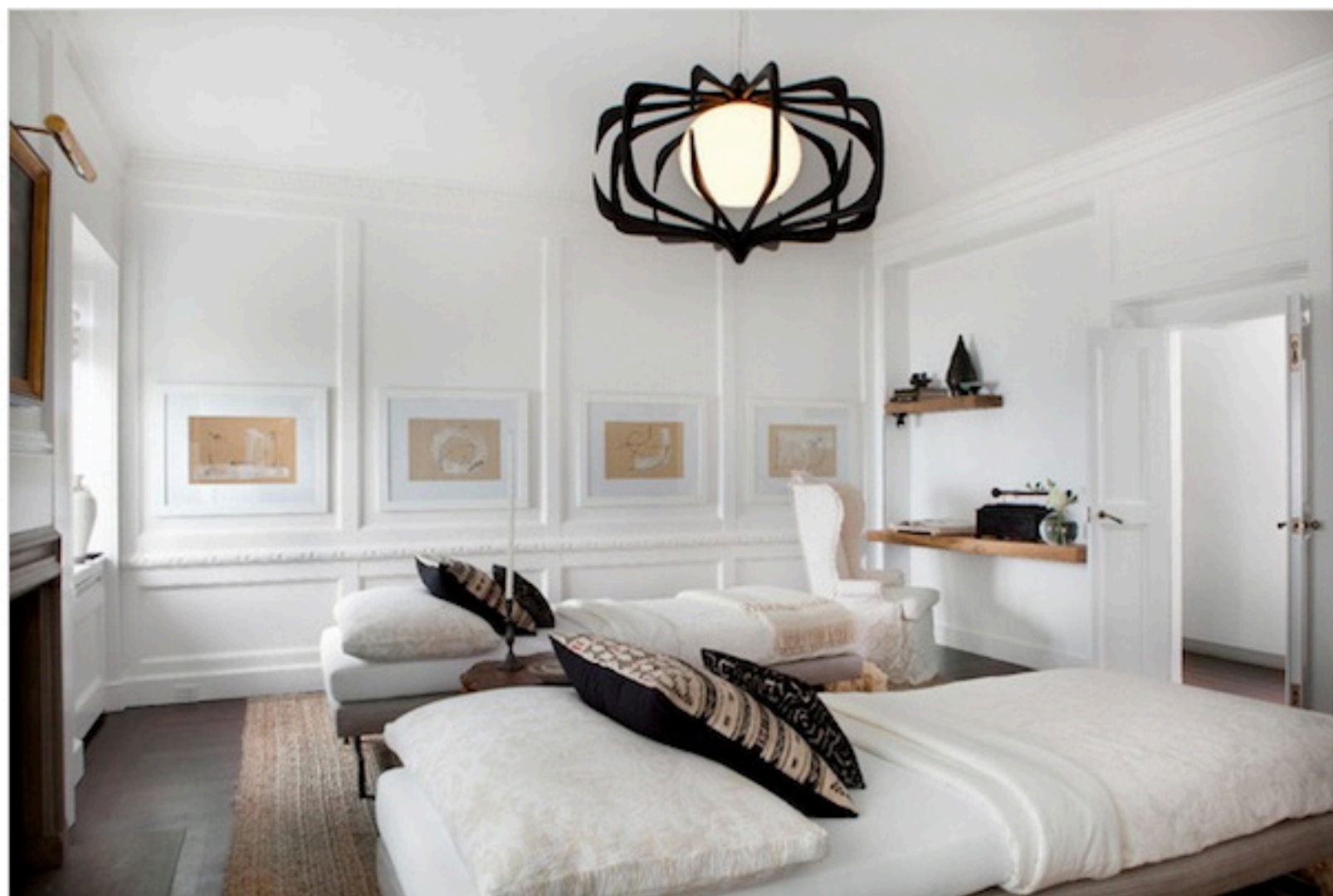


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Local Design Icon: Michael Del Piero

posted by **Caroline Boneham** | Jan 22, 2015

Anyone who knows local design icon, **Michael Del Piero**, knows that her incredible talent, her inspired spirit, and her gracious charm are her calling card. Through this interview we got to know Michael a little better, heard a little more about how her magnificent spaces are created, and found out why many call her a "client satisfaction" expert.



"Lake Forest Show House" project

What about Chicago do you enjoy most during the winter (if anything)?

I like to be outdoors in the winter, believe it or not! I enjoy running in the cold along the lake as well as cross-country skiing. My boyfriend Stuart (owner of **Architectural Artifacts**) and I sit and have dinner in front of the fire. The fireplace, with its incredibly large opening, makes us feel as though we are sitting around a huge campfire.

What would you say is your signature style and area of expertise, and why?

My style has many facets. As disparate as these facets may seem, I think they work together seamlessly. I'm inspired by travel and places I like to spend my time. I blend the informal beach (The Hamptons) with romantic (Belgium/France) with textural (Africa). My "mix" is a combination of clean-lined modern upholstered furniture, sculptural accent pieces, worn woods, textural fabrics, and abstract art. But my real specialty is excellent client communication.



