

Kandrac & Kole Interior Designs, Inc.

DESIGN DUO TARGETS HIGH-END FEMALE NICHE
WITH CREATIVE, REPURPOSED SOLUTIONS

by Ruth E. Dávila

Kandrac & Kole Interior Designs, Inc. (K & K), a full-service design firm in Atlanta, Georgia, attests that interior-design firm owners can steadily grow their client base—and make their service a necessity—by fusing style insights with sharp administration, and by over-delivering on service.

"The business of interior design can lend itself to quite a bit of drama," says Kelly Kole, president and co-owner of K & K. "People are paying a lot for us to do our job, so it's really important for us to come across as talented, experienced professionals, who charge accordingly but are really fair"

Although Kole and her business partner Joann Kandrac—who used to work together at a home-furnishings center—primarily target working professionals with families, they also pick up some commercial referrals from residential clientele. Thanks to its systematic approach, K & K juggles up to 10 projects at a time, while many in the design community have been forced to close their doors. "I think it helps that we both have business backgrounds and are organized administratively," Kandrac says.

The first step is a client consultation, which is a "working appointment" rather than a casual meet and greet. That's why the firm charges for it—and 99 percent of its prospects convert into customers. "It's our chance to see their lifestyle," Kandrac says. "To meet their kids, their dogs, their spouse. To let them talk about where they are headed, where their challenges are."

Armed with a tape measure and camera, the team procures a set of impressions at each assessment. Post-consultation, the firm assembles a comprehensive design proposal, outlining all processes and fees, to be presented at the second meeting. When the client approves the proposal and pays the preset service fee in full, Kandrac and Kole spring into action.

Scouring the marketplace, the duo searches trade marts, shops, and catalogues for an inspirational springboard. Usually they land on an individual work of art, fabric, or a rug that epitomizes the theme in a single glance. "That sets the tone of the room; we're stuck until we have that one thing," Kole says. "We're really floundering, because that piece gives us focus in the color, the style, the whole look, and feel."



Design Inspiration

For a K&K dining-room design showcased at a 2009 DIFFA Dining By Design event in Atlanta, GA, the duo drew inspiration from C Lighting's (www.clighting.com) Capella nine-light chandelier in a wet-black finish, featuring hand-cut black crystal.

For an executive's home office, the centerpiece was an oil painting of an abstract chandelier. Building the room around it, the end result was a tailor-made retreat perfect for relaxation at the end of the day. "Women are the captain of the ship, the orchestra leader—they run Command Central in the home, and they want their own space," Kole says. "So, designing ladies' home offices has become a formal request lately."

The third meeting in the project cycle includes a presentation of all the selections—with photos or renderings, when possible—along with an itemized budget. Items are often vintage adaptations. "We try to repurpose things whenever possible—whether it's grandma's rocker or a crib from when they were a baby or something we found at a flea market," Kole says. "It's more fun."

When decorating a fantastical room for a three-year-old girl, K & K bought a cohort of antiques and then had them hand-painted by an artist on it's team. Experimentation—with panache—is the firm's forte.

"Our job is to create designs that are really original," Kole says. "We don't want our clients' neighbors copying their homes. We want every piece to be special."

In future projects, the firm plans to employ decorative-concrete countertops, bamboo and cork flooring, and stainless-steel backslashes. Even with heavy customization, a complex project, from consultation to installation, might take 10–12 weeks. Throughout the process, the firm's communication is so transparent that clients are thoroughly impressed, Kole says—as are their husbands. "Business professionals realize the importance of a contract, documentation, and putting down dollars in writing," she says.

Clarity, design tenacity, and world-class project management has led to repeat business. But that's not the only reason K & K's network is ever-expanding. "We love to email, blog, tweet, become a Facebook friend, or connect in some way," Kole Says. "You never know when you'll find a new source, a new avenues, and build—in some way—new inspiration."