



THE DESIGNER BEAT

Redd Alert

Laura Redd Interiors' thoughtful approach to design

By Robin Sutton Anders

Greensboro interior designer Laura Redd loves furniture, but she doesn't mind if you put your feet on it. In fact, Redd recently walked into a senior living facility she designed and saw a group of seniors hanging out with their feet propped up, drinking coffee and reading newspapers. The whole scene made her giddy.

"That is the point of good interior design," says Redd. "It's supposed to help people live better. We all work so hard, and this world is so stressful. Everyone wants to come home to a place of sanctuary where you can relax."

In the past two decades, under the banner Laura Redd Interiors, the designer has shaped the aesthetic of almost 1,000 homes across North Carolina. Three years ago, she began adding senior living facilities to her portfolio. "I was helping seniors downsize and relocate to Heritage Greens, a local senior living community," she says. "At the time, the director was in the midst of a lobby remodel and some of the furniture came in damaged. He was frustrated and asked me if I'd like to take a stab at it.

Redd says she fell in love with the whole process. "In this space, with great design you have the ability to affect 100 lives, all at once."

As a 29-year-old with a passion for architecture and, aesthetically pleasing interiors, Redd moved from Atlanta to Garlstedt, Germany. There, studying interior design, she learned an approach she continues to apply today. "International designs are space conscious," she says. "Almost every piece of furniture has multiple uses."

This is a trend gaining steam in America. "We're expecting more out of our furniture," she says. "When I was at furniture market, I found this adorable oversize chair that flipped out to be a full-size bed. If you do not need a bed all the time, why take up the space? If you have an end table that can easily transition to a nightstand in a guest room, you'll be able to use it longer." Not only that, she adds, "it's more efficient. No matter how big our houses are, we fill them. We never have enough storage." Especially in senior living communities, where the overarching design and a room's furnishings must be fluid enough to accommodate multiple uses, from events and performances to intimate meetings with friends.

'In a really big room, maybe you have a central conversation area surrounded by smaller groupings, and incorporate swivel chairs that can easily turn to face the large conversation area," Redd explains. "The directors come and move things around for a program, and then they can quickly move them back."

In many ways, designing a senior living community feels like designing a residential living room. "It needs to be comfortable," Redd says. "These are people over 70, they don't want to live in a hotel; they want to live in a home." There are unique challenges, however: In addition to looking— and feeling— as if they'd belong in any ordinary living room furniture, the furnishings need to be extraordinarily sturdy. "The frames need to support someone who literally falls into a chair," Redd says. "They have to be strong enough to support the impact, and the fabrics need to be more than Crypton-durable because of moisture issues."

As with any design project, an effective color scheme is the cornerstone. But in a senior living community, designers need to consider a variety of factors that eclipse trends. "Most older adults have some sort of color blindness or macular degeneration, so yellows don't work, and the gray trend is an absolute no," Redd says. "You have to look at the colors they are comfortable with and understand that many seniors are seeing completely different colors from what other people are seeing."

Lighting is another critical consideration. "You want to steer toward clear, bright light. Not blue light," Redd says. "These days, we have 20 different shades of light bulbs and LED lights. We truly can light a space correctly so a senior can see and read and experience their surroundings in an enjoyable way."

North Carolina designers share a major job perk, Redd says: Easy access to High Point's furniture market. Twice a year, designers from around the globe flock to the Triad, where the world's hottest up-and-coming design trends are on display. Redd makes it a point to attend the semiannual furniture markets, and she pores over the new colors, accessories and furniture styles — information that guides but never dictates the advice she gives to her commercial and residential clients.

"It's a 50-50 balance of trends and a client's personal preferences," Redd notes. "I'll ask to see a client's Instagram or Pinterest pages, to get an idea of what they like. But as a designer, it's my job to introduce new ideas." That's important, she adds, because about five to seven years down the road, today's market trends become commonplace. "I want my clients to be aware of the trends so their newly designed space will continue to feel fresh for years to come."

To that end, Redd never reuses a fabric. "I think it's important to reinvent the design elements every time," she says. In their office, Redd and her assistant designer, Kerstin Leigh, keep a display board covered with snapshots of the manufacturers who inspired them at market. These are the manufacturers they call on for new projects. "We like to use entrepreneurial, local companies who are doing something unique," Redd says.

"For example, I found a guy in Blowing Rock who creates furniture — desks, shelves, a cool tray that holds whiskey glasses — out of wine barrels." These unique design pieces lend a personalized look to each of Redd's projects. They add vibrancy and create a sense of home that functions for each individual, she says. "It's not enough to pair a pretty sofa with matching tables and lamps. What inspires me is the ability to create a space that works for the way people live."

In 20 years, Redd says she's rarely designed a space in her own personal style — that's not the point. "I don't think it's right to do my style," she adds. "I want to learn your style and bring it to life."

Robin Sutton Anders is a Greensboro-based freelance writer and a regular contributor to Seasons magazine.