

# kitchen & bath DESIGN NEWS®

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# THE INNOVATORS

KBDN highlights **50** top innovators whose work, creative talents, business acumen and professionalism are currently leading the way for the industry and elevating the kitchen and bath trade. — BY KBDN STAFF



**T**he kitchen and bath trade loves great design; it's no secret that great projects are a driving force in this industry. Indeed, creativity and artistry are frequently recognized and rewarded through a plethora of design competitions, with glossy project photos splashed across the pages of magazines, websites, blogs and even on TV.

But in the celebration of design, the very professionals who create those projects and elevate the industry are sometimes overlooked. Yet great design doesn't exist in a vacuum; the kitchen and bath industry continues to prosper largely due to the efforts of innovators who aren't afraid to lead the way and chart their own course, whether through design, education, technology, showroom development, community service, new business models or specialty areas that evolve alongside today's ever-changing consumers.

For this reason, *Kitchen & Bath Design News* is pleased to announce its inaugural *KBDN* 50 list of Innovators, honoring some of the industry's finest dealers, designers and industry leaders who are out there on the front lines, right now, redefining the kitchen and bath trade.

Nominated by their peers and then carefully reviewed by the *KBDN* nominating committee, the 2017 Innovators reflect a true cross section of the industry.

Some are in the early stages of their careers; others have devoted decades to the industry. Some have showrooms; others are independent designers.

Some specialize in an essential niche – such as Universal Design, theme design, decorative plumbing and hardware, the luxury market, sustainable design, appliance showroom design or virtual reality technology – and, in many cases, they have literally and single-handedly redefined that niche, changing how spaces are conceived, designed and experienced.

Of course some have created entirely new niches, such as the online design portfolio better known as Houzz, and the Network Management System business management software program created specifically for kitchen and bath dealers.

From seasoned design professionals who devote hundreds of hours to mentoring the next generation of design talent to authors who educate the public about key topics like safety and sustainability, many of the designers on the list have made sharing their knowledge a priority. They give seminars and host webinars, speak at conferences and teach college courses, and share their knowledge through websites, blogs, radio shows, HGTV appearances and advice columns.

A number of these innovators are also active in various professional organizations, serving the industry through their work with local and national chapters of their associations, buying groups and other industry groups. These design professionals are integral to creating educational programs for the industry and funding scholarships for design students; they foster networking opportunities and develop unique ways to engage with their communities, both within the trade and with consumers.

They lead by coloring outside of the lines, and in doing so, create new pathways for other design professionals to follow.

Of course design innovation is also an important part of the package, with many of the top 50 having received myriad awards and design accolades for creating fashionable and functional spaces that wow all who see them. By incorporating their unique vision into their kitchen, bath and showroom projects, they not only dramatically improve the lives of their clients, they also raise the bar for all of the industry. And ultimately, that's what innovation is all about.

On this and the following 12 pages, *KBDN* spotlights "The Innovators" – 50 extraordinary kitchen and bath professionals who are changing the industry right now. ■

*KBDN will begin accepting nominations for next year's Innovators on January 1, 2018. Visit [KitchenBathDesign.com](http://KitchenBathDesign.com) for further details.*



## Richard T. Anuszkiewicz

*Passionate, multi-talented young designer blazes his own trail*

A passion for design and an appreciation of style are two driving forces behind Richard T. Anuszkiewicz's accomplishments.

The creative director of Richard Living lifestyle brand and executive director of ABS Architects Casework

division is a 2010 graduate of Virginia Tech's NKBA-accredited Residential Design program who has received numerous accolades. Since being named to the inaugural NKBA "30 Under 30" list in 2013, Anuszkiewicz has quickly become recognized as a kitchen design authority with creativity and passion.

Unafraid to forge his own path, he notes, "For me, innovation is trail blazing, and my main goal has always been to change one's perception of what the kitchen and bath could or should be."

Launching the renowned #FASHIONFORWARD Tour in 2014, Anuszkiewicz's love for public speaking has led him to present nationally at premier industry events including KBIS and Dwell on Design Los Angeles. In 2016, he was a part of the DXV by American Standard Design Panel, commissioned to design a kitchen for their national advertisement campaign.

Anuszkiewicz has been highlighted in various media, including *Vanity Fair*, *House Beautiful*, *Architectural Digest*, *Traditional Home*, *The Washington Post*, *Robb Report*, HGTV and more. He enjoys staying up to date with trends and technologies and most recently was abroad at Salone del Mobile in Milan and The London Design Festival as part of Modenus #designhounds.



## James Baloga

*Entrepreneur acts as architect of a multi-location retail giant*

James Baloga has carved out more than simply a major entrepreneurial presence in the kitchen and bath industry's retail sector. Along the way, he also established the very blueprint for the kind of high-volume, full-service, multi-location retail business

model that has seen his company grow into perhaps the largest independent kitchen and bath dealership in the nation.

As owner and founder of the Holbrook, NY-based Consumers Kitchen & Bath Specialists, Baloga envisioned, and then ultimately spearheaded, the growth of a corporate entity whose success has been fueled both by traditional word-of-mouth referrals and an aggressive, savvy media advertising campaign.

