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## DECORATORS AT HOME

WRITTEN BY DAVID BONETTI - PD

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**O**ver the course of a career, a successful interior designer will create hundreds, maybe thousands, of homes, all of them a cross between their clients' needs and desires and their own taste.

First in their affections, however, are their own homes - laboratories of ideas, demonstrations of convictions, sometimes display models for future commissions.

We visited three area interior designers, all at different stages of their careers, with distinct points of view, to talk about how philosophy affects the design of their own homes.

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June Roesslein lives on two wooded acres in a quiet street of large houses.

You drive into a curved drive and park by the entrance. The foyer has gently rounded walls on both sides and a shallow dome above, but initially you don't pay that much attention to the room. Instead, your gaze is drawn through the house to the row of windows bordering a stone-paved terrace through which bright winter sun pours. The light and the view through a pleasant living room pull you into the house.

The living room, stylistically a balance between formality and informality, is a two-story space Roessleij Grand Hall. A large rectangular space with dining on one side and a sitting area on the other, it forms a grand axis with the sequence of entry spaces.

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The other main living space is a tri-partite rectangle. A sequence of kitchen, breakfast room (with a table that expands to seat 18) and family room, it is comfortably informal. It is where the family spends most of its time.

Q How do you define a good designer?

A The key to being a good designer is to be able to pull out of clients what they really want. A lot of people can't visualize. It's an educational process - we work with people for six months to sometimes a couple of years. We bring them to display homes, give them magazines, show them examples:

"Is this really the color scheme you want?" We give them homework. During the process, you get to know the client. Some of my clients have become very good friends.

Q What was your goal with the Grand Hall?

A I wanted it to be soft, cozy, homey, comfortable. There are rooms where people don't want to sit down - that's not what I wanted. It has a two-story height, but I wanted to bring it down, so we created the hip roof with coffers. We painted it a soft caramel. Throughout the house we used gray-green, off-whites, warm colors. The blue bedroom is the only cool color. The Grand Hall is country French in style. The fabrics are casual. The furniture is not ostentatious. There is, like everywhere in the house, a mix of old and new.

Q Is there a specific St. Louis style?

A No. People everywhere like different things. People everywhere like the latest style and look. In St. Louis, there is a full range of styles. Contemporary is the least popular.

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Q Can you work with inexpensive objects?

A I have nine grandchildren running through this house. I don't want to cry if they break something! Sure, I have plenty of inexpensive pieces. Those two bombe chests - there's no need to take out any extra insurance on them. You can do great looks without spending a fortune. If you're using a decorator, be honest about your budget. I don't want to show you a \$10,000 sofa if you can only afford \$5,000.

Q What about personal taste?

A Personal taste always comes into play. I love to mix furniture styles. I hate rooms that look like furniture show rooms. I have a wall of folk crosses that I pick up on my travels. I've been collecting watercolors by New York artist Barbara Wood for more than 20 years. Those kinds of things make a home unique.

June Roesslein

Owner of June Roesslein Interiors Inc., 17899 Chesterfield Airport Road (636-394-1465, [www.juneroessleininteriors.com](http://www.juneroessleininteriors.com))

Age • 63

Home • A large "country French" house in West County built four years ago

Family • Roesslein lives with her husband, Howard Chilcutt, a builder. She has two adult sons by a previous marriage; he has five children. Together, they have nine, "soon to be 11," grandchildren.

Experience • Now semiretired, Roesslein has been in the business for 35 years. "My background was in she said. "My father was a home builder. I started out as a building superintendent, doing design work on the side. I decided it was a lot more fun doing design - you didn't have to worry about rain." Roesslein's company employs 14 designers in two divisions: model home merchandising and residential.

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Edwin Massie lives in a small house on a small lot in a settled area of University City near the Clayton border. Inside, however, the house seems spacious. "This is a small house with big rooms," he said. Upstairs, he took down a wall separating two small rooms to create one large bedroom.

Massie's house exudes personality. Old pieces of inherited furniture and art mix with vintage pieces of American manufacturers such as Kendall and Baker picked up at Ivey-Selkirk auctions or from the Patton showroom.

The house is distinguished by its art. Well-known locals such as Siegfried Reinhardt and Greg Edmondson mix with unknowns and 19th century decorative objects. A large bronze of an Arab horseman attributed to Antoine-Louis Barye sits on a circa-1938 Baker sideboard in front of an expressionist painting by Blain de St. Croix.

Q How do you define your personal style?

A I love mixing new things with older, traditional things. That chandelier in the dining room has hung in every dining room of every place I've ever owned. I bought it from Lammert's. Mr. Lammert purchased it in Italy in the 1950s. It was originally made for candles, but he had it electrified. I have it hanging over a table by Henredon I bought at the Patton showroom. I love to create a layered, acquired look. I don't want a room to look like the clients bought a suite of furniture. I want it to look as if it were assembled over time.

