

THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER

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DIALOGUE WITH A DESIGNER

INTERVIEW WITH SUSAN FRUIT ASID, CGR, CAPS



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Morrison knows that dreams, reality and inspiration make a house a home. They also know that an interior designer or interior design firm often become an intricate part of this process. Design professionals should be committed to creating individualized and functional designs to meet the lifestyles of their clients' families. They should exemplify an unwavering dedication to open communication, to reliable service, and to building a collaborative design partnership with all of their clients.

*This month Morrison speaks with **SUSAN FRUIT ASID, CGR, CAPS.***

Susan Fruit is an award-winning ASID interior designer, a residential remodeling contractor (CGR), a lighting designer and a certified aging-in-place specialist (CAPS). She has been working in the interior design and home renovation field for 40 years. Tasteful, timeless interiors are the trademarks of her style from trendy traditional to classic contemporary.

Her company, Susan Fruit Interiors, has designed homes in Texas, California, Florida and South America, and her work has been published in numerous design magazines. Susan is a recognized industry expert in solving difficult design dilemmas in interior design, decorating and residential remodeling.

Susan also offers a series of fun and informative Design-On-The-Go Bus Tours to unusual and unique local decorating shops and design resources in Houston several times throughout the year.

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

Fruit: As I child, I was fascinated by beautiful rooms, draperies and accessories. My mother was a wonderful decorator, so she inspired me. From a young age, I started drawing rudimentary floor plans and arranged paper furniture templates in them. I was thrilled when I found out that this activity can actually become a career! So, it was only natural that I majored in interior design in college.

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

Fruit: It has changed tremendously. When I graduated from Purdue University in 1973, floor plans and renderings were created manually, and a strong emphasis was placed on hand sketching as a way to communicate design ideas to clients. Design students were taught strategic sales skills to prepare them to work with residential clients and to be successful at selling products and services. Now all plans are CAD generated, designer/client relationship skills are not taught and commercial interior design is what is strongly emphasized in all the design schools.

Morrison: How can an experienced interior designer help a custom home builder or a remodeling contractor with their building or remodeling projects?

Fruit: Experienced interior designers are skilled at selling up a project and in making their design ideas appealing to homeowners. Clients are often resistant to spending more than what they have pre-determined to spend, but a skilled designer knows just how to make certain design upgrades irresistible. Builders and remodeling contractors generally don't do this as well.

Seasoned interior designers can paint beautiful visual images with their words and can tempt homeowners with enticing materials, fresh new color palettes and photos of beautiful design work from the latest design magazines. Homeowners love to be exposed to new ideas and design possibilities. Interior designers excel at doing this.

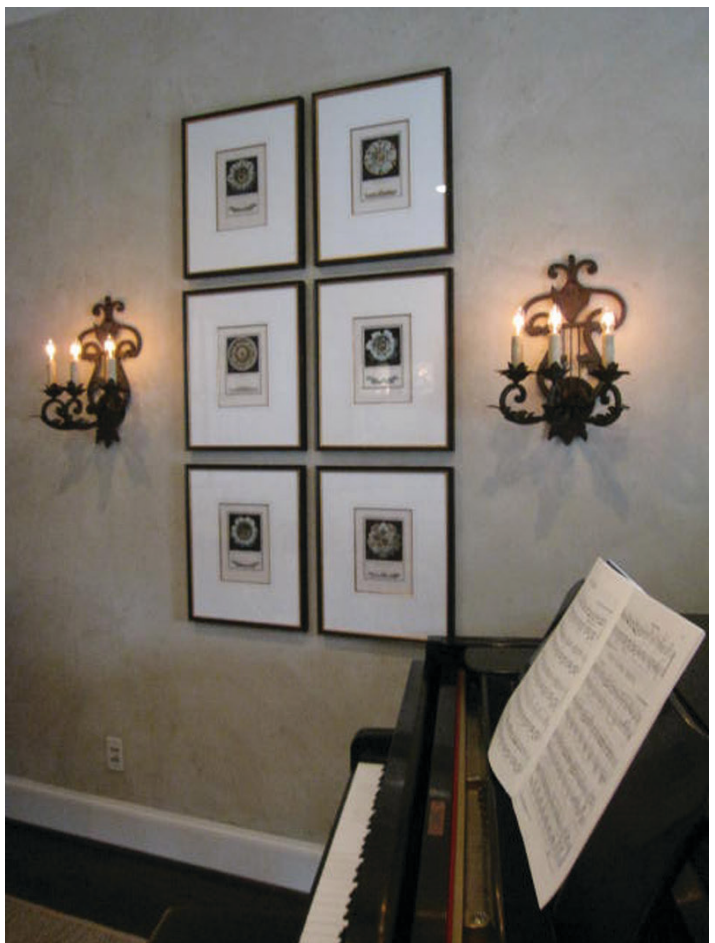
Morrison: What sets you apart from other designers?

