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A Designer Who Listened

Designed By Lisa McDennon | Written By Ryan Ritchie | Photographed By Anastacia Wilhite

When designing a home, Lisa Rachelle McDennon adds her artistic flair while keeping the homeowners' wants and needs a priority.



Lisa Rachelle McDennon has the eye for change. Her decade-long experience has enabled her to walk into a home and tell the owners exactly what they need and how a remodel and/or redesign should take place. The thing is, that's not what she does.

Instead, the Laguna Beach designer caters to her clients' needs by asking about their interests and wants and customizes each job based on the situations at hand. This not only ensures happy clients but a happy working environment for McDennon.

"My clients are young and fun," McDennon says, "and I try to be really flexible. My motto is, 'Your tastes. Our touch.' I try to be the conduit and make everyone play nice music together. I pull out of my clients what they want and not just cookie cutter it, and use what's really popular. I want someone to look at photos of past work and wonder when the design was done. Hopefully, my work is timeless and classic."

A prime example of McDennon's work is seen in a home she helped design approximately eight years ago that never looked dated or out of vogue. The abode in question is a 6,000 square foot residence in San Juan Capistrano. The designer estimates that the structure itself was built sometime in the early 1980s, but when she first entered the home, she knew right away that the previous homeowners' aesthetic would not fit her clients' needs.

"The previous woman designed the home very ornately and old fashioned," McDennon says. "There were faux paintings throughout the house and crystal chandeliers. The master bedroom had clouds and cherub angels on the ceiling. It was very much not reflective of my clients."

McDennon describes herself as more of a designer who works with remodeling jobs more often than new construction, but for this particular project, she focused her attention on the decorative aspect of the home make-over process. To begin the creative renovation, McDennon re-painted the walls and exchanged the existing





carpeting and lighting. These changes, she says, were a quick and relatively easy method of modernizing the stuffy feeling of the home. With a new canvas to play with, McDennon and the owners got to work on customizing certain portions of the house. In the living room, a cherry red piano was added, not only for style, but because the homeowners shared a penchant for music. A red velvet sofa was brought in to help continue the color scheme while the mantel was simplified through the use of white lacquer. This clean and sleek design allowed the homeowners to hoist a painting above their mantel that was created by a personal friend, which gave the room a slice of their personality that could not be purchased at a store.

Near the entryway of the home is an office that McDennon designed with a Zen influence. To achieve this motif, the room was carpeted with a Sisal, and a Portuguese writing desk was added to create an organic, earthy theme. Before the re-design, the room featured cherry-colored cabinets, white window sills and a faux painting, so McDennon painted the sills black and the walls a soft white while lacquering the cabinets black.

McDennon gave the master bedroom a more modernized vibe by creating all custom furniture, which included a reclining chair for the husband and a Chaise lounge for the wife. But similar to many master bedrooms, the piece de resistance is the bed itself, which comes from Mimi London. "Originally," McDennon says, "we saw the bed as a four-poster bed, but it was not a canopy. I came up with a design to customize it into a canopy. It's constructed with traditional Japanese joinery. There is not one nail or screw in the entire bed. It's put together like Jenga."

Once the project was finished, McDennon and her clients were so happy with the outcome that they remained friends. The designer attributes the strong bond due to the owners' inclusion in the renovation process.

"One nice thing was the wife was very involved with me on the design," McDennon says, "so she and I could bounce ideas off of each other. It was great because the home became reflective of their personality and their lifestyle."

