

Katie Charlotte Design | Building an International Brand



Katie Charlotte Bridgman is a British interior designer based out of Montreal, who has completed various luxury residential design projects around Los Angeles, Chicago and all over Canada. Originally from the UK, she came to Canada in 2007 where she first resided in Montreal. Her passion for interior design came from watching her own Mother in action at home as she was growing up. "My Mother was not an interior designer, but she has and still does create some beautiful homes for pleasure." Katie got her feet wet in the design world back in 2013 when she had the chance to design a condo for a friend from scratch in Toronto where she was living at the time - and the rest is history. "My Grandfather was a large and successful building contractor in the UK and my Father had a structural steel and architectural fabrication engineering company. The industry was already in my blood so it was just a case of naturally finding my way onto that path as I evolved." Her journey is one of perseverance, determination and of course, a true love for her craft. Here's Katie Charlotte Design.

We know architect and design runs in your bloodline, but what about entrepreneurship?

My Grandfather had his own large and successful building company in the UK. He passed away when I was three, but he was self-made. My Dad, too, had his own

engineering business. I remember when I was growing up, at night time my dad would be doing all these amazing drawings of elevations and structural designs. Something that actually really stuck to me from a previous Goss event actually came from a speaker, Mireille Fontaine, who said: "by the time you're six or seven, the images you start drawing or painting, often end up relating to what you will gravitate to doing as a career." I used to always draw floor plans when I was young, but for horses: stable yards, arenas etc., as I had and still have a huge love for animals. I truly believe that your inner self will always find a way to guide you onto the right path. I remember really taking that statement away from Mireille at that event. For me, I guess a career in design or construction was always going to be a natural path, it was just "what will the journey entail to get there?" Then the condo opportunity in Toronto came up and I really enjoyed the interior design process, sourcing fabrics, furniture and lighting etc, and just seeing it come to life was so rewarding. One of the elements I really love about my job is that you get to pick items from anywhere and everywhere. Seeing that all come together, I remember saying to myself, "wow, I really enjoy doing this."



When did you take the leap of faith?

The first leap of faith was after doing an online interior design course. I did my design diploma with the Interior Design Institute of Canada in 2013 and at the time I just made it my full-time mission. I completed it in eight months, giving myself the goal of submitting one module a month. The minute I finished it and graduated, I set up Katie Charlotte Design. I had some great friends in Toronto that were realtors, so opportunities came in and it all just all happened really. I don't want to say luck, but more that it all happened organically and it was just meant to be. People started contacting me for interior design projects and it took off.



What do you specialize in? What do you want people to really look at you and your company for?

In terms of the design work, I specialize in high end and luxury modern interiors. I'm just finishing a project right now in the exclusive enclave of Rancho Mirage in California. I went down there to the project site last January with my client, not

knowing the world was going to blow up two months later with Covid. It was a very large house and we were meant to just change the floors, bathrooms and the kitchen. I had a great week down there and came home with a game plan which then evolved majorly not just with the pandemic hitting but the scope of work changed massively. We pretty much decided to demo everything and rebuild everything from scratch. We had an incredible general contractor down there, and he's been the number one speed dial in my phone favourites for over a year now. It's just been amazing to see how people can adjust to a situation. So - to best answer your question, I would say adaptability, style, uniqueness and incredible results.

What has been a challenge that you have surmounted recently?

Hands down, it was having planned to commence a large-scale design project on the other side of the US in a conventional manner and then having to operate remotely from Montreal due to the pandemic. Design is very hands on - you need to be able to see and touch things. That said, it was a great challenge and both the building contractor and I adjusted quickly - Facetime, Fedex and Google Sheets became my greatest ally. That said, I did have the luxury of a virtual project year before, for the same clients. They moved from Montreal to Vancouver, so I designed their home from Montreal without even going to Vancouver until after the project was finished. I was lucky to have had a shot at this virtual world before I actually needed to, that was very helpful. In terms of supporting my local economy, I did everything I could in Montreal - the sourcing of furniture, fabrics, lighting, artwork and window treatments all happened locally and got shipped from and to the US so it worked well. I'd say the that was the biggest challenge.

Has that allowed you to take your business to a new level?

Yes absolutely. It changed everything in all senses of the word. I mean of course there are the obvious things - you still need to go and get samples of various different items, but in terms of "Do I need to physically go?" Yes and no. I need architectural floor plans, videos of a walkthrough, and the rest is all doable through 3D software and a creative mind. I guess it's given me the confidence and the reality check of this being possible. Was it more work and more stress? Without a doubt. But was it even more rewarding to be present and witness the final installation in California last month. Exponentially so!

