

A Match Made in Heaven

Karen Fisher unites interior designers with home owners in need, by Rachel Leaney

WHEN COUNTESS PAULA BRANDOLINI D'ADDA NEEDED A decorator for the New York apartment she recently acquired to complement homes in Switzerland, England, and Brazil, one of the first people she called was Karen Fisher, a design specialist who matches clients with interior designers and architects.

Fisher introduced Countess Brandolini, an American who married a Venetian count, to David Walker, a designer and architect in New York. The result? Nearly 2,000 square feet of modern opulence on the Upper East Side.

"I will never forget that moment," she said of the day she first saw the completed condominium. "It was like my birthday and New Year's and the birth of my daughter all rolled into one."

That moment celebrated a meeting of the minds that had grown into a real friendship, one which would not have occurred without Karen Fisher's involvement.

It was Fisher's accurate instincts about people, combined with an intimate knowledge of the design industry, that prompted her to launch her business, Designer Previews, in 1985. In her previous career as a decorating editor for *Woman's Wear Daily*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Esquire* and *American Home*, Fisher was often asked by friends to refer designers and the designers loved meeting her friends as well.

During the early 90s, the economy was booming, yuppies were buying and newly assertive working women were willing to hire decorators rather than do the job themselves. It was the beginning of a major change in interior design, and I just happened to be standing at the crossroads," says Fisher.

No longer was it simply permissible to hire a designer, it was a necessity. "I think people began to realize the extent to which decorating could change an environment. They used to add on a room and put in some old furniture; not they could see what a pitched ceiling would do, or what fabulous lighting would do, or what effect red floors would have."

When Fisher launched her "match making" company, she also forged a new niche in the architecture and interior design industries. Although similar services have sprouted, it is generally considered by those in the industry that Fisher's enviable stable of contacts and match making abilities make her company second to none.

Designer Previews now represents more than 300 interior designers and architects across America. While Fisher has had success pairing home owners with new, young designers, she is also accomplished at deciding when one of her more established designers would be preferable.

The selection process is painstaking. She initiates the three-part process of match making in her office in a stylish Gramercy Park penthouse. She charges clients a flat \$100 consulting charge. The process begins with an informal interview on tastes, styles, preferences and specifics of the project. Once a rough budget has been established (projects range in cost from \$50,000 to \$5 million) clients view a presentation of about 80 slides, which Fisher calls a "decorating Rorschach."

Not all of Fisher's business is done in New York. She also has "virtual offices" in many major cities, including Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Washington DC, Atlanta, Miami, Boston and Philadelphia. She shows some out-of-town clients the designers work on the Internet; other clients come to New York because they want the cachet of a Manhattan designer.

Gary and Mary Becker of Louisville, Kentucky, are one such couple. An attorney specializing in personal injury plaintiff work. Becker heads a law office that bears his name. When the couple was ready to decorate a new two-story penthouse apartment, they deliberately set out for New York.

Coordinating a partnership between Louisville and New York is a minor challenge for Fisher. "The fact is we're one world. Our designers are working in Taiwan and Tokyo. Louisville is a snap!" ∞

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