

Lisa McDennon Brings a Touch of Nuance to Laguna Beach

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Lisa McDennon

California-based designer Lisa McDennon has hit the design industry trifecta, as her resume boasts a 20-year interior design career, a boutique retail space and a collection with a major lighting retailer.

Interior design wasn't always in McDennon's plans. She originally went to school for fine art and worked for an architectural firm, but when she realized the world of interiors was more appealing than architecture, she went back to school, this time for interior design.

In 2000, she opened her eponymous Laguna Beach, CA, firm. While she has done both residential and commercial work, today most of her projects are residential new construction or renovation.

"I enjoy starting a project in the beginning when it's still in the concept phase, and getting to collaborate with the architect, client and builder," McDennon says. "Now I feel like I have the opportunity to work on larger projects and be able to pour more details into not only the construction, but also with furnishings, too."

Retail & Beyond

In early 2014, McDennon was approached by the owner of a local art gallery who offered her a pop-up retail space within the gallery. Six months later, she moved the shop to a larger permanent location and was able to expand her product offerings.

"I chose the name Nuance because that is what I am hoping to provide customers — elements that have that little extra 'something' that makes it different in a subtle way, and stands out from the rest," she says. "Maybe it's a handmade vase, or maybe it's a vintage textile I scouted on a buying trip, or a really special stoneware collection I've discovered they can use for everyday meals. I think my customers are looking for items that are unique, carefully chosen and not easily found elsewhere."



At Nuance, Owner Lisa McDennon says customers will find “an artful curation of beautiful items for the home.”

The shop stocks an array of merchandise, including one-of-a-kind home furnishings, garden decor, jewelry and stationery. Also on offer is lighting, both from McDennon’s collection with Hinkley, as well as other pieces she’s hand selected.

McDennon was tasked with redesigning Hinkley’s flagship showroom at the Dallas Market Center in 2012. A few years later, when she was ready to pitch her lighting collection, she went with the company she knew best.

“It only seemed natural to reach out to them, and being that I am so family oriented and their company is too, it felt like the right fit in many ways,” she says. Her first collection with Hinkley launched in January 2018, and she’s been releasing new product with the manufacturer ever since.

From interior design to her lighting collection, McDennon’s surroundings inform much of what she does. Her proximity to the beach means a constant source of inspiration from the natural environment, using organic materials and shapes and unique material combinations.

“I am very eclectic, and enjoy a variety of styles but have always been drawn to a more clean, modern aesthetic with warmth, texture and always with a touch of drama,” McDennon says. “I call it coastal modern — the essence of California lifestyle without anything cliché (i.e., no seashells or boat anchors here).”

Coping with COVID-19

In light of the coronavirus crisis, McDennon, like most others, moved her operations to the virtual space. Her once-lively office is now quiet, with her staff all working remotely, but McDennon is still there, which is not the norm for her.

“For me, being in the office all day is so strange anyway — not because I’m here alone, but because I am not used to being there so much,” she says. “Normally, I’m bouncing from place to place — visiting workrooms, stone yards, job sites, and zooming all over town meeting clients and suppliers, and getting work done. Now my ‘zooming’ is just Zoom video conferences.”

Even though things are moving slower than usual — often due to delayed or canceled shipments, closed warehouses and workrooms — she’s making the best of it, taking virtual showroom tours with suppliers and using digital tools to communicate with clients.

The store, she says, has taken the biggest hit, but they recently launched an e-commerce portal on their website and offer private in-store shopping sessions to promote social distancing. The shop also developed gift boxes designed to be sent as care packages for loved ones.

“I think the most important thing we can do is let our clients and customers know we are there for them, and maintaining the relationships we have built,” McDennon says. “It’s not about the products right now, but of our service to them in a human, personal way. It’s important we stay connected and let them know we are working, that we care and that we are here for them.”

The disruptions caused by the pandemic will change the way we all do business in the future, and McDennon is ready for a bit of normalcy and to get back out in the field. She’s learned that flexibility and adaptability are key.

“Hopefully people are ready to get out there and start supporting businesses, but with so many job losses, it’s hard to know how much non-essential spending there will actually be,” she says. “I think online purchasing and virtual meetings and events will continue to take a strong hold of our future business. It’s up to us to adapt and evolve.”