



Our Greenwich design studio has been maintained throughout the pandemic by our amazing staff, supervised by Laird Morgan Tolan, Senior Designer. We've been in constant contact with our clients, vendors, workrooms, providing status of all current projects.

For a closer look at SMI, please scroll down to see the recent online editorial by Fairfield County Look, "The New Normal in Home Design." It is a worthwhile read and we're thrilled to have been featured.

As we adjust to the New Norm, we will continue to assist you with the best in creative design and welcome new projects. Our studio and art gallery are open by appointment, Monday-Friday 10am-5:00pm, and 24/7 for Art Privé, online.

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Warmest wishes,

Sandy & Laird

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The New Normal in Home Design



Sandra Morgan of Sandra Morgan Interiors & Art Privé; Scott Soper, Principal at Soper Babcock Associates and Richard Rosano, Managing Director RR Builders, LLC talk to LOOK about what is to be expected in home design, building, and renovation as our world opens up again.

Photographs by ChiChi Ubiña

It was a winning collaboration. With Scott Soper contributing architectural planning, Richard Rosano realizing the home with his construction team, and Sandra Morgan refining the interior, this nine-month home renovation and design project was a success. The clients, a young couple originally from Chicago, had relocated to New York City in August of 2018. With two children in tow and another on the way, they were looking for a home large enough to accommodate their growing family. The vintage traditional colonial house in Larchmont captured their fancy, but it needed a fresh, modern look and an extensive reorganization of the interior space. Soper, Rosano and Morgan immediately went to work.



Sandra Morgan



Rich Rosano



Scott Soper

The major challenge for the team of three was opening up the barrel-vaulted kitchen into the family room with a large archway. This design featured provided continuous flow and incorporated the creation of a new kitchen, a cozy banquette dining space, and a new play area. Almost all the other rooms were touched in some way and new floors, lighting and millwork were installed throughout the first floor. What resulted is a dramatic, soaring space that works perfectly for this active family.



LOOK: How and where have you spent the last two and a half months?

Sandy: I've been on John's Island in Vero Beach, Fla., since February 25th, where I have a cottage and a branch studio of our design firm. I've been working remotely from home with my clients, both here and in Connecticut, sometimes via FaceTime. Our studio here is close by and I've often worked there, on my own for a change of scene, sourcing information and samples for projects ongoing both North and South. Earlier this week I supervised a six hour FaceTime artwork installation with a CT client! We installed pieces throughout the entire residence. It was a marathon, but worked just fine.

Scott: I have spent the last two and a half months working out of my home office in Greenwich. Since my firm has long utilized CAD (computer-aided design), my workflow for the most part has gone uninterrupted. In-person client meetings stopped and went virtual. I had quite a bit of experience with this mode of operation having just finished a two year project in Park City, Utah where the project team meetings were almost always virtual. I believe people have become comfortable working this way and will continue to do so going forward.

Rich: I've been working at my new home office instead of my company's conventional office with the team. Our full team is now working remotely, as well as off-site at client projects.



LOOK: What are your thoughts on architecture, design and building as we move to open up?

Sandy: The pandemic has made homeowners realize how important their home environment is, even more so than before. Being confined at home has highlighted specific areas that need to be updated and refreshed; kitchens/family rooms, bathrooms and home offices are at the top of the list. Without being able to travel, our clients have focused on home being their primary destination and they are eager to make changes they may have put off before. They are looking for comfort and convenience, as well as a clean, modern aesthetic. As we reopen our design studio now, we're preparing for new business and looking forward to having new projects materialize.

Scott: It's interesting that architecture, as it relates to residential design, had been going through a paradigm shift prior to Covid shutting things down. The homes we design are reflective of that generational shift in tastes and the way families are choosing to live. The exterior design of homes now tends to be edgier with less traditional massing and utilizes more varied material, creating pleasing textural juxtapositions. The interiors have eschewed compartmentalized layouts and embraced more family-friendly open floor plans with clean and less fastidious details.

Rich: I feel that some architects will take into account expanding the shared spaces within a home. We will see an increase in home amenities: home offices, family spaces, theaters/media rooms, eating areas, outdoor living. More people are spending more time at home now and, in the future, will do more at home as well.

LOOK: During these challenging financial times, are there values to be had to renovate or build a home?

Sandy: Some businesses have been offering ongoing sales to entice customers with overstocked items. I understand the need for cash flow. The value of our staff's design skills, knowledge, and experience is still maintained. We are grateful for our client/customer loyalty and show our appreciation through dedicated customer service.

Rich: Not really. Just about the opposite for the construction business. Some businesses have and/or will be closing their doors as a result of necessity and/or convenience. We saw this same trend post-9/11. Some suppliers may have going out of business sales, although we haven't seen that to-date. Also, supply chains have been disrupted which has led to scarcity of supplies, some temporary. We have been seeing a slight increase with building costs due to scarcity and a higher cost of doing business.

