



No Instant Miracles

Linda Constable
redesigns some
misconceptions

By Mackensy Lunsford
Photo by Matt Rose

Linda Constable has been a sunny presence at Ambiance Interiors for most of its 35 years. Constable, who has served as a buyer, receivables manager and even furniture retailer for the design company, was owner Kathryn Long's first assistant. She's also an avid cook who knows her way around the stove as well as a slow-smoker. "My Paul Prudhomme cookbook is pretty well-loved these days," she says. "I like to make soups and gumbos, things like that — they call me the one-pot wonder." But it's as an interior designer that Constable has made her mark. *Carolina Home + Garden* caught up with her to find out how over three decades in the design business can still inspire joy. "Joy — that's my word," she laughs.

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CH+G: What does Ambiance Interiors specialize in?

LC: We specialize in residential design, but we do commercial and hospitality a little, too. We work with new construction and existing homes, from the smallest part of a room to the entire house.

What is your personal specialty?

As diverse as people are, I am too — and that’s part of what I love. I love working with older homes because there’s a lot of soul in them — existing spaces that people may have lived in for a long time, but how they live has evolved, and so things around the house are [ready] to evolve too. I like helping people with that.

What was life like before design?

I started out as a fine-arts major. I have a degree in forestry. I did that for the earlier years of my career, but working for the government wasn’t exactly the right fit. I started working for Kathryn in January of ‘79, so I have learned the business from *being* in the business.

What moves you about design?

Working with people and working with their homes is really heartfelt for me. I think that’s what keeps me in the business — the clients.

You’ve seen a lot of trends come and go. What’s here to stay?

People’s affection for their homes is here to stay.

Why hire a designer?

There are a number of reasons. I think designers can help people recognize their own creativity — I think that’s really

important. Also, getting an overall plan and getting help with the big picture and space planning so when you get to decisions about furnishings, things not only look great but fit great, too. There’s so many parts to putting your house together.

Tips for working with a designer?

Knowing what you don’t like is just as important as knowing what you do like, sometimes — and being able to express that. Communication is important. We’re here to help people feel more at home *at* home. Do you remember that song by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young? “Our house is a very fine house?” I think that when you get home and you drive up in your driveway and that song comes to mind, I think you’ve done well with your house.

What if you don’t get that feeling? Then what?

I think most any space can be made to be something that you enjoy living in more. It may be refurbishing rooms. It may be recognizing that, as wonderful as the dark paneling may have been for the earlier homeowner, dark paneling is just not your thing. Adding details, whether it’s architecturally or decoratively speaking. Anything can be made better, even the pot of soup on the stove.

What if you’ve put in too much salt? Throw a potato in!

Any tips for decorating on a budget?

Well, we all know that paint can make a

room a happier place. Maybe the room feels too crowded. Maybe the room is uninviting because the arrangement of the room could be improved upon. Work with your existing items.

What are some good tips for choosing the right color?

That’s as individual as the people who live in a house. Sometimes a more neutral palette of colors is a plus because perhaps people are collectors and they have more details in their room, so wall spaces serve more as a background for their art. Sometimes people may be just starting to gather and collect. Sometimes it’s a personal thing; some people just like to live with more color.

Favorite paint brand?

Benjamin Moore, hands down; they have paint for people that may be sensitive to chemicals.

Any design trends that drive you nuts?

I think the TV decorating shows have their place — I really do. But when you get a call and someone thinks that you’re going to come and heal their house in 30 minutes ... it’s a process.

Any parting words of wisdom?

Enjoy your home and gather people there. That’s part of what makes your house a home. Find joy in your house. ■

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