid to buy something big.

Smith We have designed a whole room around a work of art. I would encourage people to purchase original art; it doesn't have to be expensive! And we always hang the artwork.

Kostamo-McNeil Clients always want to place art so high.

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Wagenaar Or they'll place it right in the middle of the wall.

Q Do clients ever have too much "stuff"?

(Every designer's hand shoots into air amid shudders; hilarity ensues.)

Maggio One of everything: nothing more and nothing less is what you need. Our job is to edit ... to make additions and subtractions. When you have too much stuff, it clutters your life. I am open and honest with my clients about getting rid of their stuff. I tell them it is detoxifying and can change your life.

Feldman Because I help many people downsize, this becomes a frequent need. So many people try to move into a condo with three truckloads of stuff.

Frazier When in doubt, take it out.

Cunningham With the aging of the



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J Hill Interior Designs

Baby Boomers, which is going to double over the next two decades. A lot of my clients are older and you have to keep that in mind more and more of them are centered in the home. They may go out for doctors and hairdressing appointments and eventually those services have to come in, so you need a streamlined environment. Most people are willing to do what you suggest if you give them logical reasons.

Feldman Our digital world is helping people downsize. You can frame one piece of your children's artwork and digitize the rest and then let it go. It is very liberating.

Q Any other special considerations for Coronado?

Cunningham Often, what a client sees in a magazine is a product that they may be attracted to, but they don't know the pros and cons about what can stain or not wear well, especially here on the coast where we are dealing with salt air and where windows can expand and contract.

Marshall The salt air means you need to avoid certain kinds of metals on outdoor furniture because of corrosion.

Jensen If you live at the Coronado Shores, you've got to know there's a lot of soot from jets flying directly over the buildings, so you need to be careful in selecting finishes and materials. And that doesn't mean only if you have your windows open; soot comes through the building systems and it peppers everything. As good as your housekeeper is, it's still a factor.

Marshall It's also bad in the center of town. Having lived on both Olive Avenue and H Avenue, I've found it can happen anywhere in the Village. It comes on the wind. I would never encourage fabric on outdoor furniture.