

LIVING LUXE

THE DESIGN ISSUE

MEET 7 OF
TORONTO'S
INFLUENTIAL
DESIGNERS



Special Issue — Diverse Designers — Grand Estates — Impressive Lighting — Hot Trends

Creators By Design

To celebrate our Design issue, we selected seven designers who are each making their mark in their craft. These brilliant professionals are a testament to the adage that design is not just a profession, it's also an attitude.

By Lisa van de Geyn



Nadia Di Donato

Designer, vice-president and creative director of Liberty Entertainment Group in Toronto and Miami

Photography by Paula Wilson

ON CAREER SELECTION. I've been designing since I was 17. I live and breathe design. It's all I've ever wanted to do. For me, it wasn't learned — it's innate. I didn't choose my career path, it chose me.

ON PIVOTAL POINTS. A significant career move was joining my husband in the hospitality industry as creative director of the Liberty Entertainment Group. It was a natural transition from 2D to interior design at a time when the design industry was seeing revolutionary changes, allowing





EXTERIOR PHOTOS SUPPLIED BY NADIA DI DONATO



innovation at lightning speed. Over the last two decades my work spans from conceptualization to design and build of unique hospitality and residential projects.

ON GOOD MEMORIES. A particularly memorable story that comes to mind is when “ET Canada” approached our company to partner in a pop-up installation during TIFF. I was asked to conceptualize and construct a state-of-the-art nightclub lounge for a five-day activation. I was escorted up to an empty rooftop parking lot in the trendy Yorkville area, and it took a week to transform 8,000 square feet of flat concrete into a glamorous Hollywood studio lounge hosting celebrity interviews and film debut parties. One of the LA studio executives attending was so impressed with the concept and design that he insisted I attend the Oscars — and I did!

ON SIGNATURE STYLE. I’m not a big fan of the latest trend or the “it” design. I’m always searching for that custom, unique accent piece to ensure originality, quality and my personal infusion of that slight bit of edginess.

ON LESSONS LEARNED ON CONSTRUCTION SITES. I was onsite during construction of one of our first restaurants surrounded by 20 workmen. I was wearing high heels. As I was backing up looking at a design detail, I tripped and fell backwards in front of the construction team. It may not sound like a big deal, but it was one of my most embarrassing moments because at the time it screamed, “What a girl,” in a man’s world. From that moment forward I wore work boots to every construction site. I also taught myself all the construction terminology so that I could earn the respect of foremen, carpenters, painters and other workers on sites.

ON GOOD ADVICE. I’d tell new designers that the more work you do, the better you’ll get.

ON POINTS OF PRIDE. I’m most proud of the diversity in my design portfolio. From restaurants to event spaces, tourist spots to residential design, no two projects have ever been the same. In my personal life, I’m most proud of the people who have greatly inspired me — my husband and my sons, Justin and Luca. They stand above everyone else when I reflect on my success.



Di Donato says this space (left) is grounded in “traditional style (the plush sofa, elegant rug, classic fireplace), the modern artwork and the back-lit floating marble wall are the wild cards in the room.” Meanwhile, the backyard pool area is also beautifully modern. “A sculptural pool can be a gorgeous focal point. Contemporary doesn’t have to mean cold and minimalist,” she says. “This infinity pool is in altissimo Italian porcelain and the overall feel is soft, glamorous and wonderfully serene.”