



Class of 2023

They have roots everywhere from Korea to Lebanon to Minneapolis, and training in fields including law, fashion design, and hotel management. But these **15 design stars on the rise** share two things in common: a talent for telling stories through spaces and a guaranteed spot in tomorrow's list of top designers.

By The Editors of *House Beautiful*



Carmen René Smith

OAKLAND, CA
The founder of Aquilo Interiors, Carmen René Smith traces her love of design to childhood days spent at her aunt's home, where she'd sit in the Jacuzzi, next to a life-size stone mermaid, "appreciating the magic of it all," she recalls. "My aunt is a free-spirited, powerhouse boss babe, and every home she has lived in is fabulously quirky, layered, and maximalist." Today, Smith puts her degree in architecture to use creating homes that evoke the same magic for their owners. **"I want my clients to feel their authenticity, their true reflection, and their inner weirdo in their spaces,"** she says. "Honestly, I hope they feel like total badasses!" @aquilointeriors

SMITH: STEPHEN PAUL. MILLARD: ALLISON ELEFANTE. ALEXANDER: MARIE THOMAS. ABOUZANAT: RASHIDA ZAGON.



Evan Millard

NASHVILLE
What does Evan Millard mean when he says his firm, Millard, specializes in "jewel box interiors"? Many things, he says, including **"designs that wrap you in an emotion, celebrate a treasured person or thing, create precious memories, or that are whimsical and out of the box."** Treasured people and precious memories shaped his aesthetic. Born in South Korea and adopted as an infant, Millard credits his mother and grandmothers for his "love for color and pattern, which comes from how they decorated." Because of them, he "gravitates toward jewel tones layered with intricate details and exaggerated designs." @evandmillard



Ahmad AbouZanat

NEW YORK
He has a degree in interior design, plus he's also studied hotel management, architecture, lighting, and furniture design. But the skill Ahmad AbouZanat of Project AZ relies on most is *listening*. **"It's easy to carry a conversation by sharing your expertise,"** he says. **"But genuine relationships come from listening with intention."** He honed his visual sense traveling in his native Lebanon, "seeing how the architecture changed from mountain to farm to urban." These days, AbouZanat creates spaces that "embody the people who inhabit them while blending multicultural influences with different styles and periods." @ahmad.abouzanat

Leah Alexander

ATLANTA AND LOS ANGELES
"Start before you are ready" is the advice Leah Alexander lives by. It applies to her hobbies as a marathoner, kickboxing instructor, and yogi, as well as to her career. During a stint as a personal shopper on Rodeo Drive, Alexander realized that she loved helping people "who appreciate beautiful things and live beautiful lives." Pivoting to interior design, she worked at three firms in 10 years before launching her own. Her just-do-it philosophy is definitely paying off: In 2022, Alexander won HGTV Designer of the Year in the Kitchen + Dining category for her "Green Goddess" kitchen, a bold space that mixes chartreuse and green. @leahalexander_



Meta Coleman

PROVO, UT

When Meta Coleman designs a house, she considers context: the era when it was built and the personalities of the homeowners. “Who are they, how do they want to live, what’s their story?” she asks. Coleman also strives to make homes “perfectly imperfect,” meaning “they will only get better after I am gone.” It’s a lesson she learned from her grandfather, whom she never met, an architect who built the home where she spent childhood summers in a small town in Germany. **“He created a beautiful environment to maximize comfort, coziness, purpose, and personality,”** she says. “It left a deep impression on me.”

@metacoleman_



—●—
“I’m not afraid to work in color and pattern—but not with reckless abandon!”

—Meta Coleman

DuVäl

FAIRFAX, VA

What project makes the founder of DuVäl Design feel most proud? That would be the “Introvert’s Escape,” a playful hideaway he created for our 2022 Whole Home. This space felt like a room James Bond would unwind in—Vesper martini in hand—and it was “the first project that reflected the level of conceptual design our team has been wanting to do,” DuVäl says. It also struck a personal chord. “I’m a massive introvert—serious, focused, and intense,” the designer says. “But my professional persona is cheerful and light-hearted.” It’s an emotional range he brings to every project, since, as he says, **“Design is based on your perspective.”** @duvaldesignllc

COLEMAN: DANIELLE WATERS. DUVÄL: MARKUS WILBORN.