Fundamentally, yes, we can minimize our movements - the world has indeed shrunk in a sense in terms of distance and abilities - but some things just need that core physical presence.



What is the big goal that you have set for Katie Charlotte Designs?

I would say definitely to expand more globally in my projects. I guess it's just the way things have evolved with clients in the last year or so. I've also done a virtual project in Winnipeg and I'm commencing another in Vancouver now. Things for me have shifted more outside of the local area and I love it. So, the goal would be to have a lot more global and international presence and recognition. One, I'm British, so I grew up in the UK and by default have a great network of people there. Now I've grown that network across all the major cities in Canada - and have California under my belt too. I now feel there is no challenge that I can't surmount now. I can do this. I've done it. It works. I know maybe where the weaknesses are, the slowdowns and I know how to adjust. So definitely I'm comfortable expanding more internationally / globally.

What motivates you or inspires you to keep going? To keep finding new designs, new trends, etc.

The main inspiration is ultimately seeing the look on my clients face when the work is done, we are ready for the move-in and everything's set up and 'on show'. Don't get me wrong, my clients are always seeing things throughout the entire process. I am constantly sending them images and samples, so they're seeing small glimpses here and there but they're not seeing the full picture. I know that it can be very hard for people to visualize the final picture and I can't just transport an image from my mind to theirs, so they have to trust me. They see what I'm showing them and they can sometimes put it together in their head, but ultimately seeing their reaction is just the best feeling, to be honest. It's not about the money, it's about seeing them happy and knowing that you've done something that will change their lives in some way - even if it's been a relocation and you've made

their transition a lot easier because all they've had to worry about is adjusting kids in schools and events etc. It's incredibly rewarding seeing how the finished project looks and how it's all come together - but most importantly it's seeing the clients happy.

Who would an interior designer be or an architect be that you would really want to collaborate with?

It changes but currently, I am absolutely loving Toronto designer Ferris Rafauli's work - it's so bold and powerful and I am in awe of his talent and stunning work.

What is great about this industry is that everyone is so loyal and helpful - that's a big part of my success too. I can go to Crescendo or Y&Co in Montreal and I know the values of the owners, my reps, and it's just a really great feeling to know you have such a great network of people to collaborate with. It's all about that because yes of course there have been things go wrong - but it's the rest of the team who help me find the best solution. In this industry you have to be transparent because if you're tearing a house down, obviously you're going to find problems. You can't sugar coat things and a lot of it is about being honest and saying "this is the situation, but this is also the solution." It really helps to have that really strong amazing network of people.

What do you see as a big trend or something you've noticed that you've done more now compared to last year?

Colour trends change each year. This year it's been more orange and yellow along with the signature blues and greys. This year there's been a lot of inspiration from those colours because people aren't travelling. They are subconsciously taking their inspiration from ocean views and tropical climates because that's what they are missing. I think that's coming into people's visions a lot more than it obviously normally would. Blues and greens will always be around, they're very safe colours. Neutrals aren't going to go anywhere either. but the orange and yellow thing will be quick to leave.



The biggest thing - and home offices do come into this category - is that for such a long time the focus has always been about open-plan living. Now, it's about closing everything off. People are working, homeschooling - everyone's in the same space. I'd say that's probably the biggest trend. Colour change is to be expected, but now it's about, "how do we put walls and doors in and give everyone their own space to manage this new reality."

Who inspires you?

It changes, but currently, I am absolutely loving designer Ferris Rafauli's work - its so bold and powerful and I am in awe of his talent and stunning work. From a non-designer perspective, I just read Priyanka Chopra Jonas' new book, "Unfinished". I thought she was awesome before but now, having read her life story, I have so much respect for her and all she has conquered and experienced in her life. I can relate to her a lot from the boarding school, living overseas and losing a beloved Father experiences, but to learn about her drive and strong mindset as well as family values and career, has been so inspiring. She. Just. Rocks!

The easiest way to answer this is to tell you my (dead or alive) dinner party list!

My beloved late Father, Bono, Richard Branson, Barack Obama, Priyanka Chopra, Kevin Costner and the Queen!

For more information on Katie and to book her for a consultation [visit her website](#). Follow her on Instagram for her latest design work! @KatieCharlotteDesign