



BY DESIGN

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Part-time Neapolitan designer, Shelley Johnstone Paschke, blends European sensibilities with American practicality

“Creating beautiful, timeless spaces to be lived in and enjoyed.” Those are the pragmatic words Shelley Johnstone Paschke has lived by and has committed to throughout most of her 30-year career as a designer.

“Any designer can make things look pretty,” explains Johnstone Paschke. “I try to create spaces

where memories can be made; I want places to be livable. There’s little point to having pretty things if they can’t be useful.”

When she’s not traveling the country for speaking engagements, design-related events, or client projects, Johnstone Paschke splits her time between her





JOHNSTONE PASCHKE, WHOSE FAVORITE COLOR IS BROWN, CREATED A NONTRADITIONAL HOLIDAY TABLESCAPE IN HER BAY COLONY RESIDENCE. MUCH OF HER DESIGN WORK IS NAPLES-BASED, WITH RECENT WORK AT ROYAL POINCIANA GOLF CLUB AND THE PORT ROYAL CLUB.

home in Lake Forest, Illinois, and her Bay Colony residence in Naples. While she does design work for clients back in Illinois—and in several other states, too—she relates that more than half of her business is Naples-based right now. “We love working down here,” she notes. “The projects are exciting.”

In Naples, her recent projects include work for both Royal Poinciana Golf Club and the Port Royal Club, though the latter has suffered tremendous damages from Hurricane Ian.

“I was one of three on a committee to hire an interior designer to remodel and renovate the ladies’ locker room at Royal Poinciana, says Mary Jo Bovich, who is a member and long-time Naples resident. “The result was a total transformation of the space, filled with more light. Working with Shelley is the hidden gem. She is uplifting, and her attention to detail is unparalleled.”

BACKGROUND CHOICES

Johnstone Paschke hails from Madison, Wisconsin, and has always been creative. She attributes at least some of her ingenuity to her parents: Her father worked as a landscape architect and her mother as a









JOHNSTONE PASCHKE CREDITS HER ATTENTION TO DETAIL TO STUDYING AND DESIGNING IN LONDON, ENGLAND. STILL, SHE BELIEVES HER WORK IS REFLECTIVE OF AMERICAN SENSIBILITIES.

florist. Even with these influences, the success she's created for herself as a designer has come somewhat unexpectedly. "I went to the University of Wisconsin and majored in communications," she says. "Design was something I was always very interested in, but I really didn't understand that I could make a career of it."

Following college, she moved to London, England, where she was admitted to the highly revered Inchbald School of Design and completed an intensive yearlong program. After, she found employment with a London-based interior designer.

"This is where I learned my attention to detail," adds Johnstone Paschke. "I worked for an amazing designer and learned much about bespoke details. I took it all in and would travel on the weekends to European cities, including Paris. But, London was a place full of design opportunities. They take the design industry very seriously there."

She describes herself as the American girl who went to London. Living abroad and visiting places in Europe have had an immense influence on Johnstone Paschke's work, but she's never lost sight of her roots. "I love all the details of Europe, but there's always been this American practicality, a cleanness, that I mix with them. I don't like things too overdone—I don't like ruffles."

After working in London for about four years, Johnstone Paschke returned to Illinois, first establishing her business in Chicago, eventually relocating to the north suburb of Lake Forest. At first, she only worked for friends, but through referrals and word of mouth, she steadily gained more clients. Through it all, she's maintained a sense of simplicity, however. "We're a boutique firm," she tells. "I keep my business small so that I'm not having to manage a lot of people; I pick and choose the projects I want. I only want to be around people who care about me. There must be a level of trust on both sides."



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ETERNAL BEAUTY

Being on trend isn't important to Johnstone Paschke. Testament to this is the fact she's lived with her husband, Brett, in the same home for many years. "This is rare for a designer, and my home has not been redone," she states. "I look at design as an investment, and I like the idea of things being timeless. I come home, and I love it."

Along with timelessness, her design precepts center around beauty, approachability, and even a little dose of imperfection.

