

Lamorinda Interior Design—the Beauty Inside

By Andrea A. Firth



Leslie Kalish

Photo Andrea Firth

Transitional seems to be the “buzz” word when you ask area experts what the interior design trends in Lamorinda are today. “It’s not as heavy and incorporates clean lines,” explains Leslie Kalish, a resident of Moraga and owner of LMK Interiors based in Lafayette. She explains that the transitional approach to interior design mixes contemporary pieces with antiques fluidly, and it projects warmth and comfort not uncharacteristic of the many indulged but relaxed post-Baby Boom homeowners in the area. Karin Lechner, an interior designer based in Lafayette, concurs: “Design in this area today is not fussy or ornate. It’s simple. There may be antiques, but the style is simple.”

The house designs in Lamorinda span the spectrum from the traditional older-home styles of Orinda from the 1920’s and 30’s to the ranchers of the 1950’s and 60’s on to the Brandy Bunch split levels filled with oak from the 1970’s and 80’s followed by the contemporary

styles of the 1990’s and sprinkled with a smattering of original farmhomes and funky modern houses. One might call the area architecturally challenged, but local interior designers choose a pragmatic approach.

“The biggest challenge in Lamorinda is lighting,” states Leslie Kalish. This is often a function of way the house is situated on the lot, low ceilings, poor floor plans, and too many soffits she explains. “Original rooms in Lamorinda homes were mostly rectangular—long and narrow,” notes Kalish. She often finds herself working in redesigned space. “Remodel is what we do,” she adds. “The great room trend—combining the kitchen, eating area, and family room into one open connected space—is continuing strong.”

“Lamorinda is a lot about updating,” notes Lechner. “Exterior remodels on the ranchers in the area have added Craftsman elements such as columns by the front

door and detailing in the trim to great effect,” she adds, “But these design elements do not have to be carried through to the interior of the home necessarily.”

“You always hope that a project has some strong architectural bones,” explains Alissa Lillie, a resident of Orinda with an interior design business based in Emeryville. “There is a lot of variety in home styles in Lamorinda and that makes it interesting.”

Lillie, whose clients are primarily based in San Francisco, is in the process of expanding into the Lamorinda area. “From what I see, people in Lamorinda want to have their hand in things when it comes to interior design,” she explains. Lillie anticipates that the interior design market will continue to become more user friendly, and that the show rooms will become more accessible to the public.

All of the designers describe a profusion of new materials to work with inside homes today. Leslie Kalish finds more clients in-

corporating metal surfaces into their designs and that some are using unique products such as zinc. Reclaimed wood is also a popular material for countertops and floors. And she identifies with the trend toward mixing surfaces. “Having more than one kind of material in a countertop works well. The more you mix—the calmer it gets,” she explains.

“People are also becoming ecologically conscious,” notes Lillie. Whether this increased eco-awareness has had an effect on Lamorinda homeowner choices with respect to home décor products is unclear.

Karin Lechner finds that although green design is hot among interior design junkies, she does not find it significantly affects the decision-making process of her clients in Lamorinda. “Green designs tend to be pricier,” she explains.

Leslie Kalish does find clients asking for low- and no-VOC (volatile organic compounds) paints to be used in their remodeling projects, but their motivation often stems from the fact that a family member struggles with allergies versus environmental considerations.

All the Lamorinda interior design experts stress the need for clients to retain their own personal style in whatever interior design changes they make.

“A person’s home should look and feel like them. It should tell their story,” notes Lechner.

“I see myself as part of an educational and guiding process with the client helping them to make good decisions and understanding what works well together and why,” states Lillie

“I like to see what people love,” says Kalish. “I stick with their style but bring them to new heights.”