Fruit: Besides being an ASID interior designer for over 40 years, I am also a Certified Graduate Remodeling Contractor (CGR) and an Aging in Place Specialist (CAPS). I am the only interior designer in Houston with this combination of credentials, which is very helpful when working with clients on their remodeling projects.

In addition, I also teach classes on interior design, decorating and home renovation through The Women's Institute of Houston, and I offer a series of fun Design-On-The-Go Bus Tours two-three times a year to interesting local antique shops, design showrooms and fabulous Houston residences.

Morrison: What has been your most challenging project and why?

Fruit: High rise condominiums are always a challenge because they have restricted work hours, generally one designated elevator that all contractors have to use and concrete ceilings, which makes it difficult to add additional ceiling fixtures, which almost all condominium



units seem to need. You have to get real creative when highlighting artwork or adding additional ambient lighting, but then that's what makes these projects all the more rewarding in the end.

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

Fruit: After selecting a specific design style with the clients, I carry that design theme in detail throughout the home. I make sure all fixtures, fittings and finishes reflect this theme as well as all architectural elements, trimwork, surfacing materials, etc. Interior designers know just what flooring to select to create a country French look, what light fixtures will create an English country look and what mouldings and trims will create a classic American traditional look. If an interior designer does his or her work right, it makes builders' and remodelers' projects look fabulous.

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

Fruit: The most common mistake I see builders make is selecting the wrong architectural style for fireplace surrounds and staircases. Many times builders resort to using the same style from the same vendor for every house they build. Windows, doors and trim work also are not always well selected. These important architectural elements are frequently ordered without proper design style consideration.

The biggest mistake I see homeowners make is in not seeking professional interior design guidance with their selections. They typically are very excited when it comes making their house selections, but so many are not aware of what is currently in style and what is not. They may know what they like, but many times what they like, a particular tile or finish or light fixture, is very outdated. Showroom personnel don't always know what trends are current, so the only way builders and homeowners can be assured of getting expert design advice is to engage the services of an interior designer. It generally takes only a few hours for an experienced interior designer to make all the major design selections that a home requires.

Morrison: Speaking about staying current, how to you keep yourself up to date with all the design trends happening in the industry today?

Fruit: I am constantly educating and refreshing myself by reading design industry publications, such as Architectural Digest and Veranda, which showcase the latest and greatest in architecture, interior design and landscape design. I pay attention to design trends I see evolving on the internet, I read trade industry reports and I attend numerous design industry product meetings throughout the year to stay abreast of all the new innovative products coming out.

Morrison: What is your favorite design style?

Fruit: Right now it's English Country style due to the influence of the hit PBS series "Downton Abbey." I recently had the privilege of staying in a fabulous, centuries-old English manor house, Weston Park, in Shropshire, England, which further instilled in me a love and appreciation for beautiful English Country style design. I believe this comfortable traditional style will always be fashionable if kept fresh and casual for our active American lifestyle.



For more information, contact Susan Fruit ASID, CGR, CAPS at Susan Fruit Interiors at 713-817-6565 or susan@susanfruitinteriors.com or visit her website at www.susanfruitinteriors.com

