

The open floor plan was a huge plus for the buyers of this two-story barrier island home, but the pandemic threw a wrench into the design process.

Making House Calls

INTERIOR DESIGNERS GET CREATIVE TO MAKE A RENOVATION DEADLINE IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE COVID LOCKDOWN

BY ANN TAYLOR
PHOTOGRAPHY BY NICHOLAS SARGENT





Do you remember where you were and what you were doing on Friday, March 13, 2020? Shelly Craft does. As director of design for Spectrum Interior Design, she was in her office working on the renovation of a two-story barrier island residence. The project was just beginning to take shape, and with an October deadline, timing was going to be tight.

That's when she heard the news: In response to the coronavirus pandemic, a state of emergency had been declared. Lockdown orders had been issued.

"Everything shut down," Craft recalls, shaking her head. "We had given the clients a fabric and furniture concept, so they had been in the office for a touch and feel, and we were just starting to work on the hardscape and trying to get prices. There was a lot of research we had to do because of availability issues."

As Spectrum owner Susan Schuyler Smith notes, "All of our employees went home and did their jobs from there. Like most everyone, we thought it would be for a week, maybe two."

It wasn't. During that time, Craft would come into the office, cull

through the firm's extensive design library, pull items, and reach out to suppliers.

"We've been doing this for a long time and have great working relationships with our subcontractors, vendors, and manufacturers. We were able to get hold of them and make everything work. It was a real team effort," Craft smiles.

While she makes it sound oh, so easy, it wasn't. With strict safety protocols in place, routine ways of doing business needed to be replaced with creative flexibility. For example, an order would be sent, the supplier

"It's a statement," says Shelly Craft of the chandelier that illuminates the living room, a 600-pound Hammerton piece called "Element."

The sleek staircase leads to a second floor customized for the clients' lifestyle, complete with coffee bar and Pilates studio.





One wall in the kitchen is created with 24-by-36 inch marble panels, which were scarce and difficult to procure at the height of the pandemic.

would fill it and then put everything in a carton and leave it outside the office door.

A Spectrum employee would pick the carton up, bring it to the office, and check to make sure the order was complete. Then everything would be thoroughly wiped down before being delivered to the client's residence.

It wasn't seamless. There were a few glitches along the way, as Craft is quick to point out.

"We received a carton with all of the 24-by-36-inch marble panels for the kitchen walls, but some of them had stripes and some didn't, so they wouldn't lay out right. We worked

with our distributors, and a guy from Miami drove up with the last 15 pieces of marble in the country, and we laid out a design that worked.

"Another thing: Throughout construction, COVID took a toll on the workers. If one of the plumbing crew got sick, they all got sick. It became a juggling act, but everyone pulled together to make it work.

"It really showed me how very important the relationships we have with suppliers are, and our team's determination to keep our deadline. We didn't miss a beat."

While everyone at Spectrum was hard at work, so were the clients, who

had fallen in love with the riverfront residence the minute they walked in the front door. The location and the open floor plan with just enough cozy spaces were exactly what they had been looking for.

It wasn't perfect, though. The decor was dark, dreary, and downright depressing. There was also the need to create areas that fit their lifestyle: A second-floor coffee bar for him and a Pilates studio for her were high on the list. Gallons of paint took care of the dark and dreary, while design modifications led to the bar and studio.

