



kitchen
& **bath** DESIGN
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INDUSTRY PROFILES

Designer Creates Family-Friendly Spaces

La Cañada, CA designer Courtney Thomas utilizes her insight as a working mother to craft functional and inspiring spaces for young families.



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This family kitchen boasts double islands with book-matched quartzite counters, custom built-in cabinetry and coffered ceilings. Courtney Thomas Design custom designed all built-in cabinetry in the house and added architectural elements for drama. Photos: Jill Weller Photography

La Cañada, CA — Beautiful, practical design is in Courtney Thomas' blood. The southern California-based designer was immersed in the world of interiors from a very young age, thanks to her mother, an interior designer. "She exposed me to the idea of cultivating a curated home in the midst of raising a family," Thomas says. "She raised us to appreciate antiques (though we weren't always careful with them), to love the character of a layered house and to cherish objects that tell stories by passing not only the objects on to our kids but their stories as well." She recalls days spent at auction houses and project sites, trips to fine art houses and to the hardware store.

Now a parent herself, Thomas has carried on her mother's legacy of designing family-friendly and beautiful spaces. After studying at the Parsons School of Design in New York City, Thomas eventually founded her own design firm, Courtney Thomas Design, in 2013.



This bath is shared by three kids who often fight for vanity time in the morning. To open up a tight space and give all three children a place at the counter, CTD ran the mirror over the vanity wall-to-wall and almost to the ceiling. Additional storage was created behind the vanity by recessing a cabinet into the wall.

Family focus

Courtney Thomas Design is based in La Cañada Flintridge, an affluent residential community located in Los Angeles County. The area is primarily comprised of homes and small commercial spaces, driving a demand for whole-home remodel and design services in particular. According to Thomas, a majority of her clients are young families with children.

As a wife and mother of four, Thomas has first-hand experience dealing with the day-to-day needs of a growing family, and notes that she has "the most compassion for parents who are looking to bring some calm to the chaos." In order to create solutions that transform turmoil into tranquility, Thomas says, "my efforts focus on spaces that account for storage needs, furnishings that account for active use and layouts that account for multiple demands at once."

Figuring out exactly what the unique needs of a family are begins with an in-depth process of getting to know every

family member involved. In a phase Thomas refers to as Plan Review, Thomas and her team “go over any existing or proposed plans to understand the client’s use of space, optimum layout and highest function.” The second phase, which Thomas calls Style Direction, consists of “ask[ing] for any person involved in that project’s design decisions to weigh in on our questionnaire, which probes the client’s design preferences and asks them to add images and comments to their style boards on Pinterest and Houzz.”

Thomas credits this attentive initial design process with enabling her to foster strong client relationships. An “orientation around function [and] my dedication to hearing (not just listening to) the client” has a great impact on Thomas’ ability to deliver thoughtfully tailored designs that bring a sense of order to the inherent disarray of family life.

Perfectly imperfect

For Thomas, functionality is always the principal focus, with comfort, luxury and visual excitement following closely behind. She is keenly aware of the fact that, in a family setting, perfection is impossible: Spaces are meant to be lived in, and life – especially life with kids – is messy. Embracing the imperfections of family life and the rich stories those imperfections tell is crucial to Thomas’ design process.

One particular whole-house remodel in Laguna perfectly illustrates Thomas’ practice of celebrating the stories a home can tell. The project included a kitchen and three bathrooms, and the scope of work involved opening up the kitchen layout and finding space in small bathrooms. Thomas and her team created some drastic changes within the rooms, but were also careful to salvage old cabinets and other elements – “[merging] new features with old,” according to Thomas.



For this subway tile backsplash, CTD inserted cranberry glass and chrome mosaic tiles intermittently throughout the brick-lay pattern so that the backsplash would highlight the colors in the island’s counters.



These clients were looking to build a forever home that would grow with their young kids and embrace their casual California lifestyle; nature helped define interior colors early in construction.

Looking to the future

Not content to rest on her laurels, Thomas is constantly striving to increase awareness of her brand. “We have been growing our brand through a greater social media presence: LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram have given us a platform for an audience to engage with us and get to know our story,” Thomas explains. “We are also promoting our projects through a PR company that focuses on interior design. I think all our efforts have strengthened our presence, our name recognition and certainly our visibility. Word of mouth is still leading our success in finding and signing new clients.”

Additionally, Thomas’ plans for the future of her business involve making improvements to their design process and building more structured client relationships. Her 2019 New Year’s resolutions for Courtney Thomas Design involve “[making] a stronger, clearer case for our concept to completion services – [helping] our clients, current and

future, understand the importance of our early and consistent involvement in seeing their project through its many phases and decisions. We want to be part of the decisions during build and during final furnishings.” ■



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