

lake norman

WOMAN

CELEBRATING THE SUCCESS OF WOMEN

how does
YOUR GARDEN
grow?

YOUR
spring allergy
survival
guide

*Mothers
& daughters*

featuring
STARR MILLER OF
STARRMILLER INTERIOR
DESIGN



LAKE NORMAN WOMAN
Success



LIFE BY
DESIGN

By: Dana Nieters | Photography By: Chelsea Bren

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TARR MILLER
FELL IN
LOVE WITH
DESIGN
WHEN SHE
WAS 13
YEARS OLD,


thanks to the confidence her mother had in her. When Starr was in the seventh grade, her mother allowed her to work with an

interior designer to decorate her room. It was at that moment she began to understand that you could express who you are through how you lived—that your designs could reflect your life. Of course, in seventh grade that meant yellow and green contrasting walls and custom-made flower power bedspreads!

Despite this early experience, Starr didn't start her professional life as an interior designer. In fact, after graduating from the University of Alabama with a degree in business, she began a very successful career managing the merchandising and product selection for some of the nation's largest retailers and Fortune 500 companies. Part of her job at that time, though, did involve design through the development of products, packaging, store layouts, and store displays. When she decided she had had enough of the corporate life, it was to design that she turned.

With the unequivocal support of her husband, Tom, Starr applied and was accepted to Parsons School of Design in New York City, one of the most prestigious design schools in the country. For two years, Tom commuted back and forth from their home in Florida to New York, while Starr learned from the industry's leaders and collaborated with design students from around the world. And though Starr gained invaluable design skills and learned expert techniques while studying at Parsons, she never forgot the lesson she learned as the 13-year-old designer of her own room: that your environment should say loud and clear, "This is me!"

In fact, that lesson was reinforced in one of her very first projects out of Parsons when she designed for an HGTV show called "Save My Bath." Though she did not actually meet the clients prior to designing, Starr was able to glean a few tidbits about their life through the producer's interview and a written questionnaire. And though the project was quite extensive, it was a detail that reflected the couple's life that made the most impact. Starr recalls: "When I went to the set (their house), the wife grabbed me to show me their wedding invitation. It had autumn leaves on it. I had included in the design a special handmade tile that had real autumn leaves in the glass as a focal point. I couldn't believe how in sync



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This focus on collaboration and consultation has stayed with Starr, becoming—and remaining—an integral part of the methodology she uses in her design process, despite the fact that the digital revolution has changed the industry in many ways. While Starr and her team now use a plethora of computer software in all stages of their projects, there is one traditional design instrument that has remained essential: listening to the client. “And it’s not just listening,” Starr notes. “It’s paying attention to their story and then translating their thoughts and goals—their life—into their home.”

Starr and her team start every design process with a questionnaire that helps them to understand how

clients think: their likes and dislikes, who they are, and what they value in life. From there, Starr develops a specific, unique design vocabulary for the client that guides design decisions throughout the project—and depending on the scope of that project, there could be tens of thousands of those decisions, big and small. “Our best projects,” Starr notes, “are the ones in which clients are open to our process ... who show us who they are and let us use our imaginations and design skills to bring that out in their homes!”

Starr attributes much of her success (she has won a multitude of national and local awards) to this collaborative business philosophy—well, that and her mother’s unwavering belief in her. “She is the

reason I am confident in myself,” Starr explains. Ironically, Starr believes that her mother, born in 1924, and whom Starr describes as a “lovely Southern woman” who firmly believed that a woman’s place was in the home, would not have approved of Starr’s decision to move away from Tom those two years and attend design school.

Nevertheless, Starr feels her mother’s influence in all that she does, even her career: “As an adopted child, I was raised being told that I was chosen. She made sure that we felt loved and special. She was perfect for a little girl because she loved everything girly. We went to luncheon fashion shows and antiquing. She had an incredible sense of style, and her eye for all things beautiful, I think, rubbed off on me!”

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