Q This is an old house, what did you do to it?

A Everything! When we moved in, everything was painted - the doorknobs, the hinges - mint green do  
band-aid pink upstairs. The kitchens and bathrooms had to be totally redone, which is not unusual in other houses.  
We put (sustainable) bamboo floors in the kitchen.

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Q You live with art, what about art for your clients?

A Of course, it depends on the client. The ideal client finds artwork that speaks to him personally. Art really personalizes a living space. Using contemporary art in a traditional setting makes it feel current. Unfortunately, 90 percent of people just want a painting over the sofa that matches in color.

Q What is your ideal client?

A The best thing is a client who can make their intentions known. There are people with developed tastes who are too busy to do the design and shopping themselves. They're the ideal people to work with.

Q Any hints for decorating on the cheap?

A Sure. Those curtains in the dining room were made from silk fabric I found at a closeout sale for a couple of dollars a yard. Keep your eyes open for bargains.

Edwin R. Massie of Frank Patton Interiors, 13133 Manchester Road, Des Peres (314-965-4240, **frankpattoninteriors.com**)

Age • 49

Home • An 1,800-square-foot brick two-story built in 1928 in University City

Family • Lives with partner, Rick.

Experience • "I've been working for Frank Patton for 16 years. It's as close as being independent as it can be for somebody else," Massie said.

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"I grew up in Salem, Mo., and I started moving the furniture around our house when I was 8 years old. I took design classes, but a lot of design is like painting or any other art form - you have the talent or you don't. School is good for learning legal codes and other rules.

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Ken Stuckenschneider lives in a charming bungalow on an established street near the Washington University campus. Having grown up in family farmhouses in Audrain County, he wanted to re-create the country look in the city. He described the look as English country, but the Swedish influence is also very strong. The dining room, with a large Indian cotton rug he found in a second-hand shop in Fulton, Mo., and painted and light wood furniture, is strongly Gustavian - or Swedish neo-classical - in style. A Mies van der Rohe Brno chair (upholstered in lime green velvet) fits in perfectly, however.

Stuckenschneider stresses that the house is in progress, that work has been done, but that much more remains. He has built closets in the two bedrooms. And he has wax-finished all the floors, which were, he said, eight different colors when he moved in. He plans to strip the white paint off the fireplace and the house exterior. He also plans to tear out a glass-brick window in the kitchen.

Q some interior designers are insulted if you call them decorators, but you don't mind.

A I use the term decorator to describe myself because there is a great tradition of decorating that is totally different from design. Decorating is a whole different set of skills that interior designers use whether they want to acknowledge it or not. At Pratt, I learned how to think about space, how to solve design problems aesthetically. But at Laura

Ashley, I learned how to put things together. Decorating is an accumulation of things - it's about curati

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Q What's your goal as a decorator?

A I strive to achieve an effect that is so natural that you don't see the hand of the decorator. A home should reflect the people who live there. I think of my projects as stage sets for people's lives.

Q As a new homeowner here in St. Louis, what were you looking for?

A We wanted light. We visited at least 50 houses before we chose this one. As charming as many were, they were dark inside. So many were so big, it would cost too much and take too long. As it is, this house is three times the size of our New York apartment.

Q Although you have a Mies van der Rohe chair and a metal and glass trolley for a bar in your dining room, you don't have many manufactured objects.

A I like to have a modern piece or two so the house is not like a museum set, but I try to avoid the factory-made. The upholstery on the sofa and pillows in the living room is hand-printed in England by a firm called Bennison. I'm having the rug in the dining room reproduced in India for the house I'm doing in Barbados. It will be much bigger and cost \$30,000, but it will provide women in an Indian village with work. I like to patronize crafts people. So many traditional crafts are falling by the wayside.

Q Any hints on saving money?

A Most of my clients haven't had to worry about that. A Robert A.M. Stern house can cost \$25 million! If I had one recommendation it is to wax your floors. I hate polyurethane. You can strip your floors yourself and rub the wax in. It's hard work, but the result is worth it.

Ken Stuckenschneider

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Stuckenschneider Decoration and Design (314-726-6301, [www.stuckenschneider.com](http://www.stuckenschneider.com))

Age • 38

Home • A 1,600-square-foot "cottage" built in 1920 in University City

Family • Lives with wife, Rosanne Toroian, who edits Schnuck's publications, their 3-year-old daughter, India, and golden retriever, Brooklyn.

Experience • "I worked with Robert A.M. Stern in New York as an associate for eight years. I moved back to St. Louis a year and a half ago to be closer to my family. I'm setting up a business here now."

Stuckenschneider, who grew up on a farm in Martinsburg, Mo., attended Washington University. He credits three sources for his education: art history at Washington University; interior design at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, where he received a master's of interior design degree; and working in the decorating department at Laura Ashley.

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