"Country Estate" project

Can you describe your design process and how you get to know your clients?

I was an executive coach for almost twenty years. I know how to get people to talk about what they want and need. It's one of my strengths. My process begins with an in-depth interview. I always have this conversation on-site unless the location is not yet built or under construction. I like to see how a potential client lives and the choices made for what surrounds them. The interview process is key to the success of the project!

I heard you went to an event where Windsor Smith spoke about 'trusting your designer.' Can you describe what she said and what resonated with your client?

I went to see Windsor speak at The Merchandise Mart in October. She was launching a collection for Century and gave an informal presentation prior to the viewing in the showroom. During her presentation, she spoke about the benefit of our design clientele needing to trust us and trust the design process. This seems obvious, however, Windsor directed the comment to one specific area of trust: that a designer can take a client to a level they wouldn't be able to reach on their own. It resonated with me and gave me a new way to speak about this with my clients.

Coincidentally, one of my clients was in the audience. We met later that day to discuss her project, and she reported the following: "I really heard Windsor today and completely agree that I should let you take full charge of the design (even though I have opinions), because I know you can take me somewhere I cannot go on my own. I will follow you." And she has been doing so ever since.



"Huron High Rise" project

Do you have a story from a project that demonstrates what thrills you about pleasing your clients?

I must say pleasing my clients is the main reason I do what I do! A few years ago I took on a project in Lake Bluff, which I would classify as an "update." The clients had a very nice home with good bones and nice flow. They had an event coming up (their daughter's wedding) and were in need of new furnishings for the entire home. From my perspective the project, including client meetings, was moving along nicely. We had selected all the furnishings, art and accessories, painted the interior walls, re-stained floors and updated the kitchen and baths. The only item in question was a rug for the entry. The wife of the couple felt it wasn't woven evenly on the sides and she felt it might not be the best option for her home. I felt strongly that this piece was perfect for the space, as the size needed was unusual. It was perfectly textured with a really interesting color way. She agreed to move forward but she was reluctant.

Over the next couple of months, I noticed the wife had become very quiet during the meetings and it concerned me. I asked her if all was well. She said, "yes, I'm just busy," so I decided to leave it at that. We scheduled the installation while the couple was out of town for a few days. We installed and felt great about how the spaces came together and left flowers with a handwritten note for the couple upon their return that weekend. On Sunday the couple was due back and I assumed I'd hear from them. I did not. On Monday, I had planned to check in if I'd not heard from them.

At 3pm I got a call from the wife crying. She said, "I am choked up with all this. Never in my lifetime, had thought I would be the owner of such a beautiful home. It's so us and unbelievably gorgeous and approachable." She proceeded to tell me how the process was absolutely awful for her! She said, "I kept telling Paul (her husband) how little confidence I have that this home will really look good. I bet we will have to sell it all and use our old furniture." She was anxious and doubtful for months and I had no idea! She further explained how well she knew the entry rug would have to be tossed because it was so wrong and "used." She couldn't see how all of this stuff was going to work together and look good. After she explained how she had been feeling, she went on to tell me how much she loved everything, and her favorite piece was the entry rug!

I recently asked her for a testimony of my work for her and this is what she sent: "We interviewed four designers. We selected Michael because she was the only one that asked how we wanted to use the space. We had three priorities for the project: that it would stay within the budget, be finished on time, and change the look and feel of the house. Michael met all three goals. She found the perfect items and was able to negotiate fair prices for furniture and accents as well as more construction-oriented work. She was very transparent about pricing and project cost. When we added additional work it was clear how this would impact the budget so we could make informed decisions. The project was finished three weeks before the wedding, so it came in on time and on budget. The results were amazing. The look and feel of the house exceeded our expectations. The spaces are inviting, relaxing and flexible. In the three months since the house has been finished we have entertained more than we did in the last three years. We have enjoyed rooms we had never used in the seventeen years we have lived in this house."



"Winnetka Traditional" project

Do you have any design rules you always follow? Any big “dos” or “don’ts”?

1) I never say never to anything. 2) I don’t follow design rules, ever. 3) My biggest “do” is to keep clients happy!

I love [Pagoda Red](#) and [The Golden Triangle](#) for interesting furniture and accessories. I am a fan of [Oscar Isberian](#) and consider him my “go to” source for new and antique rugs. I travel with Stuart Grannen of [Architectural Artifacts](#), which allows me first sightings on things he sources from around the globe. He has an interesting mix of things. [Revival](#) is always a good spot for tables, lighting and mid-century accessories. I visit [Pavilion](#) when on the hunt for a wonderful midcentury piece with pedigree. I’m a huge fan of 1stdibs and would have to say that it is my favorite source for everything! The Chicago [Merchandise Mart](#) is a wonderful local source for fabrics and furnishings.



"Lake Forest Library" project

What inspired your own home?

Travel. I am so fortunate; I travel for my job to some of the coolest places on earth. I scour the globe for the cool and unusual for my interior design projects as well as [my shop](#) in Bucktown.

Love what you see? Learn more about Michael's business and inquire about her services through her [profile](#).