



FROM THE GROUND UP

Kim LaFontaine has a “whole project” mentality

ALTHOUGH SHE WENT TO school for a certification in special education, Kim LaFontaine indulged her passion for interior design any way she could. “My parents didn’t feel it was a strong career that I could support myself in, but I took every related elective that I could,” she says. “Even as a child, I rearranged my bedroom all the time,” she says, laughing.

When she married a builder, there was an instant synergy both personally and professionally, and when they built their first home, it presented Kim the long-awaited opportunity to design a home from the ground up. “It was ‘Okay, game on!’ Finally, I can do what I know how to do,” she explains. Kim took the project and ran with it. When all was said and done, she made quite an impression on both herself and others. “When I finished, everyone started asking me to help them with their homes, and I was doing it in my free time for free, then they asked for friends, then friends of friends,” the Exeter resident explains. At the time, she was a stay-at-home mom to her young son. “My husband at the time suggested I start doing it as a business.” And LaFontaine Interior Design was born.

Her first big job was an interior designer’s dream: Beacon Rock in Newport. The mansion overlooking Newport Harbor was built in 1891 by architect Stanford White, best known as a third of the renowned New York-based architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White. The home boasts 22,000 square feet with 16 principal rooms, nine bedrooms and 10 ½ baths.

“That put me on the map and my phone just started ringing,” Kim says. “That was 17, 18 years ago.”

Today, it’s her intimate knowledge of the building process that sets her apart. “Because I have a working knowledge of the construction business, it puts [a clients’] mind at ease that I’m not ‘just’ an interior designer. I’m suggesting bringing a wall down or a major construction project,” she explains, adding that it’s common for her to work with architects from the start of a new build or renovation. “Most recently I did a project in Newport. My client lives in New York, so he’s not here at all. I hired the contractor and oversaw the whole project from the plumbing and electrical wiring down to paint colors. I’ve done everything down to choosing the china for your first dinner party,” she says.

But it’s not always the big budget, over-the-top jobs that keep her busy. “Sometimes I’ll go into a home and simply use everything they have and rearrange things,” she says. The start of each project begins with a consultation so she can get to know the wants and needs of each client. “They get to know me a little bit and I get to know them... what makes them happy, which is the most important part of being a good designer. It’s about designing for someone else, not yourself. You’re taking your knowledge and adapting to their needs.” Today, Kim says, she continues to love “every second” of her projects. www.lafontaineinteriordesign.com

HOME STYLE

French-country inspired

TIP

“Even in my small home, just under 2,000 sq. ft., you can still use large pieces of furniture while still incorporating a cozy feel. By using a soft color palette, I created a very warm and welcoming feel.”