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KARA SMITH

SFA Design's Partner-President shares her process for success

BY VANESSA KOGEVINAS



ONCE IN A PROLIFIC WHILE, a perfect fit leads to enormous inspiration, innovation and success. That is the case with Kara Smith, who eighteen years ago joined SFA Design and has not only achieved the role of Partner-President, but has curated the company to bring a current, modern and sophisticated look to every project.

With a background in fashion and event planning, Smith attributes part of her success to being at once highly entrepreneurial and business driven, yet consciously prioritizing design. "It is really important to allow the time to be creative, because that is what fuels the other part of the business," says Smith. "There is so much meeting with clients, managing deliverables, managing your brand," she continues, "but in the end, it

is about good work and that leads to more work, so we try to make the creative focus a big part of what we do."

SFA Design, founded by Sue Firestone in 1996 and with offices in Los Angeles, Santa Barbara and New York, serves both the residential and commercial markets with a staff of almost thirty. "One of our goals has been to brand the company as a lifestyle contributor to our clients," says Smith. "Helping to craft and build a look and lifestyle that they are seeking." Clients include Four Seasons Hotel Los Angeles at Beverly Hills; The Ritz-Carlton, Abu Dhabi, Grand Canal; Above the Penthouses - W Hollywood; Windhoek Plaza Hotel, Namibia; and multiple private residences in New York, Montecito, Los Angeles and Santa Barbara—to name a few.

All featured spaces by SFA Design. **OPPOSITE** An A. Rudin green velvet upholstered sofa is paired with four Andy Warhol prints in a New York City residence to create a living room seating area that is at once comfortable, colorful, sexy and sophisticated.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM Kara Smith. **ABOVE** Luxurious materials and soft hues—dusty purples, pale dove grays, velvets and silk—create a refined and inviting living room in a Los Angeles residence. **RIGHT** A tufted leather headboard is flanked by side panels comprised of polished chrome steel trim over shagreen-covered 'shadow boxes.' Leather-upholstered side tables and a purple velvet bench complete the glamorous look.



PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTIAN HORAN

Designer Profile



LEFT Stellar white marble with black mother-of-pearl inlay was selected for the flooring in a bathroom at the Viceroy L'Ermitage Hotel Beverly Hills. A black zebra wood marble, polished nickel, and lacquered vanity finish the space. **BELOW** Siberian oak flooring, a seamless slab waterfall island top, and bronze metal stools come together to provide an industrial-inspired, yet naturally holistic environment in a Vetrina Lofts, New York City, kitchen.

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A typical day for Smith begins with design collaboration meetings with her teams. "I like to be creative in the morning and I like to review all the projects that I am particularly interested in." She also, on most days, will meet with a client for two to three hours—presenting, connecting, collaborating. Getting inspired is a daily ritual. Smith makes it a point to read magazines, go to museums, visit stores, review new products. "I spend a lot of time just focusing on general, lifestyle awareness," says Smith, "getting an understanding of where products are going. I think that the biggest thing that we can offer our clients is an awareness of what is timeless, sophisticated and forward, but not current and trendy."

Never one to be stagnant, she has a 'couture lifestyle product' line in the works—intricate throw pillows, floor cushions, accessories. She also wants to bring art to a more accessible level—not just in price point, but by developing an art-curated program that is shoppable, of the moment, interesting and purchasable.

"I really do not have one lane, and I truly find it enjoyable to be inspired by unique moments and settings and then bringing them to life," she notes. "I think that is one of my greatest strengths. I know how to execute, how to deliver a certain sense of taste and quality, and I am genuinely excited by where my clients want to take their life." CH

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