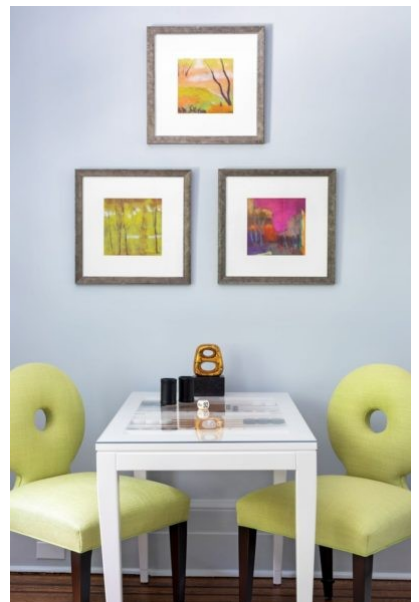
LOOK: Are your vendors, craftspeople, etc. available and open for business?

Sandy: Yes, our vendors, suppliers, and workrooms have reopened for business and are eager to get going again. They're doing their best to make up for lost time and most of our clients are being very patient and understanding. Clients are looking for more products being made in America. We're specifying as much as we can from those US.. suppliers like Dunes & Duchess, Oomph, Thibaut, and others.

LOOK: When is it practical to start a project?

Sandy: There is no perfect, practical time to start a project, but best when the stock market is up! I would discourage beginning a project in November/December because of the holidays and family time. January, (after holiday bonuses), through October are good months to begin. The most practical time is when finances have been designated for purchases and a realistic budget can be followed.

Rich: In this geography, you can start a project almost anytime. The only times that construction incurs delays is during long periods of below freezing single digit temperatures that will suspend pouring a new foundation.



LOOK: With people spending so much time at home with their multi-generational families, what are your clients telling you that they are enjoying in the homes that you've worked on?



Sandy: Our clients are especially enjoying their home offices and their kitchen/family rooms. Home offices that have easily converted from personal to business needs are high on the list of favorites. Family members of all ages, newly returned home because of the pandemic, are trying new recipes, eating pizza and watching Netflix. Togetherness is resulting in more wear and tear on furnishings. We're finding more reasons to specify attractive indoor/outdoor high performance fabrics.

Scott: My firm stays in touch with a great deal of our past clients, many who have become friends. We hear, even years later, that they still cherish their homes and the memories that were created within. I have always encouraged a high degree of collaboration between myself and my clients when embarking on any given project. This, I believe, is one of the main drivers of successful outcomes. I will share a note I was recently sent : *After 20 years , we still enjoy every aspect of our home, from the interior and exterior aesthetics to the flow of the home in general. Having both of our daughters back home during Covid quarantine has confirmed that Scott planned a home that would fit our family needs for the long term. We love the home he designed for us!*

Rich: Our clients are enjoying their home theaters, fast and secure commercial grade computer networks, home offices, and homework areas.

LOOK: What are they looking to change?

Sandy: Clients want to upgrade master bathrooms to create spa retreats. They want the latest technology in their kitchens and home offices. Purchasing new, meaningful artwork to give excitement and "soul" to their walls is important. Change requires adding, subtracting, and rearranging. Adding color and texture to uplift, soothe, motivate, and inspire can be as simple as finding and hanging the perfect painting.

Rich: Clients are asking for elaborate home offices and homework areas. Custom millwork will come into play to hide printers and supplies. Multiple computer monitors are often required. Motorized shades are a terrific addition. There is a need for secure and fast Wi-Fi. Other in-office amenities include built-in coffee machines with serving area complete with sink, refrigerator and in some cases, a dishwasher.



LOOK: What are some of the amenities that people will be adding to their homes?

Scott: The shutdown of the economy and the work from home directives are driving changes to home planning in several ways. The home office has without a doubt taken on more importance. In general, this has been a space that was previously not always an office per se, but rather an area that was placed many times in or around the kitchen or in an alcove of left over space. The home office was really there to deal with the family's business, not conduct business. Homes with studies often serve this purpose as well. Going forward, I can see a "true" home office space as a planning program requirement. Privacy will be important and the ability to receive visitors directly from the exterior will also factor into the location of the home office. Another change I believe we will see as a result of the shelter in place directives will be planning for "multi-generational" homes becoming a more common requirement when planning a new home or contemplating renovations to existing homes. The ability to have everyone under one roof has gained in importance.

Rich: Contactless door knobs and plumbing fixtures, like faucets, which have been used in public facilities for some time now, will soon be used. Residential building has been a slow adopter of this technology, however it is increasing as a result of Covid. Clients are also upgrading HVAC systems for air purification.



