

Meet Local Interior Designer: Janet Brooks

Written by Sona Patel

For over 30 years, designer Janet Brooks of Janet Brooks Design in Scottsdale has been transforming the Valley one home at a time. New and long-time clients alike love her ability to listen and create purposeful and aesthetically beautiful design concepts. Brooks answered a few questions for us about herself and her style. Let's take a look!



Q: What inspires you on a daily basis?

A: I'm a sponge for everything in my surroundings. I can be inspired by the shape of a crack in the sidewalk.

Q: When did you start feeling passionately about designing and want to pursue it as a career?

A: After I went to work for a well established ASID designer out of New York City as her showroom manager, and felt like I was "home." I knew I had found what I wanted to do, and started my own design firm six months later.

Q: What has been your most challenging project thus far?

A: Doing a Restaurant/Yacht Club on Marco Island, FL when my design studio was located in the mountains in Western Colorado. The design genre, materials, climate, and lifestyle were all 180 degrees from my local environment, which made it extremely interesting and challenging – in a good way!

Q: Your offices are modern and chic, how does this reflect on your design taste?

A: The basis of my personal taste, or style, is an arrangement of meaningful, purposeful design. I despise clutter, and I cringe when I enter a room that is confusing to the eye. When you enter a room, there should be a natural flow to the way it opens up. If I find myself stopping to try to grasp what I'm looking at, then I know it's not purposeful design. My offices are designed in a way that provides me with a background in which to create; it doesn't compete with the projects I'm working on my attention.

Q: Do you have a favorite type of home to design?

A: My favorite design project is with a homeowner who wants to push the design envelope a bit. I don't get too wild, but I do like to create surprises and encourage my clients to step out of their box and embrace elements they have never considered before. This can be within the framework of any architectural style. Although I usually follow the architectural style of a building as a guide to its interior design, I have to admit it's fun to mix it up a little – i.e. contemporary lines in Old World spaces, architectural antiques in more minimalist environments!

Q: You have many unique and successful clients, how do you meet all of their expectations?

A: By being a good listener.

Q: Do you have a favorite community in Arizona?

A: Not really. I have always lived (since I moved here from Colorado in 1987) in north Scottsdale, which I love and enjoy. The Sonoran desert is beautiful here. However, I've traveled extensively all over the state of Arizona and have to say that it is the most interesting and diverse state I have ever experienced.



Q: Does Arizona's natural landscape inspire any of your design techniques?

A: When I'm working on an urban project (downtown Phoenix, Central Corridor, Biltmore, Arcadia), I am not usually focusing on the Arizona landscape. There, it is more about the architectural style of the home, which may be of historic interest, and the vegetation is not usually native to Arizona. However, in areas where the landscaping is Xeriscape and the architectural style invites the outdoors inside, I pay a lot of attention to the colors and textures of the desert. For instance, there are certain colors like kelly green, that I find almost impossible to use in a "desert house" because it is nowhere to be found in the natural environment. You also have to be careful with grays; they need to be brownish-grays, rather than blue-grays.

Q: What is a unique request you've received from a client that you fulfilled?

A: A client I had done a new home with in north Scottsdale took a safari trip to Africa a few years after building their new home. They were so moved by Africa and its cultural heritage that they came home and told me they wanted their guest Casita to be done in an African motif. We carried the theme from the floors to the ceilings and had fun designing custom furnishings and finishes to complete the look.

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Q: Is there a certain design element that you feel so passionately about, you continue to use it over and over?

A: I am adamant about proper lighting; you might as well put art in storage as hang it without good lighting. Great architecture is lost and looks “flat” without lighting to accentuate it. Light sources that are hidden from sight create magical effects in subtle ways. And of course, decorative chandeliers and sconces are the jewelry of an interior space! Although I know quite a bit about lighting, I will defer to the expertise of a professional lighting consultant in most cases.

Q: Does your work have a signature look and feel?

A: My work is not easily recognizable, unless you're familiar with a number of projects I've done over the years. Then you may start to *feel*, rather than see, the common thread that runs through them all – comfort and warmth. People often comment that they always thought of contemporary as being “cold and uninviting” until they look at the contemporary projects in my portfolio. Regardless of the architectural and/or design style we're working in, I see my duty to my clients being interpretation of their style (whether it has a name or not) in the specific genre of the project. Just because a client loves clean lines doesn't mean they can't move into a Tuscan styled home and make it feel spacious and almost contemporary. Conversely, even if a client doesn't think they will be comfortable in a minimalist architectural environment doesn't mean I can't help them warm it up and make it feel like home.

Q: In your opinion, how can homeowners avoid common decorating mistakes?

A: By thinking that because they have “good taste” or a “friend whose daughter is a decorator,” they can put together a large design project without professional help. It may seem pricey to hire a designer, but designers can save money in the long run by helping to make the right decisions the *first time*, and because we know worldwide sources that help us create fresh, new design concepts.



Q: How have design trends changed over the years? What are some of the newer trends that weren't around when you started out in the industry?

A: When I started out in interior design, there were certain “looks” and styles that we were inclined to adhere to. Mixing things up the way we do now was not considered good design style. You would rarely experience a design “surprise” when you entered a home; it was all more predictable. Trends now are looser, more interpretive, and more fun!

Q: With Spring around the corner, what quick tips and design methods can you recommend to transition a home from winter to spring?

A: I like to switch area rugs in the spring to lighter, fresher colors, rather than the richer colors of winter. If you have the ability to store a certain few accessories and rugs from season to season, it is wonderful to bring out the arrangements, pillows and rugs that speak to the new season. Definitely put anything away that still smacks of Christmas!!

Q: Is it tough not to push your personal style onto your clients?

A: Not at all. My focus when working on a design project is completely on my client and their project. In fact, I pride myself in not having a “personal style” other than the creation of interesting, warm and comfortable spaces.

Q: Are trends as important in design as they are in fashion? How does personal taste play a role?

A: Fashion is immediate; look-alike creations are out the next day after a celebrity event. Interior trends are slower to emerge, due in part to the investment it takes to replace furnishings, cabinets and even wall colors. However, trends are very evident in design and I can “feel” the era in which a space was created when I walk into it, even though it may still be in perfect condition. Some of my clients like to be trendy, and others ask that we try to create spaces that withstand the test of time from a design point of view. Nowadays with constant new technological advancements, it's more and more difficult to avoid showing the age of the design.

Q: What has been your most memorable project?

A: My very first residential project was a large custom home for a corporation. My clients were the wives of the CEO, CFO and COO's. Each had their own unique style, which we created in their individual bedroom suites. The main living spaces, however, had to please each of the wives equally! It was an exercise in mind-reading and psychology, and it turned out perfectly!