



CONNIE LEFEVRE



Design House, Inc. owner and Houston interior designer Connie LeFevre, ASID, RID, sits down with *TH&L* to talk about being in the design industry for more than 30 years, Houston design, and her essentials to live, work, and create.

Texas Home & Living: Tell me a little bit about your background. What made you decide to become an interior designer?

Connie LeFevre, ASID, RID: When I first attended college, back in the “dark ages,” I was encouraged to study something “practical,” so I was in general business. But when I was able to go back to school, I took everything I wanted and studied fine arts, which allowed me to explore all areas of design. Interior design was my favorite, but all of the others have also been helpful. To me a good designer working so closely with clients benefits from exposure to psychology, business, journalism, and even law. You have to be able to understand the needs of the client, their budget, write proposals and letters of agreement. The concept that I could help create special and personal environments seemed like a fulfilling way I could be involved in a creative field and hopefully make a difference.

TH&L: What is your design philosophy?

CL: To work in partnership with clients to create unique, personalized environments by interpreting and anticipating their needs and lifestyles. Effective design translates the client’s lifestyle needs in both a functional and aesthetic way.

TH&L: You founded Design House, Inc. in 1975. How has it evolved and changed since then? How has design in Houston changed over the years?

CL: I began Design House, Inc. working alone as a designer, which honestly is not the best way to begin. However, it worked for me at the time with small children. As they grew up and I got busier with more work, I added office support, then design assistance, and more of both as needed. After becoming frustrated with not being able to find enough unique product for clients, I began traveling and buying for them and eventually decided to open the Design House Showroom to make the collection available to others. Since then the showroom has been expanded several times. Next on the agenda, I hope to introduce some of our own lines. We already customize a lot of the product we receive.

Design in Houston has always been exciting because it is such an international city, but this has of course been escalated by technology so that there is an immediate connection with the rest of the world, rather than waiting for it to filter down through fashion and imports or travel. Global influences have always been there, but now are much more accessible – easily and instantly. However, it does require a lot of evaluation, scrutiny, and knowledge to sort out what is good and of value.

TH&L: How would you describe the design culture in Houston? How does it differ from the other major cities in Texas? Where do you see it headed in the future?

CL: The design culture in Houston is very diversified, personalized, current, cutting edge, but warm and inviting. I don’t believe that other





major Texas cities are that different, or for that matter, anywhere else. It's such a small, connected world today. You still have to consider different climates, terrain, methods of construction, codes, etc., but it's mainly the client and how the space will be used. Individualism and comfort are key. In the future I believe there will be more and more green and sustainable design. I also think, and hope, we will build and design to last longer, with concern about what kind of footprint will be left behind, not be so disposable, and conserve our resources.

TH&L: What are some of the biggest challenges you have overcome being in the design industry for over 30 years?

CL: I've seen the economy go up and down - remember the slogan "Stay alive to 85"? I've found that especially during those times, not unlike today's economy, you can actually emerge stronger. For example, networking and peer tables were created for designers during that period and we all grew. Technology is of course a major change and challenge I have seen. In those 30 years have come faxes, computers, cell phones and they have kept evolving into more complex equipment for both us and our clients. I found you have to make them your asset and aid and grow with them. How wonderful it is to be in Europe and e-mail a photo of a potential item to a client wherever they are for approval. I remember how exciting my first huge, digital camera was, and that wasn't that many years ago. I had a client who couldn't decide on the façade colors of their home. I experimented with my "new" digital, took a picture of the house and colored in the selections. They made an immediate decision. That seems so primitive now. And of course CAD has made space design so quick, clean, changeable, and transportable. We can work on projects anywhere.

TH&L: Tell me about an average day for you.

CL: My day rarely turns out to be just what is on the calendar. Of course appointments have to be kept, but they may be late or run longer, unexpected deliveries for the showroom may arrive, or there may be construction delays or problems on projects. Some days I am wearing more of the designer hat and some days are more dedicated to the showroom, but regardless, I am blessed to have such a great team, with such positive energy, that together we make it all work—and have fun doing it.

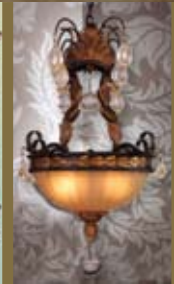
TH&L: Who or what gives you inspiration?

CL: Things that inspire me are travel, architecture, technology of new products, nature - particularly trees and sunsets, but also simple, mundane things that you never know when you will come across. And I always return from a buying trip for our showroom with lots of ideas and adrenaline.

TH&L: Do you have a signature/look? If so, what is it?

CL: No. My goal is to help clients have the best possible expression of their needs and desired environments, which are unique to the client and project. I would not want anyone to be able to walk into a space and readily identify that it was just our style, other than that it was a mix that looked timeless and effortless with attention to details and the architecture of the space, sprinkled with unexpected and special pieces.





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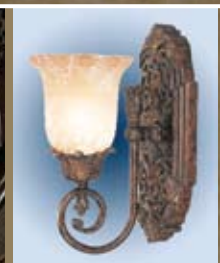
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TH&L: What is the first thing you do when you start a new project?

CL: Interview the client to understand how they live and work, or want to live and work, in the space. Then determine the scope, budget, and quality of the project. If you can commit to two of these, the third will fall into place. Depending on the project, we may digest or develop plans and elevations, improve or develop lighting plans and marry them to other electronics in the space. We will also discuss the schedule and any preferred vendors. This meeting will be attended by at least two of the designers so that there will always be someone familiar with the project available to respond to questions or needs.

TH&L: What is essential for every room?

CL:

- Good proportion/scale
- Adequate and exciting lighting
- Texture
- Contrast
- That it functions

TH&L: What do you love most about being a designer?

CL: The opportunity to meet and partner with interesting and exciting clients, talented trade sources, and to create spaces beyond just safe and proper. Creating something a little unexpected and unique, in addition to finding the solutions, is very rewarding as a designer, and hopefully to the client.

TH&L: What are ten essentials you need to live, work, and create?

CL:

1. Family and friends to make me slow down and remember what's most important.
2. My home and retreat revives me and makes me want clients to be as comfortable in theirs.
3. The various markets that I attend provide more exposure to new creations.
4. Good designer publications that we regularly receive, in addition to the ones I always pick up when traveling.
5. Travel for both renewal and inspiration.
6. My ever changing showroom full of great products and unique discoveries.
7. The energetic team at DHI and the individual artists and craftsmen we work with to support and share ideas and create solutions.
8. Technology and the people who help and support me and know much more than I ever will.
9. My iPhone that allows me to stay in touch in all ways, wherever I am.
10. Time outdoors, even if it is walking.

TH&L: What will always be in style?

CL: Thoughtful design, no matter what the style, with attention to detail. ^{TH&L}

