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Marcello A. Luzi, ASID

from dreaming of the White House to designing a dream house

an interview with an interior designer to discuss what inspires him

By Shannon Burke

From designing big projects on a large budget to smaller projects on a tight budget, Marcello Luzi of Weixler, Peterson & Luzi Interior Designers of Philadelphia, PA, has worked with a diverse range of clientele. The interior designer, who loves to travel and is inspired by movie classics, works with partners to create beauty for others. According to Luzi, the most important detail in interior design is being able to trust the designer. Understanding the client's needs and wants, and sometimes setting aside your personal preferences, is what makes a true designer. In this interview, Luzi, past president of the Pennsylvania East Chapter of ASID, talks about everything from his beginnings to his mom's cooking.



The homeowners of this condo desired modern Italian furnishings with high-tech lighting and limestone floors. Marcello A. Luzi and partner Steven Weixler designed it. Photo by Steven Weixler

Q: Describe the most luxurious or extravagant room you've designed.

A: Do I have to pick one? I'd say a living room where the wallpaper was priceless with hand-painted scenes. You can easily spend \$25,000 just on wallpaper. Another example is a home theater that cost \$250,000. Also, a library where the bookcases were custom made and cost thousands and a heated garage.

Q: Is that normal?

A: If you're parking several hundred thousand dollar cars, you'd want it to be nice.

Q: What up and coming shops do you frequent?

A: We shop a lot in New York, Paris and London. One could go to Pottery Barn or Ethan Allen, but I'm looking for one-of-a-kind or custom-made

pieces. I'll shop all over the country. I'm always looking at trade journals around 50 a month. I do not like mass-produced items if I can get something more special, whether it's lighting, accessories or furniture.

Q: What is your area of expertise?

A: I'm a money guy. I'm also an interior designer. I'm great with color. I'm good with everything from space planning to creating a vision. I went to school for finance. I like the combination of business and art. Designers have a reputation for being bad at business. I think that's my strength. I know I'm responsible with the project budget.

Q: You went to school for finance?

A: I started at Drexel and then I went to the Art Institute of Philadelphia. I loved it. Every morning I watch CNBC to see what's happening in the market and I read The Wall Street Journal everyday. Art is very nebulous and esoteric. Numbers are black and white. I like them both. When I get de-

Q: What made you decide to be an interior designer?

A: I'm an A-type personality. If I'm not doing six things at one time, I get bored. With design, you are always evolving, refining, growing. My sister helped me. She reminded me that when I was a boy, I used to be in my drawing floor plans of mansions. I had studied the White House because I thought that was a good example of a grand house. My sister said I really ought to look at interior design or architecture. I was fascinated by how function, flow and relate to other spaces, and how people lived within the space.

Q: What is your best piece of advice?

A: Hire somebody really good and trust them. I find that I really do have been doing this for 18 years. I have devoted my life to this. Listen to their advice; take all of it into consideration. Take your time. Do not buy on impulse.

Q: What are some misconceptions clients might have about an interior designer?

A: That they cannot afford one. In the long run they'll save you money. Cheaper to do it right the first time. Good interior design will add value to your home. I've seen people get 200 percent back. Another misconception is that they dictate their style. It's not true. Ultimately they have to live there and be happy.

Q: What sets you apart from other designers?

A: I want to be challenged. It's about you, not me. I should be able to do any style for you. If I'm stuck on one style, then only people who want that style can come to me. I am saying, "Who are you? Tell me about yourself. How do you want to live?" I think interior design is individualistic. I do not even like using the same fabric or paint color twice.

Q: What is your favorite restaurant?

A: One of my favorites is Friday Saturday Sunday. A great, intimate, down to earth place located on 21st Street near Rittenhouse Square.

Q: Do you have a favorite food?

A: Besides chocolate? I have a sweet tooth, but I love pasta. Anything Italian!

Q: Are you a good cook?

A: No. I won't starve, but I won't win any contests either.

Q: Is your mom a good cook?

A: Fabulous. She is an incredible cook. She's still making homemade lasagna and pasta.

Q: How do you relax?

A: Traveling. It's an education that takes me out of my self, out of my head. Everything that seems important just isn't important anymore because you're in a whole different environment.

Q: What is your next travel destination?

A: I have a long list of places that I'd like to go. I was traveling a lot internationally up until 2001. My next place might be back to Italy, or perhaps Germany or Eastern Europe. Anyplace I haven't been is great. Europe is always a favorite, but at 12 trips so far Italy is my all-time, number one winner.

Q: Do you have a favorite place in Italy?

A: Rome or Florence. It's probably Rome because it has so much history, but you cannot go wrong with Italy. Venice, Florence, Rome, Capri. They're all beautiful.

Q: Do you have a design

trend that makes you cringe?

A: One thing that drives me bananas is the TV show *Shabby Chic*. It's just because there is old stuff that's fine, and then there's just old stuff. There are certain things that don't deserve another life!

Q: What inspires you when it comes to interior design?

A: When I see movies with beautiful interiors. I'm thinking Grace Kelly and Cary Grant movies. I was always looking at the background of the movie, not the actors. I would sometimes pick movies based on what the interiors looked like and the setting, rather than the plot. In a way, what we do is theatrical. It's setting the stage for a client and their life.

Weixler, Peterson & Luzi Interior

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This bedroom in a Philadelphia townhouse is a collection of styles. It has an eclectic look with a French chair and Moorish-inspired drapes. Designed by Weixler, Peterson & Luzi Interior Designers. Photo by Barry Halkein

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