

HOMEFINDER

STYLEMAKER

Designer prefers mixing materials, not just matching

Former botanist says she has affinity for modern design.

By Linda Jerkins
For the AJC

Atlanta's Julie Witzel chose interior design as a second career. And she never looked back.

My company: Founded in Atlanta in 2010, J Witzel Interior Design is a full-service interiors firm, specializing in modern, yet approachable, design.

Background: After graduating with a botany degree from North Carolina State University, I moved to California for work. While I loved science and my job in the biological sciences department at California State University at Los Angeles, I knew it wasn't going to be creative enough to enjoy for the rest of my life. While living in California, I also discovered another love: modern design.

In 2002, I moved to Georgia to pursue a career in design, starting with a second degree from the Art Institute of Atlanta. Interior design felt like an excellent fit because it not only allowed me creativity, but also incorporated my highly technical side.

First design job: William Peace of Peace Design in Atlanta. I couldn't have asked for a better mentor. I started as an intern and quickly moved up the ranks to project manager. I was able to work on high-end residential projects throughout the country. In 2010, I left to start my own firm.

My design style: Modest luxury that is classic and approachable; minimal without being austere.

Where you've seen my work: American Craft



Julie Witzel and architect Rodolfo Castro designed the modern dining room in this house near Toco Hills. The family who lives here entertains often and wanted a formal dining room. They chose a 12-foot-by-4-foot-6-inch reclaimed claro walnut slab table, which seats 10, partly because the wood itself was stunning, and partly because it is 100 percent kid-proof. The table was made by California's Taylor Donsker, and the table design was a collaboration. CONTRIBUTED BY MALI AZIMA

Council's Make Room Earth Themed Vignette 2015; Atlanta Homes & Lifestyles Designer Showhouse at Serenbe-Swann Ridge; Atlanta Homes & Lifestyles (October 2014); Atlanta Homes & Lifestyles (December 2014); Modern Luxury Interiors-Atlanta; Atlanta Food & Wine Festival's 2014 "Rathbun's Watch List" - Bar Vignette; Modern Atlanta Home Tour (2012 and June 2015)

Career highlight (so far): I had clients who decided to work directly with a vendor on a custom piece of furniture without me (thinking that they would save money), believing that the showroom would know how to execute their idea properly. It was a total disaster, and the day they called me saying, "We messed up," I knew I had a client for life. I was able not only to negotiate a redo with the vendor, but the resulting piece of furniture is

the clients' favorite. They LOVE to tell the story of how they pretended to be designers once with tragic results, and how I saved the day. (In other words, their costly mistake did not leave them with sour grapes).

Best way to quickly transform a room: Well-placed and properly scaled artwork.

Favorite decor trick: Mixing materials instead of matching them for a more collected look.

Where should people splurge/where should they save: Splurge on pieces that will receive a lot of use (sofas, dining tables, rugs) and custom window treatments. Save on secondary and tertiary spaces that you don't see every day.

Current design obsession: Unstained waxed or oiled wood, especially claro walnut, spalted maple and wormy chestnut - the more figured the better. I try to have at least

one piece in each room that allows the beauty of the wood to speak for itself.

Design pet peeve(s): Furniture that is half on/half off a rug; bad lighting; and "karate chopping" the tops of pillows.

Most important element in a room: Lighting! Even beautiful architecture and furnishings will look bad in an improperly lit room.

New or re-emerging design looks you like: I have always had an affinity for modern design, especially some of the mid-century designers like Vladimir Kagan, Hans Wegner and Milo Baughman, and I see more people gravitating toward this style. It's even gained momentum in a traditional market like Atlanta.

Most unusual design request: A client requested we design a "Keith Richard's Heroin Crash Pad" room. Not for drug use, just wanted that rock



Atlanta's Julie Witzel describes her design style as "modest luxury that is classic and approachable, minimal without being austere."

star vibe!

Design mistake most people make: Not looking at their home as a whole. For example, they design each space as its own entity. It makes going from room to room feel "disjointed."

Best design advice: Pay attention to the scale of the room and the furnishings you are bringing into it.

Favorite design sources

■ **Showrooms at the Atlanta Decorative Arts Center (ADAC):** Martin Nash; Baker Furniture; Jim Thompson; Designer Carpets; Paul +; Brooks & Black Fine Framing; Donghia; Edelman Leather; Grizzel + Mann; and Ernest Gaspard

■ **Go-to shops:** Verde Home; Steve McKenzie's; Switch Modern; Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams; Bjork Studio; and Grey Furniture.

