

## MEETING THE DESIGNER'S CHALLENGE

Q&A WITH REGINA KURTZ

**C**OMBINING BEAUTY AND FUNCTION has been a mandate for Regina Kurtz, ASID, CID, ever since her days studying at the Fashion Institute of Technology and working in New York City's fashion industry some 40 years ago. She earned a degree in interior design from San Diego State University in 1977 and launched her Alpha Design Group in 1982. She has received many awards, including *San Diego Home/Garden Lifestyles'* Kitchens and Baths of the Year (2013 and 2001, respectively) and ASID Residential Design Awards. In 2004, she created the winning design on an episode of HGTV's *Designers' Challenge*. Last year, the USO honored Regina for her pro bono work on the USO Neil Ash Airport Center at San Diego International Airport.

**Q: Was your original plan to be a fashion designer?**

**A:** Yes. Unlike so many fellow designer friends of mine who say they knew from day one that they wanted to be an interior designer, it had never entered my mind. I was just steeped in the world of fashion and loved it. Interior design came to me after I had my children.

**Q: How did that happen?**

**A:** I decorated my first child's nursery; and friends would come over and say, "Oh my gosh, this is fabulous. You should be a decorator." Back in those days, we were called "decorators," we weren't called "designers." And it was just a seed that got planted, and the seed started to sprout; and before I knew it, I was obsessed with the idea and went back to school.

**Q: What trends have you been noticing?**

**A:** I'm noticing a cleaner, lighter look. I think that old, heavy, Tuscan, dark wood, neutral colors, browns and the fussiness of it is out. I went to Las Vegas for the furniture market this past January and saw a lot of Mid-Century revival; and I saw a lot of clean, contemporary lines. I think everything is just getting cleaner. And there's an explosion of color. We're going to see a wild palette of colors coming up through this spring and the summer. You see it in the fashion industry, and you're going to see it in the home furnishings industry as well.

**Q: What are some of the challenges facing your industry right now?**

**A:** One of the challenges I find is that on home/garden television networks, there's an abundance of shows that give the public an unreasonable expectation of budget and time frame. Ten years ago, I was chosen to be on the HGTV show *Designers' Challenge*. Basically, three designers were brought into a project, they made a presentation to the client, and the client chose which design they liked. Then we actually did the project and it appeared on TV.

**Q: So you won the challenge?**

**A:** Yes. And after the show aired, I can't tell you how many calls I got: "Oh, we would like a room just like that one you did. Can you do that for \$15,000?" Well, I couldn't; that was not even on the radar. And I'm not just talking about this show, but so many others where they show remodeling and what have you. They give numbers that are just not accurate, not real-world numbers. Then a











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Clockwise from top left: La Jolla condo living room, 2009; San Diego powder room, 2010; downtown high-rise condo dining area, 2014; downtown condo kitchen, 2014

client calls a designer — not necessarily me, but any professional — and they want to do a room and they want it done in two weeks and they want it for X amount of dollars, and it's just not a reality. So I'm not sure that modern-day home/garden television is giving the homeowner a fair indication of the real cost, and I find that a challenge very often.

**Q: Do you think your life would make a good reality-TV show?**

**A:** [Laughs] No. It couldn't compare to *The Housewives of Beverly Hills*. Actually, a day in the life of an interior designer, depending on the day, could be an interesting reality show — particularly when something goes wrong. ♦