

Lisa Wolfe in her newly designed living room



TRANSFORMING SPACES

Lake Forest interior designer Lisa Wolfe has been turning the ordinary into the extraordinary for her clients for more than 20 years.

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LAKE FOREST INTERIOR DESIGNER LISA WOLFE brings her clients joy with her craft of making homes a lot more vibrant. Redefining classic interiors with a hint of a bohemian twist, her vision has made its way into homes throughout the North Shore and Chicago areas, as well as Miami, parts of Michigan, and other cities spanning the country. Before her design career began, Wolfe worked as an account director for a corporate advertising agency with big-name clients notched on her belt. Working on the day-to-day corporate work and project management left her feeling uninspired, so she unleashed her creative side by switching careers to interior design.

After graduating from Harrington Institute of Interior Design in Chicago, she worked for a few design firms, and in 2004, started her namesake boutique interior design house, Lisa Wolfe Design.

Practicing her artistry now for almost 20 years, Wolfe has made a name for herself.

The vast majority of her roster continues to be returning clients or referrals from past clients. At this point, she feels she's growing alongside her clients as she's there to help them expand their homes, downsize to smaller spaces, take on that lake house, or even find themselves adjusting to living the single life.

Her work is often recognized for her use of vibrant jewel tones, combining time periods, blending old with new, and layering textures with pattern on pattern. "It's just my energy and how I naturally approach design," she explains.

Her favorite elements of any design project? Lighting and wall-paper.

"They set the mood and the color palette and they surround you



Lisa Wolfe in her home library

“I’m learning a different side of the client’s brain when it comes to art and I love that.”

love or pick a piece of art for so many reasons. It may remind you of a place or a time in your life or it has a certain emotion that just grabs you.”

As for finding the main inspiration, there’s always a different trigger for every project.

“It could be something a client shows me or a painting from Aunt Mary, but sometimes it’s on me to find the inspiration,” she says, “and I truly enjoy that, too.”

An avid traveler, Wolfe takes photographs of architecture, furniture, and rooms when abroad. She’ll go back to those photos to see if there is something there that can jumpstart her creative process. “I have to have something I can wrap my head around and it can be just about anything,” she says.

Then comes the wallpaper!

There are various steps throughout the design process with Wolfe, but there are two important reasons her initial meetings with new clients take place in their homes—to visually see the space to understand the scope of the project, and to make sure the chemistry is just right.

“I want to make sure it’s going to be a fun project for the both of us,” she says. “At the end of the day, it’s just design and design should be fun and we should have a good time doing it together.”

After understanding the client’s style, direction, and goals, then comes the floor plans and budgeting.

“It’s important to me that I deliver in the budget range that was agreed to and that my clients understand I know the value of a dollar,” she says. “There are times to splurge and times to pull back.”

Following this phase, Wolfe moves into the actual selections where she ultimately presents a preliminary concept to the client. She admits that more and more she comes to the table with a strong recommendation for each element—her version of exactly what she would pick if it were entirely up to her—but almost always has several options at different price points in her back pocket. Her favorite part? The client reveal.

“Cliche, but true,” she says. “It’s like watching someone open up a gift you worked so hard on.”

Wolfe goes for the unexpected, always.

“I strive to create something different that I haven’t seen or done before; something the client would never expect,” she says. “In my head, I’m always looking for that twist that the client never saw coming often pushing them out of their comfort zone, but that’s my job and there’s nothing better than having my client turn to me and say, ‘you were so right!’”

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with movement and tonality immediately,” she says. “You can do a beautiful wallpaper and a chandelier and pull back on everything else and still have a fabulous room.”

For Wolfe, wallpaper is where she usually starts, but it could also be a stenciling or even a mural. “Very rarely do I put a coat of paint on a wall and be truly happy with it,” she says. “I always want to bring it in somewhere.”

That’s also where the art comes in. “I love art and it doesn’t have to cost a fortune,” she says. “I have clients who think they have to spend a lot of money on art, but you just have to seek it out because you never know when you’re going to find something.”

Wolfe has sourced some of her favorite pieces from flea markets, street fairs, and antique malls, but her favorite go-to for art is meandering the galleries of Charleston where she always finds something that excites her. However, it’s not always an easy task to find the right piece for a client.

“It’s hard to source art for clients even when you think you really know them,” she says. “You go through this whole process to understand what they love and how they live; you design a beautiful space and then start talking about accessories and art and you have any idea, but art can be so subjective.”

Wolfe is sometimes surprised by what kind of art her clients are drawn to.

“I’m learning a different side of my client’s brain when it comes to art and I love that. I always try to get into their heads and see their vision through their eyes,” she continues. “But you fall in