Also on the list was the clients' desire to replace outdated lighting,



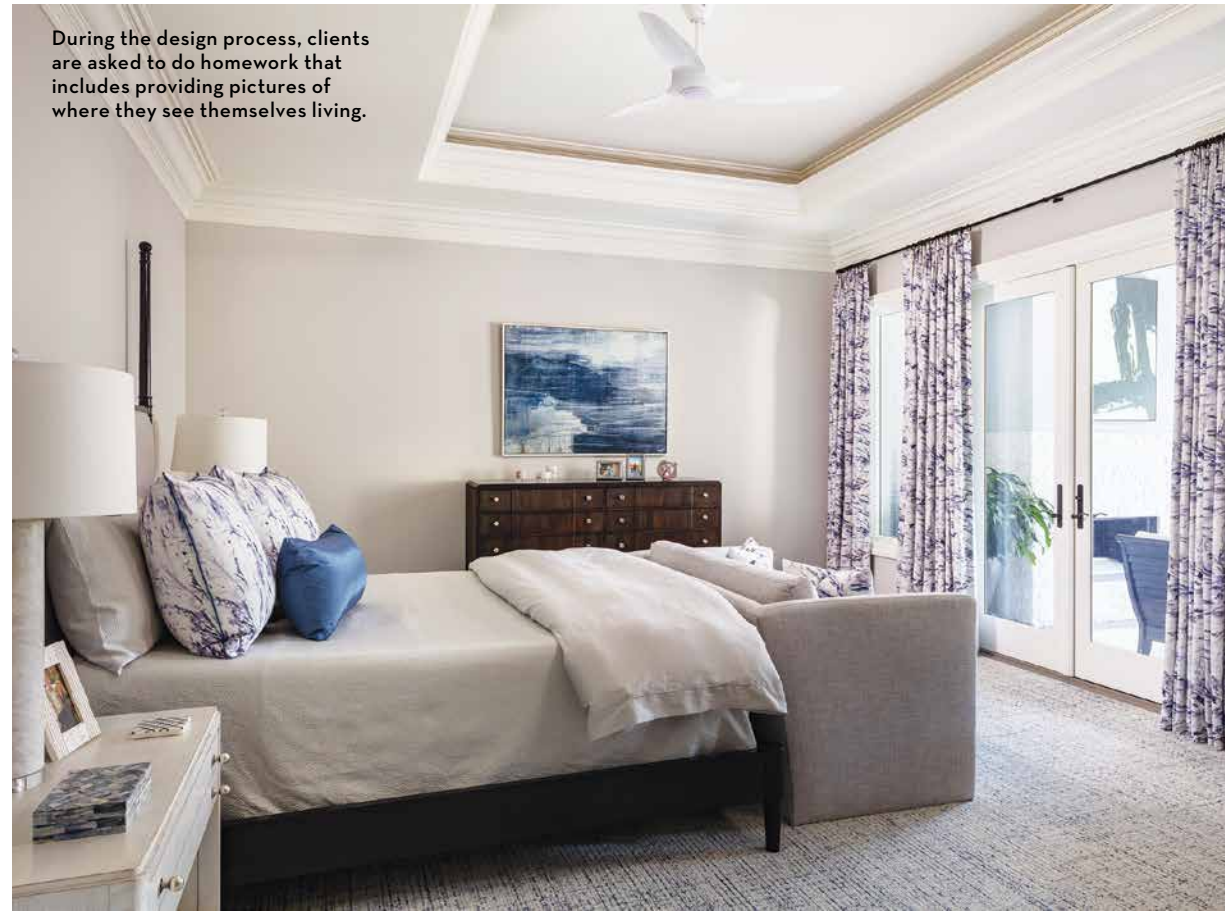
All of the lighting for the home comes from Hammerton, an artisan-crafted lighting company based in Salt Lake City.



A portrait of John Lennon hangs prominently in the office. It's made of computer keys spelling out the lyrics to "Hey, Jude."

“The clients considered lighting fixtures to be works of art.”

— SHELLY CRAFT



During the design process, clients are asked to do homework that includes providing pictures of where they see themselves living.

both inside and out. To keep a consistent flow, they opted to select everything from Hammerton, a Salt Lake City-based manufacturer of American artisan-crafted lighting. They chose well.

“The clients considered lighting fixtures to be works of art; they called it ‘picking out the jewelry of the house,’” Craft explains. “The chandelier in the living room is called “Element,” and it’s so heavy, 600 pounds, we had to put it on a lift to install it. Because of all the glass, you can see it from the pool and riverside, especially at night. It’s a statement.”

The same can be said about the contemporary art the clients are drawn to. The oversize portrait of John Lennon in the office is a perfect example. No ordinary likeness, this, as the artist used computer keys that spell out the lyrics to the Beatles’ “Hey, Jude” to create the image. It’s one of the clients’ favorite finds, and on occasion it prompts spontaneous humming.

“The clients let us have free rein with the designs, but of course we

showed them everything and made suggestions; they were part of the decisions. It’s their home, not ours,” says Smith.

“When we first met at what we call ‘concept meetings,’ we gave them a couple of homework assignments. We asked them to give us 10 pictures of things they liked or didn’t like. Then we asked them to give us a couple of pictures of where they saw themselves living. A picture is worth a thousand words.”

Craft nods in agreement. “There’s a lot of psychology involved. You need to listen to what makes people happy; they may not be aware of it, but there’s usually a common thread. With a little investment on their part, we have the information we need to establish a budget and begin to design. We select all the fabrics and make up full, blown-up boards. Once we all agree we’re there, we start working on the tile, countertops, and cabinetry.”

That’s where Spectrum and the clients were on that Friday in March two years ago. Today they are cele-



Many areas in the formerly dark and dreary home are brightened and modernized with fresh paint and new, creative lighting fixtures.

brating what Craft calls “a fun house.” “It’s truly theirs,” she says. “In the morning he comes out of the master bedroom and makes his coffee, sits down on the sofa, and looks out to the river. Later in the day they both enjoy sunsets from the same spot.

“She has her Pilates studio, and they have wonderful lighting fixtures and art. It’s everything they envisioned.”

“Because of the pandemic, we didn’t settle,” Craft says. “We kept looking until we found the perfect pieces. If they weren’t available, we had them custom made. Everybody does their part to make the client happy so that in the end, when they walk in the door, all they need to do is bring their toothbrush. Everything’s already there and they see their dream come true.” ☼