Builder/Architect

Inland Northwest Edition　　　　　April 1997

Briar Hill Builders
A Tradition of Elegance

Special Feature:

The Miller Company

DESIGN
VS
ARCHITECTURE

de.sign (di-zin´), n.
1. The invention and disposition of the forms, parts, or details of something according to a plan.

ar.chi.tec.ture (ar´ki te´kcher) n.
1. The profession of designing buildings, open areas, communities, and other artificial constructions and environments, usually with some regard to aesthetic effect.

Dialogue: Robert Miller, Designer
THE MILLER COMPANY

by Valerie Clausen

SPECIAL FEATURE

85' MAIORA
ITALIAN YACHT

Background: Born in Tacoma, Washington. Self-taught. Formed The Miller Company in Newport Beach 1971; Kreiss Collection in 1977; RobertRose showroom in Honolulu, 1980; Sterling Chandler showroom in 1993 — current office and showroom located in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Specialties include residential architectural/interior design, construction and construction management. Projects include: design and furnishing for fine custom homes, mid-rise condominiums, vacation resorts, hotels, apartments, small towns, and private yachts. Works throughout the U.S., including California, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, New York, Virginia, and Washington. International work includes projects for Canada, Costa Rica, Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Nicaragua, and Spain. Winner, Golden Nugget Award, AIA. Featured in *Architectural Digest* magazine, January 1997.

Question: What is your definition of design?

Design is in one's mind. Design is dreaming in reality. It's a use of texture, color, shape, and pattern, all formed into an expression of how comfortable we are with ourselves. Architectural design is judged by the emotional experience it evokes. Interior design should be a collection of one's memories and possessions surrounded by a relaxed architectural background of natural elements and good lighting. Design should be simple, uncomplicated, and understated. It shouldn't shout at you. It needs some form of roots, of memories. Everything comes from memory, usually fond memories… Granny's house, a palace in Paris, etc. Design is an emotional thing, it's not a movie set that can be torn down. Design is having memory of today's needs with yesterday's past.

Question: How do you distinguish between the following: designer, architect, interior designer, and decorator?

A *designer* designs and creates anything: gardens, architecture, graphics, etc. It's very broad. Michaelangelo was basically a designer, a creator. We're mostly familiar with his frescoes and sculptures, but he also gave us many of the fundamental concepts that we use today in architecture and the world of design. Thomas Jefferson was also a designer. He designed his homes and invented a three tier window that's still in use today.

An *architect* creates the backdrop and shelters lives. As the nucleus of the building world, the architect learns the structures, organizes the master plans, and supervises each

STONYBROOK
COLORADO

step of construction from the point of conception to completion. Up until 100 years ago, there wasn't much of a distinction between a designer and an architect. As time went on, city departments and government agencies recognized the need to have a professional willing to take the responsibility for failure in a structure… in other words, the necessity of errors and omissions insurance. This is why licensing came about. Frank Lloyd Wright was basically a designer but he recognized the need for licensing architecture. Today, an architect needs a college degree and a license to practice.

