

AT HOME

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A FRESH FURNITURE LINE

FACEBOOK AND TWITTER LED ONE LOCAL DESIGNER TO AN INVITATION TO CREATE A LINE OF FURNITURE.

BY ROBIN DEMATTIA

A CREATIVE DESIGNER FOUND THAT HER BUSINESS FLOURISHED WHEN SHE STEPPED INTO THE WORLD OF SOCIAL MEDIA. Lisa Kahn, owner of Kahn Design Group in Naples, rebuilt her website to include a blog. A few years ago, she began using Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest to showcase her work, comment on designs and products, and connect with designers outside of Southwest Florida.

This all paid off when the marketing director of Chelsea House, who had been following Kahn online and liked her work, sent a message through Kahn's website, inviting her to design for the company.

"It's interesting how social media can offer a three-dimensional view of what a person is like," Kahn says of being offered the high-profile opportunity without even an interview. "Social media opened up the world of design and the industry in a way I did not have access to before. The dialogue between owners of companies, editors of magazines and people following you online brings



CLASS ACT

Due to her prolific use of social media, Lisa Kahn, above, was asked to create a line of furnishings for Chelsea House. At left, a Kahn-designed coffee table.

WHILE STILL MAINTAINING HER OWN FIRM, KAHN BECAME CREATIVE DIRECTOR AT CHELSEA HOUSE, GOING TO CHINA TO VISIT FACTORIES AND CHECK FINISHED PRODUCTS.

you in touch with people you wouldn't normally meet. It levels the playing field a bit. If you're active and pay attention, it opens up conversations. It really breathed new life into my career."

Kahn had been buying Chelsea House products for years for her clients and was excited to try something new in her field by designing licensed products, through the Kahn Collection for Chelsea House.

"Chelsea House is a very traditional company, firmly rooted in history and historical correctness," Kahn explains. "What they wanted me to bring is freshness. I am a traditionally based designer, but try to work in a modern way, bringing a twist that makes it for today."

While still maintaining her own firm, Kahn became creative director at Chelsea House, going to China to visit factories and check finished products. Understanding the entire progression, and the expenses that add to a product's final cost, was an important learning process for her.

She has created almost 100 products, including tea caddy jars with matching bowls, cache pots, tables, lamps and mirrors. One collection features cherry blossoms, another has weeping willows, while a third—inspired by Kahn's trip to Ireland—incorporates Celtic knots.

The pieces are sold through retail stores and catalogues, online and to other interior designers. "In the southwestern United States, it's a particular hit," Kahn says. "I bring a sort of coastal influence." One or two samples are made to display in Chelsea House's North Carolina show-



TRANSITIONAL

Accessories created by Kahn for Chelsea House include the lamp, above, and this framed print.



TAPERED LEGS

A three-legged accent table is among nearly 100 products in Chelsea House's Lisa Kahn line.

room, and production commences once orders are placed.

This fall, she unveiled a line of hand-painted furniture, including desks, sideboards, bedside chests, console tables and some mirrors. She is also offering a line of porcelains without specific motifs but in color ranges from soft blues and greens to tans and butter yellows.

Both with her Chelsea House work and for her individual clients, Kahn prefers a timeless aesthetic not tied to trends. "I recommend that people look for something that resonates with them or reminds them of happy times. Most people don't change things in their home as often as they change things in their closet, so they want to invest in things that last. I try to steer people to the basics and add a fun throw or table lamp or piece of blown glass."

Overall, Kahn tends to blend her Midwestern roots with the beach theme popular in Southwest Florida when working with local clients. Most of her business comes from new construction, a process she understands well from the years she worked for London Bay Homes.

"Usually, people want things a little less formal here. They come in off of the boat and want to sit down and relax, so they need fabrics that are soft against their skin and colors that are lighter and brighter."

She likes working in Naples because "there are so many clients here with resources, and they take pride in their homes." Her ideal client is someone who understands they are in capable hands, doesn't second-guess every decision and enjoys the process. "I love when I can talk to someone and hear they're excited and looking for a partner to share this experience. People find it stressful, but I do it every day and can simplify the process, make it fun and make it something to be a great memory."

Kahn took on an unusual project recently when she designed a large mountain estate in the Yellowstone Club in Big Sky, Mont. A complete departure from Florida-style design, the log home gave Kahn the opportunity to travel extensively throughout the West, looking for specialty artisans, local artists and antiques unique to the early settlement of the West.

For her own home, Kahn has "a collection of everything," including pieces from her grandmother and items purchased while traveling. "It's very unique and personal," she says, adding that her home is "really serene, clean and simple. I need a place to decompress because my world is visually noisy." AH