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LUXE LIFE

Designer Tess Giuliani specializes in luxury projects with elegance and panache

BY KIM COOK

Ridgewood, N.J.-based designer Tess Giuliani’s credentials include certifications from the New York School of Interior Design and NKBA, but she actually began her career as Cartier’s first female jeweler.

While living in Asia for four years, Giuliani garnered another first, becoming the first foreign interior designer for a prestigious Tokyo firm, Motsomoto. This helped her realize that interiors, not personal accessories, were where her heart lay. She did a stint as a theater set designer, an experience that helped shape her present career.

“My job was to create a believable and functional backdrop to the story line, where the actors could perform naturally,” she says. “Kitchen design is just a specific kind of set design, reflecting the client’s lifestyle.”

Today, Giuliani’s designs span traditional to contemporary styles, all with a trademark luxury aesthetic. Her view of traditional style is that it often reflects the homeowners’ cultural heritage.

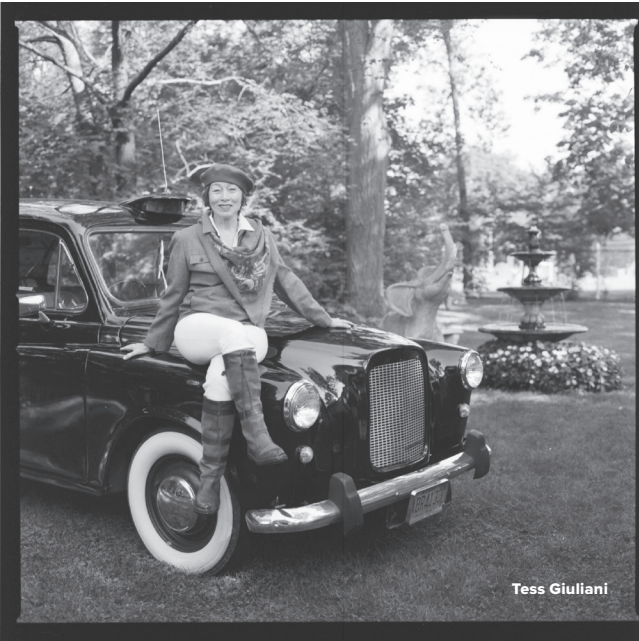
“I’ve done Swedish, English, French, Mexican, and American design,” she explains. “Although the materials are different, they all have the same effect on the owners—evoking a sense of calm, order, and heritage.”

She generally keeps these kitchens understated with simple, high-quality materials and finishes. This gives owners the opportunity to display personal decorative elements so they can be fully appreciated. But she likes to add flair with the countertops, using ogee edges to mimic fine furniture.

Though Giuliani works in a variety of styles, she is partial to transitional kitchen design because of the opportunity to balance tradition and modernity. For such projects, she mixes something old, something new, something imaginative, something blue—or green or red. The sky’s the limit.

“[Transitional design] keeps you grounded but allows you to express yourself outside of the predictable,” she says. “It catches your attention with sophisticated elements, cleaner lines, and a lighter, more current feeling—uncomplicated, but still detailed.”

For these projects, she likes medium wood or painted



cabinetry with recessed or flat panels. She’s fond of mixing interesting furniture materials in transitional projects. This style embraces the added element of surprise—such as stainless steel doors on cabinets with leather hardware.

When it comes to transitional kitchen countertops, the designer has one clear favorite. “Quartz is the perfect material,” she says. “Its overall design patterns are clean and authentic-looking.” Giuliani ramps up the luxe factor with glass, tile, and mirror alone or as a mix, in a single pattern. The backsplashes, she says, command attention.

Giuliani is also fond of contemporary projects, referring to them as art in the form of kitchens.

“Contemporary design is bold, balanced, and at times mind-blowing,” she says. “It embraces the dramatic and gives the impression of uncomplicated geometry. It’s a symphony highlighting all the new technologies in kitchen design.”

She goes for high-gloss finishes or rich woods on these



projects, and to support the geometry she equates with the ultra-modern vibe, a stacked tile installation. She prefers a 2-inch-thick clean countertop edge of quartz or metal, and has seen a sophisticated Corian whose properties allowed for a fluid-shaped counter of varying thickness.

“I’m inspired by everything,” Giuliani says. “My clients are all individual in their design sensibilities. Their styles and products may differ, but my goal is always the same—a quality kitchen from concept to completion.”

A recent Ridgewood project is one of the designer’s favorites. “A 16-foot-by-13½-foot kitchen redesigned with the most extraordinary elements in the existing space.”

The bright, airy room is replete with luxurious features. Light plays off metallic-glazed wall tiles set in a parquet pattern, while hard-wearing gray porcelain tiles clad the floors.

There’s a handmade bronze farm sink from Sun Valley Bronze; Laura Kirar for Kallista Vir Stil faucet; La Cornue

Left: Reflective surfaces and warm finishes, anchored by pro cooking amenities and lots of work space, make this Ridgewood, N.J., kitchen airy and luxe yet functional.

Below: Giuliani used ogee counter edging, metallic finishes, and a warm, colorful palette to create a traditional kitchen with modern flair in Ridgewood. High-end kitchen and bath remodeling firm Ulrich has been implementing Giuliani’s designs for 30 years.



PHOTOS: PETER RYMWID

range; Zephyr’s Okeanito range hood; a Wolf drawer microwave; Turnstile Designs leather and nickel hardware; Sub-Zero fridge; Holly Hunt sconce; signed George Nakashima handmade chairs; and a Marcel Wanders chandelier. She designed a stainless steel, leaded glass cabinet, inspired by a 1901 cabinet in the butler’s pantry of a stately home, and had it made by Artique Glass in Glen Rock, N.J.

What’s the future of high-end kitchen design? Giuliani says at this point in her career, she trusts her own instincts, so elements she wants for her own kitchen are likely the features that the marketplace will gravitate toward.

She hints at floating cabinetry, an induction cooktop, a steam oven, a microwave drawer, double sinks, and quartz countertops, to name a few.

But there’s one more thing this well-traveled creative designer has on her wish list: “In place of the wall cabinets, there’ll be art.” ■