Kerri Pilchik

RIDGEWOOD, NJ

"I am incredibly grateful that I get to do what I love after spending so many years dreaming about it," Kerri Pilchik says. Fourteen years, to be exact. That's how long she toiled as a lawyer at "a big New York law firm," she says, "**poring over design books and magazines when I should have been writing legal briefs.**" Finally, she enrolled in the New York School of Interior Design and, in 2021, launched her eponymous firm. Today, she's making a case for homes that are "layered but uncluttered, sophisticated but approachable, elegant and effortless." [@kerripilchikdesign](#)

Jaqui Seerman

LOS ANGELES

Jaqui Seerman established her firm in 2014, but she's been avidly practicing interior design since she can remember: "I used to create elaborate dollhouses." As a grown-up, she moved on to larger-scale projects, working for Waldo Fernandez and Martyn Lawrence Bullard, heading endeavors in France, Saudi Arabia, and across the United States prior to branching out on her own. No matter how big the project, her spaces retain some of that early sense of play. "**From guest rooms to hotel suites, I relish the opportunity to create cozy, inviting spaces for my clients and myself,**" Seerman says. [@jaquiseerman](#)



Jeremy D. Clark

BIRMINGHAM, AL

Bone-inlay boxes. Benjamin Moore Bonsai paint. Cork flooring. These are a few of Jeremy D. Clark's favorite things. Since launching his firm in 2019, he hopes that every room he designs "feels unexpected and collected yet fully realized," he says. "**Whether global influences, art, or a myriad of textures and colors, it's the mix I aim to master.**" With a clientele that reaches beyond the Southeast, Clark has already made a name for himself designing luxury properties. One mentor's advice has guided him: "Underpromise and overdeliver." [@jeremydclark](#)



Melissa Colgan

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Her previous career as a style editor at Martha Stewart and a market editor at brands such as *House Beautiful* honed Melissa Colgan's keen eye for composition, color, and light. Training under Darryl Carter and Lauren Liess gave her experience with the practical aspects of design—and the confidence to strike out on her own in 2019. At work, Colgan is inspired by David Hicks, whose designs she finds “**at once rebellious and timeless.**” That’s because, she says, having something fall out of style “is not such a big deal when you spend \$80 on a trendy blouse, but it would be very painful if you spent \$8,000 on a trendy chair.”

@melissacolganinteriors



Tara McCauley

NEW YORK

Tara McCauley was so set on a career in fashion, she graduated high school early to intern for style giant Tracy Reese. Realizing she'd prefer a creative job where she “could interact with the end user” led her to pursue interior design at New York University. After working with Nick Olsen, she launched her own firm last year, taking on the primary bedroom at the 2022 Brooklyn Heights Designer Showhouse. She created a space inspired by Elsa Schiaparelli, but “made it a point to bring in pieces by practicing artists, rather than all vintage,” she says. **“I love to bring a sense of drama to a space and to connect the past to the present.”** @tara_mccauley



Read more about these incredible designers (and get a glimpse at their best projects).

—*“We bring our predilection for layering and color, but a home should be a reflection of the client’s story.”*

—Melissa Colgan

Jonathan Chesley & Alexandria Donati

BROOKLYN, NY, AND OJAI, CA

Jonathan Chesley and Alexandria Donati were life partners prior to becoming business partners—but their creative pursuits always paralleled. Before launching KTISMA Studio, he worked at Selldorf Architects, she at Miranda Brooks Landscape Design. Now, the husband-and-wife team says, **“Every design we engage with is considered through the lens of architecture and landscape.** We imagine merging the built and natural worlds to bring beauty to people’s lives.” And working together has only strengthened the couple’s bond: “We are one another’s greatest critics and deepest admirers.” @ktismastudio

COLGAN: STACY ZARIN GOLDBERG; CHESLEY AND DONATI: ALLISON MICHAEL ORENSTEIN; MCCAULEY: HANNA GRANKWIST; SASS: MATTHEW WILLIAMS; SIMMONS: MALCOLM SIMMONS, JR.

Victoria Sass

MINNEAPOLIS

“People don’t want to travel the world just to have it look the same,” Victoria Sass says. **“I want to see regional conversations deepened and vernacular styles reimagined for the benefit of the local community.”** That philosophy is embodied in the name of Prospect Refuge Studio, which she launched in 2015. It reflects an eye toward the outside world (prospect) and the safety of home (refuge). Sass finds inspiration in travel but believes insight can be found at home too: “I want clients to feel they could walk into the same room for the rest of their lives and discover something new about themselves.” @prospectrefuge



Malcolm Simmons, Jr.

ARLINGTON, VA

As a contributor to Emily Henderson’s blog since 2020, Malcolm Simmons, Jr., invited the world into his bedroom to show off his handmade headboard. “It’s a bespoke design element that felt unique but classic, stylish but utilitarian, and familiar but inventive,” he says. Those same descriptors could be applied to his designs at Mas Means More, the firm he launched in 2018. **“I always try to build an element by hand that complements the existing structure or layout of the room,”** Simmons explains. “It doesn’t have to be big—think a wall nook in a bathroom. But playing up the elements that make a space unique creates something bespoke, which always delivers a big impact.” @malcolmsimmons