Since its founding in 1977, Consumers Kitchens & Baths has served literally hundreds of thousands of Long Island homeowners through its highly systemized ordering/warehousing/service operation.

Operating from five "Specialty Supercenters," the company boasts display facilities in excess of 100,000 sq. ft., and spotlights more than 650 full-size kitchen cabinet styles, along with an expansive selection of vanities, countertops, plumbing products, accessories and custom closet systems.



# THE INNOVATORS



## Rhonda Knoche, CMKBD, CAPS

*Designer's 'path less traveled' drives successful collaborations*

Many years ago, while interning for the renowned Ralph Palmer, Rhonda Knoche learned an important lesson from her then-mentor. He told her, "You see things a bit differently...use it."

The winner of 16 design awards and 2015 NKBA U Professional of the Year has had the opportunity to learn from several impressive mentors since then, including Martha Kerr, Johnny Grey, Neil Kelly and Mick de Giulio – but she's never forgotten that first lesson.

Her specialty is to "approach things differently" – whether that means using an old movie poster mural over her built-in refrigerator or choosing colors that "change and transform – like a bit of magic." When a prospect asks what everyone's doing "right now," she suggests that they might not be a good match. "Because you won't see what I'm doing all over the place...you can't see photos of things that haven't been done before."

After 23 years working for Neil Kelly, she went out on her own five years ago, focusing on creative collaborations with her clients that start with what she jokingly calls "a Columbo line of questioning" to better understand their needs and lifestyle.

Ergonomics and creative use of small spaces are current areas of interest, but it's her willingness to take that path less traveled that continues to drive her success.



## Leslie Lamarre, CKD, CID

*Eco-conscious designer has an eye for sustainable projects*

Kitchen and bath designer Leslie Lamarre, CKD, CID, was designing sustainable homes in California even before the rigorous CALGreen Code was put into place. Sustainability is something to which Lamarre, principal/interiors at San Mateo, CA-based TRG Architecture + Interior Design

– started in 1995 with her husband, Randy Grange – is deeply dedicated.

Many of the company's early efforts toward green building, such as energy-efficient lighting and water-use reduction, are now standard requirements of the CALGreen Code. This allows Lamarre and her team to focus their energy on additional sustainability improvements. When specifying products for kitchens and baths, she seeks out businesses that do their part to provide sustainable and recycled products, and minimize waste created by their manufacturing processes. Lamarre's firm is now working on its first rammed earth house, a planet-friendly technique that literally deploys rammed, or compacted, earth on select walls. In addition to the sustainable aspect of this building technique, Lamarre loves the design aesthetic of the striations.

As far as moving the industry forward, she says, "The bottom line is this: in order to advance, the industry has to accommodate sustainability along with smart design. In fact, they are becoming one and the same. And the companies that are not embracing sustainability risk being left behind."



## Lauren Levant

*Unique interests and pieces inspire young designer's creations*

As principal and creative director of Lauren Levant Interior, Lauren Levant is carving an impressive path early in her career. A native of Connecticut, Levant honed her design craft in the demanding markets of Connecticut, New York and Washington DC before settling in the Pittsburgh, PA area.

The young designer has received numerous international design awards, and been honored as Viking Appliance's National Designer of the Year. HGTV also named her one of the top 10 American designers under 35. The firm's work has been featured in numerous publications and design books.

"Inspiration comes from the strangest places and, as a result, my portfolio is very eclectic," notes the designer. "As I develop my designs, I use the unique personalities and life experiences of my clients. I try to challenge myself to dig in until I find something to work with, and I think editors and judging panels have been excited to see details that are out of the ordinary."

As a Women in Business honoree, Levant collaborates with local craftspersons, fabricators and artisans in her design of interior spaces. "Through their talented hands, we designers can create something truly unique for our clients," she offers. "The process of bringing this piece to life together connects everyone involved in a soulful, profound way. Clients find the process unforgettable and exciting."



## Danielle McDonald

*Creating beachfront spaces is this designer's specialty*

Danielle McDonald has found her niche, and it's one that many would envy. The famed New Jersey shore is her backdrop, and second homes on the beach are her specialty.

After many years in the design industry, McDonald started at Margate, NJ-based Colmar Kitchen & Bath Studio in 2005. The design approach to these homes is different, she notes, because the needs and functions are different than they would be for a main home.

"For entertaining purposes, we need to have the kitchen oriented to outdoor living along with indoor living because people are vacationing here," she reports. "The outdoor space is a major focal point of the entertaining done here."

"Everything is about an influx of people for three to four days, and then there's nobody," she continues. Kitchens are often on the second floor to take advantage of the view, and they showcase a lot of clean lines and a modern aesthetic.

One of McDonald's designs was recently honored with the Viking Designer of Distinction award. The client had purchased a huge retirement multi-unit home on the beach that was originally for Catholic priests. "They knocked down the facility and built one large home, which included an apartment for each of their children – three condos in one house," she explains.

McDonald was honored at KBIS 2017 in front of her peers. "It was a great honor to be recognized for something I am passionate about," she concludes.