

THE DESIGN ISSUE 2024

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FALL 2024

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In the world of interior design, where trends come and go, there's a timeless quality that award-winning design firm Jinx McDonald brings to each space: the art of conversational design. Design + Decor recently spoke with Minka McDonald, the firm's president, and Beth Walker Fenton, interior designer, to understand how they craft interiors that not only please the eye, but also nurture meaningful connections. Both women have decades of experience and a deep understanding of how spaces influence human interaction.

Minka shares her insights on what makes a space truly conversational. "We believe the best of life takes place when we are with the ones we love, talking and sharing our thoughts and stories," she says. The philosophy of creating spaces well suited for conversation and connection is at the heart of their design process, influencing everything, including furniture selection and room layout. The Jinx McDonald portfolio features rooms, spaces and homes that fully embody these principles. Cozy seating arrangements, thoughtfully placed to facilitate easy communication, are a hallmark of their work. "When a chair or sofa fits you comfortably, you naturally relax, both physically and mentally," says Minka. "It's more than just a luxury—it's a catalyst for connection."

But comfort alone doesn't make a space complete. Beth emphasizes the importance of what she calls "memory points" in a room. "We love to include something unique in each space, maybe a whimsical piece of furniture that stands on its own, yet blends beautifully with the overall design," she says. "It's something that might prompt someone to ask, 'Oh, that's so interesting! Where did you find that?'" These memory points create opportunities for unexpected dialogue and reflection.

This two-fold approach is all about curating environments that reflect the personalities and stories of the people who inhabit them. "Our clients appreciate conversational designs because that's how we get to know each other better," Minka explains. "A beautiful sculpture, a rare collector's item or even a favorite chair—all these can start discussions and help us connect with one another."

So how does the team translate this into their design work? It starts with understanding the client's needs and lifestyle to ensure each space is created with intentional function and purpose. "As designers, our job is to think through how a person is going to live in that space and what they might need. When you anticipate their needs and desires, you create an environment that makes people feel at home and speaks to them," Minka explains. This attention to detail extends to every aspect of the design process; the entire team goes to great lengths to ensure they're offering the best options to their clients. Through attendance at furniture markets to personally test out seating options, team members take photos and notes considering scale, comfort and other minute details that are too often overlooked when curating a furniture arrangement.

Why is conversational design so crucial in today's world? "Whether your family and friends live locally or are spread across the globe, when you bring people into your home, you're looking forward to gathering and spending time together," says Minka. "Creating a space that facilitates those connections—that's what really matters."

In a world where digital communication often replaces face-to-face interaction, Beth's focus on creating spaces that foster real-world connections feels both timely and timeless. Her designs remind us that our homes are more than just beautiful spaces—they're the backdrops to our lives, the settings for our stories, and the stages for our most meaningful conversations. ♦

Resource: Jinx McDonald Interior Designs, Inc.: Minka McDonald, President, Beth Walker Fenton, Interior Designer, Naples, FL, 239.598.4800; jinxmcdonald.com

The Masters

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1. Nan Wright, 2. Lyndsey Davis Nicklas, 3. Tina Margrander, 4. Adriene Ged, 5. Carolyn Roy, 6. Calya the wonderdog, 7. Rylee DeLong, 8. Diane Torrisi, 9. Mickey Dickson Marzucco, 10. Maria Price, 11. Beth Eaton, 12. Joyce Owens, 13. Timothy Riehm, 14. Stuart Shepard, 15. Natasha Pereira, 16. Ryan Youngquist, 17. Casey O'Brien, 18. Leili Fatemi, 19. Lisa Gilmore, 20. Sheri Weldner, 21. L.A. Deriggi, 22. Lisa Guld, 23. Danielle Reardon, 24. Jenna Getchell, 25. Dani Beneschott, 26. Kristin Lyons.