An *interior designer* creates a strong essence of architecture. While the architect creates the backdrop, the interior designer applies the colors, the textures, the moods, and the emotions to the canvas. It's a relatively new field. *Architectural Digest* magazine gave the general public their first taste of what interior designers did for the rich; the Gettys, the Rockefellers, etc. They educated the public in design and style — the Southampton look, the French Country look. (Once again, the roles of designer and architect are becoming blurred because interior designers are moving walls and interfering with structure. Because interior designers aren't licensed, the American Society of Interior Designers is bowing to the concerns of licensing agencies and insurance companies. Standards have now been developed through the National Council for Interior Design Qualifications [NCIDQ]. Within 5 years, every interior designer will need an NCIDQ license to practice.)
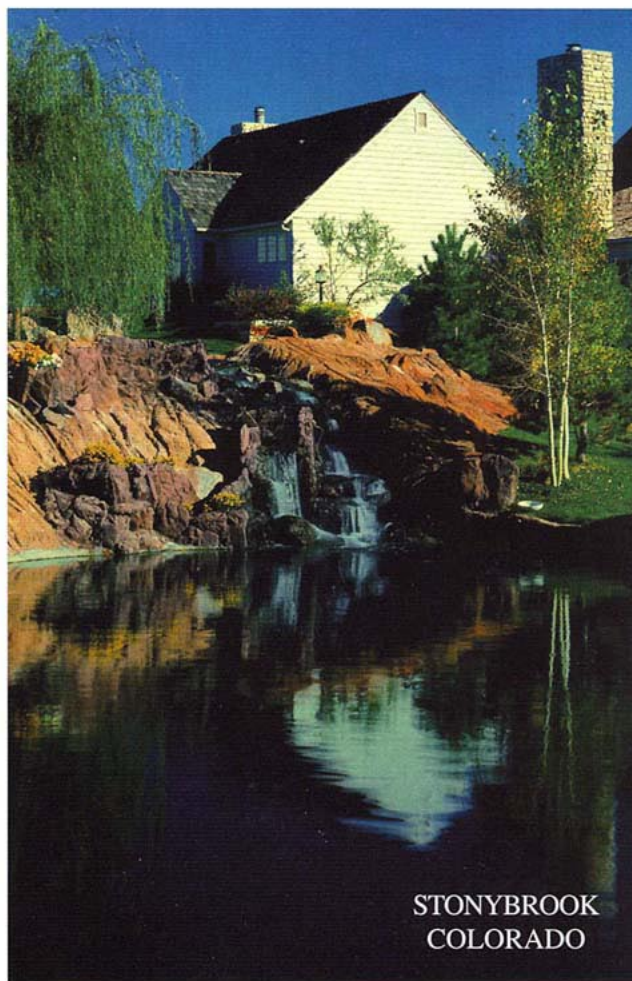
A ***decorator*** works with the completed structure, or canvas, if you will. The decorator chooses fabrics, colors, furniture, wall coverings, window treatments, and accessories. Unlike an interior designer, a decorator doesn't alter the existing structure, but fills in the canvas.

Q **uestion:** What is your design process when working with a client?

Most of my clients are referred to me. They've seen something I've done and liked it. They interview me, I interview them. It's the beginning of a long working relationship. They have to like me, I have to like them; it's a two-way street. I have to protect my reputation as well as the client's. Most of mine have similar desires and feelings. I like to associate with people who demand more of me in design. Making people think about what they want in design is difficult. I try to pull out as much as I can of their feelings and desires. In the beginning, the main thing I do is sit back and listen, in order to learn everything about the client: what they like in styles, furnishings, music, foods, etc. (With a husband/wife combination, you have to interpret each one's desires into a whole so that both of them win.)

When I first start talking to clients, it's a dream of memories they've seen. As I get to know the direction for me and for them, I talk more about the reality of what we're going to do. Then, we expand on the details and I propose a budget. It's my job to dissect the situation, to find out what makes them feel what their desires are. As I pull the details out, I put the pieces together. This is the hardest part. This is what the design profession is all about, to develop the memory of the client with today's needs.

