

COTTAGES & GARDENS

Meet the Designer: Lisa Schwert of Innate Studio

Inside the designer's recent Westport project.

by Isabel Gouveia



If there's one woman who can design it all, it's Lisa Schwert, AIA, ASID, who founded Connecticut-based Innate Studio in 2021. Schwert's former experience at Douglas Elliman and SHoP Architects has allowed her to plan and design both commercial and residential spaces. Recently, Schwert renovated a country home in Westport for a young, professional New York City-based family. "The clients love to entertain and wanted their second residence to be where they could host friends and family, celebrate the holidays, and relax on the weekends," Schwert says. "We created a completely comfortable home that would stand up to the life of a family with pets and young children." Here, more about the newly finished property and the backstory on Schwert and her firm.

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Photograph by Read McKendree

CTC&G: What is the inspiration behind the name of your company?

Lisa Schwert: Practicing architecture and design has always felt very intuitive to me. I am a person who appreciates a clear process and structure, but I love that ‘aha’ moment that happens in every successful project when the constraints and the solutions magically align, and the outcome works. ‘Innate’ felt like a good word to capture that phenomenon. Creating a studio where everyone works together equally feels more rewarding to me than having my name on the door.

What led you to open your own firm?

Since I was in architecture school, I had always thought I’d love to have my own business one day, but my career working on large, high-profile projects had momentum, and it never felt like the right time to take the leap. As it did for so many people, the pandemic made my family and I re-evaluate how we were living. We moved to Wilton, where my husband is from, and the rest is history!

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Photograph by Read McKendree

What is the history of this Westport residence?

The house was originally the studio of American sculptors James Earle and Laura Gardin Fraser. It is on the Westport historic register, so we wanted to maintain and highlight the home's beautiful original details while showcasing the client's style and creating a comfortable second home for the family.

How did you find design inspiration for the various spaces in this home?

The home is so special and unique, so much of the inspiration naturally came directly from those interesting details. For example, the gorgeous stained-glass windows throughout the living spaces feature these beautiful bird motifs, and since the clients and I are both animal lovers, we embraced a menagerie theme that found its way into many fabrics and decorative items we selected.

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Favorite space in this project?

The home's original timber structure is unique and beautiful, but also created some unusual spaces on the main floor. A small corner of the primary living area where the structural beams intersected was too small to furnish properly. Right below the ceiling in this space is an incredible limestone relief done by Laura Gardin Fraser that is integral to the home. We custom-designed a bar clad in beautiful marble to occupy the corner. The clients found a gorgeous bone inlaid mirror highlighting the original windows' metalwork at a local antique store. The bar added so much drama and utility to a beautiful but challenging space in the home.



Photograph by Read McKendree

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How was the blending of textures incorporated into this home?

We mixed natural stone, antique Heriz rugs, and ornate botanical prints with patinaed leather, wood, and neutral upholstered pieces. The number of patterns we incorporated pushed me out of my comfort zone, but it worked in this home.

What's your biggest tip on blending different textures?

For me, what works is to find continuity in what you've selected, focus on one or two impactful moments in a room and let them shine. For example, if you find a patterned wallpaper you love, utilize colors and tones from the wallpaper for the painted trim, the ceiling, the bedding, and the rug. You want to complement and reinforce your statement pieces, not compete.



Photograph by Read McKendree

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A favorite wallpaper?

There are so many beautiful options! William Morris' patterns are so perfectly complex and feel good 150 years after he designed them. Farrow and Ball's painted wallpapers have beautiful textures and a handmade feel.

What is a tip for mixing antiques with newer pieces?

Architects and designers are also responsible for being stewards of the environment. If we can reuse or repurpose something, we should. Like mixing patterns and textures, try to find moments of continuity between the old and new pieces. Whether it's the geometry of a curve, the tone, and the type of wood, or the metal hardware, try to find one element of the pieces you're mixing that relate in some way.



Photograph by Read McKendree