■ **Unexpected finds:** Chamblee Antique Row; Scott Antique Markets; West Elm (especially its new Handcrafted Artisan pieces); and Anthropologie House & Home (great hardware).

■ **Favorite magazines:** Elle Décor; Atlanta Homes & Lifestyles; American Craft Magazine; domino; and Wallpaper.

■ **Favorite blogs/websites:** Garden and Gun; Editor at Large; Design Sponge; and Design Love Fest

Favorites on Instagram:

- @marlene_fichtner
- @enyleeparker
- @amsullivan
- @nikoleherriott

Favorite go-to accessory, sofa or color: I have been accused of using "Julie Witzel Green" somewhere in almost every project (except for the few who don't like the color green). It's a green that is darker than avocado, but brighter than olive.

Favorite space at home: My bedroom: It's luxurious and warm, quiet and peaceful: walnut woods throughout, old brass finish on the hardware and lighting that has a perfect patina, soft goods in bright white and olive (er, Julie Witzel) green.

Favorite household possessions: Vintage midcentury furniture pieces that belonged to my grandmother; a handmade quilt art hanging by my mother that was a design collaboration between us; stoneware coffee mugs (a Christmas gift from my sister); and an abstract painting by my dear friend, Tatyana Ostapenko, an emerging artist in Portland, Oregon.

Most recent design project: Working on a modern home by Chastain Park as well as finishing up the final details of a 1940s three-story building renovation in Nashville, Tennessee.

Find Julie Witzel at:

- Instagram: www.instagram.com/jwitzeldesign
- Houzz: www.houzz.com/pro/jwitzeldesign
- Pinterest: www.pinterest.com/jwitzeldesign/
- Website: www.jwitzeldesign.com



From the moment you top the peak of the hill at Soleil Laurel Canyon, roll down your window and inhale the crisp air, you know you're in a different place. You're at home. Nestled in the foothills of the North Georgia Mountains and only an hour drive from Atlanta, this active adult community in Canton has everything an active adult needs to live a luxurious, resort-style life with a low cost of living.

AMENITIES

Residents enjoy exceptional recreational amenities including a 28,000 square-foot clubhouse, gourmet teaching kitchen, fitness center and aerobics studio, library, performing arts theater, card rooms and an arts and crafts workshop. Outside the clubhouse, the tennis center, an amphitheater, community garden, greenhouse, lagoon-style pool, walking trails and adjacent Fairways of Canton golf course complete the resort-style environment.

ACTIVITIES

Soleil has a team of lifestyle managers who are dedicated to scheduling activities and events for residents each month. The monthly activity calendar is jam-packed with events, parties, brunch and learns, speeches, trips, live entertainment, meet and greets, and more! With more than 55 social clubs in the community, you are sure to find your niche (or a new hobby!) at Soleil.

HOMES

The ranch-style homes available at Soleil Laurel Canyon are perfect for active adults looking for one-level living. Complete with an open floor plan that makes entertaining a breeze, these homes are void of any stairs and offer low-maintenance, lock-and-go lifestyles a reality. All lawn care is managed by the community association, and the homes are built with high-quality siding products that require minimal maintenance. In addition, the community has a 24-hour manned gate, and security alarms are standard in all homes.

Soleil Laurel Canyon offers eight unique home designs that offer a variety of square footage and options. These homes feature two and three bedroom designer floor plans that are spacious with elegant architectural details for which the award-winning community is widely known.

LOCATION

In an ideal location between the bustling city of Atlanta and the quiet calm of the North Georgia Mountains, the city of Canton is home to Soleil. The bucolic mountain views in Canton offer a beautiful, colorful scene during the fall and summer months when trees and flowers bloom. Though the city is growing, it maintains its small town feel, offering local restaurants and local shops on its Main Street. When residents wish to venture out for a change of scenery, the city of Atlanta is only an hour away, and the foothills of the North Georgia Mountains are at Soleil's doorstep.

AWARDS

Soleil Laurel Canyon was named the 2014 Grand Aurora Award winner at the 2014 Aurora Awards, a design competition of the Southeast Building Conference that honors excellence in building and design. Soleil was also named as one of the 50 best master-planned communities in the United States in 2013 by Where to Retire magazine. It also won both the 2012 OBIE award for Atlanta's 50+ Community of the Year and best amenity package.

Soleil
LAUREL CANYON

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