

THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER

Greater Houston Edition

themetropolitanbuilder.com



DIALOGUE WITH A DESIGNER

Amilee Wendt, ASID, RID



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International Flooring knows that dreams, reality and inspiration make a house a home. It also knows that an interior designer or interior design firm often becomes an integral part of this process. As a National Wood Flooring Association (NWFA)-certified company, International Flooring takes great pride in working with some of the finest professionals in the Houston market, providing the best quality wood flooring and carpets available and superb customer service. International Flooring offers its clients a private showroom full of exotic wood floors not found in retail showrooms.

This month International Flooring speaks with Amilee Wendt, owner and founder of Wendt Design Group, an award-winning interior designer who has served the Gulf Coast Area and Pacific Rim. She is licensed by the Texas Board of Architectural Examiners (TBAE), is a member of the Texas Association for Interior Design and is a professional member of the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID). Wendt served as the professional development director of the Texas Gulf Coast chapter of the ASID and follows in the footsteps of her great uncle, Eugene Harris, who was a founding member of the local chapter.

Wendt Design Group is a full-service design firm that serves a wide range of clients and that works on diverse projects, such as large estates, residential high-rises, smaller homes, corporations, restaurants and hotels. The firm has worked both locally and internationally to complete projects, including a five-star restaurant, a trendy

London apartment and a renovation of a historic church.

International Flooring: What motivated you to go into the interior design field?

Amilee Wendt: I knew that this is what I wanted as a profession at age 10. My great uncle, Eugene Harris, a well-known decorator, had great style, and I was fortunate to see the houses he did for my cousins and live in two houses that he worked on for my parents, all of which influenced my decision. He was a founding member of the Houston AID chapter which later became ASID Gulf Coast Chapter.

International Flooring: How has the field of interior design changed since you graduated?

Amilee Wendt: In the 1970s design for Houston was just starting with a few sales reps and select showrooms. Most of the sourcing was done through the Dallas Trade and Decorative Centers. Now we have as much representation as the other large cities. Design has also evolved in part due to TV exposure, where the public can see the value in hiring a designer. Technology has also changed the business; all plans previously were drawn by hand, and now we have CAD that we can share with teams of other professionals if the project is large in scope. With the internet, we can shop online, send orders and communicate with the client by email. Technology has also brought wider exposure, assisting the client to find looks they are drawn to. The more educated the client is on a style or architectural direction, the easier it is for a designer to help



them reach the goals the team has agreed to.

International Flooring: How can an experienced interior designer help custom home builders or remodeling contractors with their building or remodeling projects?

Amilee Wendt: If there is a set budget and the design firm is brought in during the early stages, there will be more flexibility on product selections. We provide the builder and client with a spreadsheet that shows the product image and the cost of that product, including the estimated shipping and lead time. Many builders or remodeling companies work on cost-plus, so this helps in speeding up some of the work. Builders give the designer and the client a budget; if it is to be a new construction home, we add the cost of the builder's labor to some parts of a spread sheet- so it is easy for all team members to see what the costs are to get the backsplash completed, etc.

International Flooring: What sets you apart from other designers?

Amilee Wendt: Experience, striving for excellence on each job and listening to the client. No two projects are ever the same. Working for 40 years has given me the opportunity to work on hundreds of business and hospitality ventures and a few thousand residential projects.

International Flooring: What has been your most challenging project and why?

Amilee Wendt: Several projects that were completed in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, were challenging. All elevations had to be produced in sections in metric so that they could be reproduced by local craftsman. All of the interior space of a proposed building or home was a blank shell; the interior designer had to draw the spaces, including the structural sections for creating each said space. Some projects had a Feng Shui expert as part of the team. Then, because of the duty on goods coming from outside the



country, most procurement would be done within the country using a local interior design firm – which meant that they would try to copy what had been proposed and approved. The finished product was not always made like products we use here.

International Flooring: How do you begin the materials' selection process when working with builders' and remodelers' clients?

Amilee Wendt: We have a meeting to walk the property that is to be renovated or we look at the plans, if there are plans at the stage where we are brought in. A designer can see a space differently than the builder or the architect does. Sometimes pocket doors make more sense than several doors in a small area or if a client is handicapped, ADA or Aging in Place are certain considerations needed to be included. Then we discuss style and budget with the clients and the builder. There is usually a set budget on a new house. For a remodel there are fewer perimeters. I use the



“Mini-Maxie Rule” for all projects; this means you use less expensive products to reduce the budget in some secondary areas, then, in other areas a few Wow! Factor finishes that have a higher price are added. Those finishes will help create focal points in more important areas.

International Flooring: What are some common mistakes made by builders and homeowners?

Amilee Wendt: Builders or contractors sometimes are too busy to check on all of the projects. No one is constantly supervising the work, which is when mistakes happen, costing money and delays. Homeowners should enjoy the journey when spending their money and take the time to see several product showrooms. Never make a decision in a rush. I always encourage the client to think about the options for a day or two.

International Flooring: How to you keep yourself up to date with all the design trends happening in the industry today?

Amilee Wendt: We subscribe to 20 magazines, which provide the latest products on the market. Many trade vendors offer CEU classes to the design community, helping us to know what the latest products are and how they are constantly improving them.

International Flooring: What is your favorite design style?

Amilee Wendt: Soft Contemporary, which is an understated subtle look; this look translates to either a contemporary space or a transitional/traditional home.

International Flooring: What fascinates you and how have you incorporated that fascination into your designs?

Amilee Wendt: We always work to have any space be timeless. The most important starting point of any space is the interior architecture — so I look to see how this can be changed if it is a renovation. The lighting is also very important. Since 1991 I have been using one color for the walls and the trim in a room- I love large art and great rugs. So I try to start with art or a rug if possible.

International Flooring: Any last thoughts, comments?

Amilee Wendt: Any time one of our designers needs to be reinvigorated, we just start a new project, and the creativity begins all over again.

**To contact Amilee Wendt, ASID, RID,
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