"We want clients to feel at ease in their homes," she says. "If they're entertaining in their spaces, it should be fun—and easy. And there's no right or wrong. We want our clients to feel comfortable and confident in their own spaces. It doesn't have to be perfect. No matter the space; it's your space. Make it special."

"When people walk into our home, they can't help but smile," says Mary Dolan, a Lake Forest-based client of Johnstone Paschke's. "Shelley has helped with the design of nearly every room in our home, and when I walk through it, I say to myself 'I love this room and this home.' Shelly has been open to my ideas and somehow manages to make them work perfectly."

As for where she finds inspiration, it's in books, art, movies, and most of all traveling. She'll tell you she can't remember a phone number, but ask her to recall a unique detail on a charming door situated along a side street in Paris, and she'll speak about it with painstaking precision. In fact, she's likely already incorporated that door into one of her design creations.



PICTURED ON THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE IS THE EXTERIOR OF JOHNSTONE PASCHKE'S RESIDENCE IN LAKE FOREST, ILLINOIS, A HOME SHE'S LIVED IN FOR MORE THAN 20 YEARS.

Johnstone Paschke's Instagram following of close to 55,000 followers indicates that people appreciate not only her design aesthetic but also her cheerful, genuine, and inclusive approach. "I attribute my following to being truly authentic," she explains. "I don't take it too seriously, and I'm not calculated at all. It's called Instagram for a reason." She also sees Insta as a conduit to the social media worlds of her children, of which she has five: Hunter, Ford, Will, Luke, and Lauren.



Part of Johnstone Paschke's Instagram popularity also likely stems from the success of her latest book, *A Loving Table*, co-authored with Kimberly Schlegel Whitman. The concept, she says, stemmed from an event called the Orchid Dinner that involved decorating elaborate tables with orchids at the Plaza Hotel in benefit of the New York Botanical Garden.

"I participated in the Orchid Dinner three years in a row, and one year I met Kimberly, who had already written books on tablescaping," says Johnstone Paschke. "We collaborated on an idea about designers creating loving tables and later worked together to refine the concept. She took it to her publisher, and they loved it."

On the horizon for Johnstone Paschke are more design projects of course and possibly a second edition of *A Loving Table*. Enjoying Naples is on the list, too. Her parents, who have wintered in Naples for many years, live in Bay Colony, too, as does a cousin of hers. "Naples holds so many family memories," she says. "It's a big part of us." <<

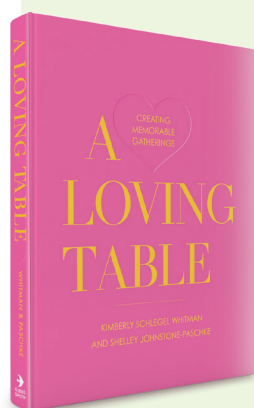


CREATING YOUR LOVING TABLE

THE NEXT TIME YOU SET YOUR TABLE, MAKE IT PERSONAL WITH THESE TIPS FROM SHELLEY JOHNSTONE PASCHKE, WHO BELIEVES TABLESCAPES SHOULD BE REFLECTIVE OF ONE'S AUTHENTIC SELF



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1. Curate items you love and that have meaningful, personal connections to you or your family and friends. It's about making memories with these people and showing them you care.
2. Try mixing fine china and crystal with more relaxed items like rattan chargers, bamboo-inspired flatware, and woven glassware. Including the unexpected

- keeps the tablescape from feeling too formal or fussy.
3. Use a casual block print tablecloth that reflects your personality, and place beautiful, embroidered napkins on top of it. This makes for an elegant combination.
4. To add color, incorporate fresh flowers, small potted plants, or even bowls of fruit; doing this can make tablescapes more vivid and elevate

- the table in interesting ways.
5. When curating tabletop collections, consider what you already have, including those special pieces that may have been passed down through the generations. Mixing the new and old can be beautiful and spark amazing conversations.
6. Keep your tabletop items well-organized and easily accessible. This way, you're

- more inclined to use them and to set a lovely table.
7. Items typically found indoors can enhance an outdoor tablescape. Consider bringing items that usually reside inside to the outside.
8. Add an element of fun to the table by including questions under plates to pose to guests. This is a great way to include and involve all guests in the conversation.