92' SHERE KHAN
NEW ZEALAND

ORCAS ISLAND
SAN JUANS
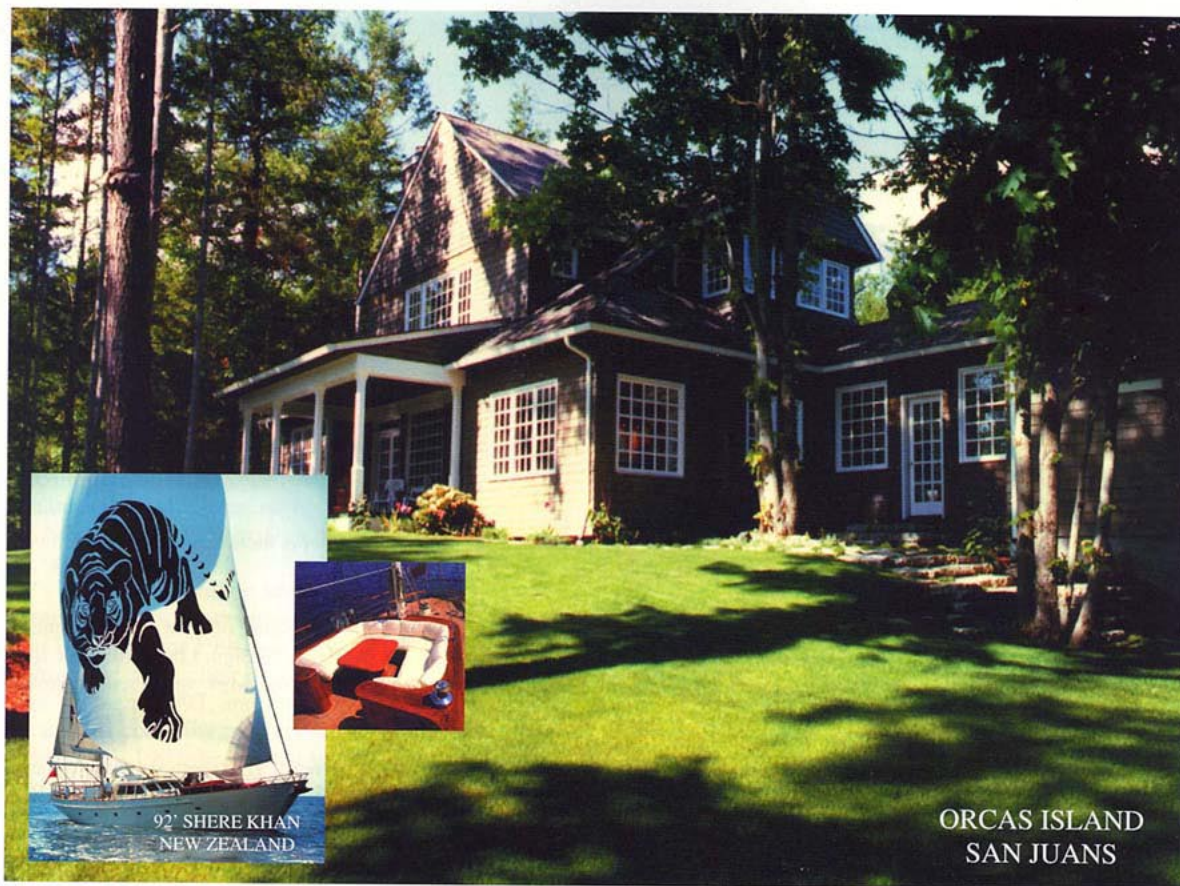
I like to design from the inside/out to make a home. I have to know my products well before I start. It's like putting together a puzzle. If it's a residence, I develop the concept and the feeling I want to capture by going through design books searching for details… roof overhangs, shapes, styles, furnishings, kitchens. It can vary from Russian houses to Virginia farms. I'm not looking at overall subject matter, just architectural details that provide the theme. Then, I make lots of sketches. When the right feeling is there, I add the finished layout and put it to scale. I scan my drawing into the computer and build walls, windows, doors, and roofs. I build this on two computer screens so we can view the shapes from all perspectives. This ensures that the scale and shape are accurate. We do interior perspectives to make sure the floorplan and the furniture layout work together. I make a laser printout and do freehand sketching to show more details. Then, it's back to the computer to enhance the sketch. The working drawings are developed from here. This takes from 4 months to a year, depending upon the client.

I'm from the old school that's very labor intensive and I just like doing things until they're right. This process saves you from doing a bad design. I like incorporating freehand drawing with the computer. It's a tremendous timesaver. Everything is precise. We use an ArchiCad system on a Macintosh computer. You can see the residence from every angle… up the hill, out on the water in a rowboat, or through a window, to ensure the view isn't blocked. It's amazing!

BEVERLY HILLS

THOUSAND OAKS

Question: You design a total environment for your clients including cabinetry, drawer pulls, etc. How does this reflect them and not you?

The client already has their own sense of identity. I interpret their sense of style. As a designer, I have to develop solutions to please the needs of my client. In residential design, I build from the life of the client and incorporate it into the final design. I talk with them and work with them to develop the proper design solution that suits their needs.

Sometimes, people don't have design confidence. As a designer, I give them something they didn't know they had. The most important thing is to leave them with something they like and can live with.

B/A