

## 2006/04: Sara King Andrews

contributed by Amy Johnson [field reporter / stylist / comedienne]

"Students should try to complement the business of interior design with the activity of interior design. The idea is to make money, hopefully by improving the quality of environments for others through thoughtful, dynamic, and sustainable design solutions." Well said! Sara Jane King, aka Sara King Andrews, ASID, knows of what she speaks. (And don't you just love a woman with an alias? We do.) In her twenty years in the business, her career has run the gamut from commercial design to residential design to art consulting for Art Dallas, Inc.

What's that readers? Did you say "Huh? Art consulting?" Yes, we did. Here's yet another facet of the interior design industry we want you to consider as you ponder your future in the business. And we're thrilled that we met Sara so that she could introduce us to this niche.

Think of artwork as another "surface" to be selected — one that plays as important a part as wall color or floor coverings or the casegoods and accessories chosen to complete the overall look and feel of a space. We're not talking investment pieces that will help you retire at the ripe old age of 37 when you sell them for a mint at Sotheby's. We're talking original, reproduction, or custom art that is selected or created to complement a space's design. But how do you get to Art Consultant from Interior Designer? Start With What You Don't Like

Sara's first gig was working in the accounts payable office of a medical facility as a summer job during high school. "I learned what I did not like: doing clerical work, the monotony of repetitive tasks, a static work environment, and the idea of set break times. Argh." Many of our readers identify with that succinct statement (especially the "Argh") — that's why they're in the design field. As are we. From Dollars To Dalí

After that very telling job experience, Sara went off to college to pursue a major that offered more creativity and flexibility. She earned a BS in Interior Design from Baylor University as well as a Masters in Theology from Southern Methodist University.

"My first "real" job came from the architecture firm where I fulfilled my internship requirement. I contacted firms asking if they were accepting interns. Baylor may have had a list of firms that were willing to accept interns from which we could initiate a search. I don't fully recall, that would have been twenty — count them twenty! — years ago." (Ed. Note: Most schools do have lists of firms that are willing to partner for internships, at least in their local area. Be sure to use the resources your school has to offer. And Sara? We don't believe for a minute that it's been 20 years since you were at Baylor!) Don't Sugarcoat It

The toughest lesson Sara learned in that first job is one that all of you soon-to-be designers will discover too, so you might as well hear it from her now. "[The toughest lesson was] learning that you get paid to erase as well as draw. In other words, the design process is mutable."

So true, so true. Other words of wisdom Sara passed along that will alleviate frustration for those starting out:

"I didn't really know what to expect [from my first job]. All I had was an idea that had been informed by the theories of the academy as opposed to one informed by "real world" experience (design in a vacuum vs. design with fluid criteria).

"I was really eager to go to a meeting to see the interaction with clients and design professionals. I thought this venue was the nexus of the action; well needless to say, meetings do have their place, but are a means to an end, not ends in themselves.

"Also, the progress through the design process is driven ultimately by client preferences rather than by the designer's personal preferences. You serve rather than be served." Reality Bites

And all the professionals out there say amen. Right? The industry isn't always glamorous and creative, allowing a

designer to have free reign to create whatever they want for their fabulously agreeable client. Instead, there are budgets, timelines, and hard lessons to be learned, like this one (that many of you pros out there will identify with):

“[I once] caved to the pressure to approve a paint color that I did not have the right conditions for viewing. The argument from the client and contractor [was] ‘the painter will be on site tomorrow to start spraying; you do want us to stay on schedule, on budget, etc.’ It was not the right color, and I paid to repaint four building cores. Better safe than sorry.”

But with its downs there are also ups — fantastic projects that come along and reaffirm why you became a designer. Sara got that experience with her most satisfying project to date. It was “a residential project that the client supported, encouraged, and allowed the fullness of my creative expression.” See? Those fabulously agreeable clients do come along eventually.

Nevertheless, last year when Sara decided the risks of a sole design proprietorship outweighed the rewards, she set out to find another arena in which to use her considerable talents.

Not Your Cheap Hotel Artwork Nightmare

Enter Art Dallas, Inc. Their mission is to provide art and framing services to the design trade for commercial, residential, healthcare, and hospitality projects around the world. They work with design professionals to provide original, reproduction, and custom artwork to complement both commercial and residential spaces.

In the past, Art Dallas hired more “artist-oriented” art consultants but found they weren’t always able to see the “art-as-means” side of the designer’s equation vs. a collector’s “art-as-end” view. Now, the majority of their staff have interior design degrees, like Sara. They can better communicate with the designer about their vision for a space, and they understand that, in these cases, it’s not all about the art. It’s about the environment as a whole.

In The Know

“The biggest advantage [of having been an interior designer] is having the design project cycle ingrained into your thought pattern and having an awareness of the competing demands for the designer’s resources, especially time.

“I still have the same project formula as one does as a designer. The major difference is that I am only responsible for a component of the whole. Working with artists is the equivalent of working with subcontractors. My clients are mostly design professionals. The variety in the day is still consistent with the pattern of being a designer.

“I’ve worked on apartment clubhouses, surgical clinics, hospitals, and residential projects. I am anticipating working on real estate development, healthcare, and senior living communities in the coming months.”

Skills For The Real World

“Technical drawing and art principles are the two skills [I learned in school] I found to be most valuable. The technical drawing because it gave me a marketable skill while I learned how to design. The art principles because I view interior design as essentially 3-D collage. I utilize the same composition techniques for creating satisfying interior environments. I am resistant to the trend of interior design programs that emphasize the technical over the creative.

“You need to be organized, disciplined, and an effective communicator to be a good designer. You do not have to be talented or gifted. I would guess that about 15 percent of the design effort is creative; the rest is administration and execution of the design solution.”

Sara Says “Relax”

Here’s our favorite advice for graduating students from Sara — it’s right on track:

“Relax. You don’t know anything, but the people who you will be working with know this, and they are ready and willing to share the knowledge of their experience with you. Try not to do too much independent thinking. If the designer you are working with has asked you to select fabrics with red and white stripes, please don’t return with blue stars because you thought it was a good idea. The project designer is managing the execution of the design solution and is not requesting creative input for a new, altered, or variation on the solution.”

What Makes Sara Tick

What projects are you currently working on around your home?

I live in a 1000 sq. ft. loft. It’s done! There are some significant changes in one’s focus and energy when one no longer is thinking about their own space. One’s participation in the exterior world expands beyond consumer.

Who is your favorite artist, designer, or architect?

Artist — Anselm Kiefer

Designer &mdash; Andree Putnam  
Architect &mdash; Louis Kahn

What's the last book you read, and would you recommend it?

Geoff Dyer is an astute observer of the art of life. Lord Vishnu's Love Handles by Will Clark &mdash; It has good local color. (Ed. Note: Both authors are available through Amazon.com and Barnes & Noble.com. Don't forget to shop through PLiNTH & CHiNTZ.)

Are you an early bird or a night owl?

Neither, strictly day.

What is the one thing that you wish you knew more about?

History &mdash; the ways in which the past inform the present.

Those of you interested in picking Sara's brain for career and art advice can reach her at [sking@artdallas.com](mailto:sking@artdallas.com). And don't hesitate to check out Art Dallas as one of your design resources!