Homes are being integrated with more functionality via one's smart phone. Geo-fencing is becoming a popular software. It's an app on your smart phone. As you pull into your driveway, your home will respond to selected presets, such as: turning off the alarm, opening your garage door, unlocking a door lock, turning on preselected music, adjusting HVAC, etc. It can do the same in reverse when you are leaving. Home automation with Crestron, Control4 and Savant. Swimming pools have the Aqualink smart phone app to control all functions.



Lifts and/or elevators are important, especially when designing/building for the concept of aging in place. Also, dedicated and/or more elaborate and secure package delivery areas will be added, because of the increase in online shopping. One could build a dedicated and locked space with cameras with audio and electronic locks that can be controlled remotely from an app.

LOOK: From your experience with New York City residents, do you see an exodus?

Sandy: We are definitely seeing an escape from NYC, some temporary, some permanent. This is happening even before couples are starting families. People want

the ease of being outdoors for themselves and their children and less density in general. The word is the real estate market is heating up in CT. And Fairfield County residents are buying further north in places like Vermont. The ability to work remotely has dramatically changed the way we look at our lifestyle.

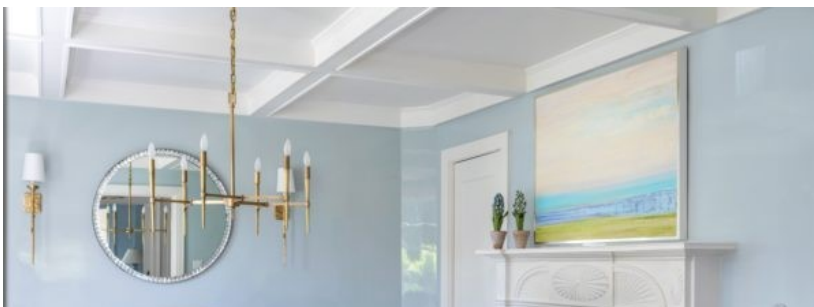


Scott: Having many friends and colleagues who live in New York, several who are involved with residential real estate, allows me to keep a finger on the pulse of what is taking place in that market. Most of my friends have fled to the Hamptons, Fairfield County, CT, out west, or to other areas of New York State. The trend of families moving out of the city into Greenwich is also happening on a significant scale based on the number of residential sales, rentals and the overall strength of the delayed spring market.

LOOK: Do you see people from the Fairfield County area moving away, now that people can work from home anywhere?

Sandy: I think people have discovered that commercial offices outside of home are not essential for many types of businesses. Personal face to face interaction can be achieved through Zoom meetings, FaceTime, and Skype. We can prepare room plans with furniture layouts to scale, complete with textures, paint colors, paper samples, finishes and photos, and FedEx to our clients overnight. Then we discuss in detail after they review the materials.

Scott: I am not sure how much of an effect working from home will have on the decision making process for Fairfield County residents in regard to moving or not. I believe the reasons that have traditionally propelled families to move will continue to apply such, as retirement, downsizing, empty nests, weather, etc. What may be more of a catalyst for people to move could be proximity to New York City and potential future events that may occur there which could impact Fairfield and Westchester Counties.



Rich: Over the last few years, we have seen an increase with primary and/or secondary homes in south Florida. It is one of several reasons we have set up for business in that market. We are licensed and have recently established a presence in Naples and Sarasota, and are ready for business. Additionally, we have sources in place to serve Palm Beach and the surrounding area. We are happy to support other locations for special destination projects.

LOOK: Where will people go? Tell us about the places where you are familiar working.



area choices and varied terrain. A terrific choice of restaurants and culture are also to be found. Park City is home to the Sundance Film Festival, as one example. The homes run the gamut from modest to amazing "mountain modern" masterpieces hugging the ski slopes up to and beyond nine thousand feet in elevation.

Rich: We have seen an increase of people moving to the markets where we build: Fairfield/Litchfield county, CT; Westchester, NY; Bergen Counties in New Jersey, and south Florida. We have also seen an increase to the Hudson Valley, NY.

LOOK: What is the "new normal?"

Sandy: The new normal is yet to be realized, but social distancing will be a daily reality indefinitely, depending on where you live.

Scott: The new normal will touch on many things. Perhaps one of the largest tectonic shifts may be in regard to how people view real estate and where one chooses to live. Urban living had perhaps become more in vogue than ever prior to Covid hitting cities hard. This has forced a "rethinking" of priorities for many people. The idea of living in the suburbs was simply a non-starter. We are seeing this trend reverse right before our eyes. Whether or not it will be permanent is hard to say.

Rich: I feel that some of the remote working/flex will remain, there will be more online purchasing, more local supply chain, new safety procedures, sanitizer stations in many more locations, a decrease in business travel, and cloud computing will grow further.



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