

Coastal REFRESH

Jessica Merrill says so long to the "typical coastal palette"
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BY ROBIN DEMATTIA
Florida Weekly Correspondent



Designer Jessica Merrill says the goal of the living room was to create a "wow" that allowed people's eyes to look past the living room and focus on the residence's water view

Jessica Merrill's friends know that if they invite her over for dinner, they might find the living room furniture in different places before they serve cocktails. The design manager at Judith Liegeois Designs says she was constantly rearranging her bedroom while growing up and finds herself still moving objects at friends' houses.

After attending the University of Miami, the Cincinnati native moved to Southwest Florida. She has spent the last 10 years with Judith Liegeois Designs, which opened in Naples about 25 years ago.

When/how did you know you wanted to be an interior designer?

I started at Judith Liegeois Designs as a purchasing agent and became more and more intrigued by the design choices. After two years intensively learning the products, I grew into a position in design under Judith Liegeois. It felt right and natural to me. Over the years, I've developed into a leadership role in design at Judith Liegeois Designs.

Describe your approach to interior design in five words.

Balance. Feeling. Scale. Texture. Function.

Tell us something about your very first project.

It was the renovation of a condo in Park Shore. We focused on the living, dining and bar areas. Everything about the project was custom. It was my first real experience working with high-end clientele on custom projects. The style of the project was coastal contemporary.

Tell us something about your most challenging project.

It was a commercial project and my first experience working with everything from architecture to construction. Additionally, I had to work with the condominium's architectural review board to approve



MERRILL

each design element in the spaces. This project lasted over two years. We have since started other spaces at the building.



For the chandelier over the breakfast table, Judith Liegeois Designs worked with a local artist who fabricated and painted steel to look like wood

And tell us something about a favorite project: What made it so great?

It was in the same condominium building as above. After working through multiple spaces, we had established a great team of architect, builder and designer. The process was much smoother than our first project. After working together for years on the building, we have a good flow that resulted in a beautiful project. The condo owners understood the quality of product we design for and allowed us the opportunity to make each space a showpiece.

What is your favorite room/place in your own home and why?

My bedroom is a safe haven after a long day. I always enjoy fresh sheets and beautiful artwork to wake up to.

Tell us three things you consider must-haves for a great room/family room where people gather.

1. Fresh flowers
2. A cozy throw
3. A beautiful candle



During multiple phases conducted over five years, Judith Liegeois Designs renovated this client's residence using a high-end, detailed aesthetic that was elegant and modern. One touch was the bookshelf (bottom left) with lighting along the sides and glass shelves that brings attention to the accessories. COURTESY PHOTOS

Walk us through the process when you start a new project with a client.

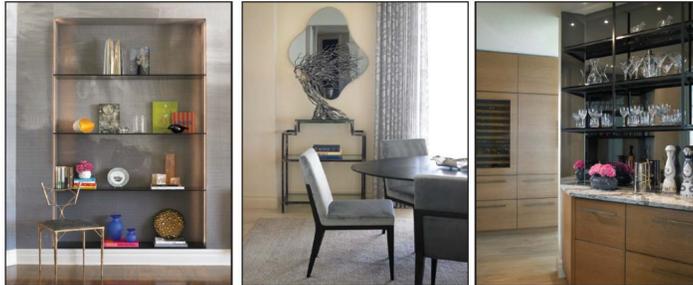
We begin with discussions about their aesthetic and feelings about their design style. We also discuss the necessary function for the space. In my opinion, the home quickly tells you what it needs.

For clients who are new to Southwest Florida, what is something you have found that surprises many of them about having a home here?

They are surprised that they have to adapt to the Florida lifestyle. There are so many things with the weather exposure that we have to think about. How many towels do they need? Where does the golf cart go when it's not in use? Also, the scale of homes here tends to be much larger. Most people are shocked by 20-foot ceilings; to me, they present a great design challenge.

Describe the perfect client.

The ideal client is a collaborative one who is open to new ideas and stepping out of the box. I help my clients to trust their instincts. This is imperative for the design outcome.



Do you have a design pet peeve?

Playing it safe.

Remodel or start from scratch — do you have a preference?

I much prefer to start from scratch. It is much better to design the architecture and furnishings at the same time. This allows us more time to perfect the design space and details of a project.

That said, remodels can be a fun challenge, working off an existing space and finding new or better ways for clients to live in and enjoy their home.

Any trends you especially love today? And any you will be or were delighted to see go away?

I'm happy that wallpaper is so in right now. I love that it can transform a space and add texture and depth. It always seems to add warmth and make the space more inviting. Mural wallpaper is a wonderful way to make a statement. The florals and botanicals do very well in designs.

I wish the typical Florida coastal palette of white and blue would just go away. Coastal can be done in such a new and unexpected way by staying away from harsh blue tones against whites and neutrals. I prefer to focus on the nuances from nature and the coast, like pulling blush tones out of shells and looking at other natural organic materials for tones and inspiration. When I look at typical coastal, I feel it has no strength. It's blah. I like to create more strength in the space.

Any words of wisdom for a young person who thinks they want to be an interior designer?

Understanding the principles of design and how to apply them is a very important cornerstone to any design project. It's not always just about putting pretty fabrics together. Product knowledge is also so important. Understanding the manufacturing side of furnishings allows a designer to better speak to the design and better understand how and why it is made for a particular space. Also, a designer's focus should be on quality and comfort.

What do you think you'd be doing if you weren't doing this?

I love the merchandising aspect of the process. Going on market buying trips. Finding product that's fitting for our market and client. Meeting with artists to create collections for our clients.

I think I would be in some sort of showroom environment doing creative merchandising. ;