

By Ivan Meade



Ivan Meade is principal designer at Meade Design Group — a multi-disciplinary interior and graphic design firm.

Victoria's design scene: An inside look

I am often asked: What do you think about the “design scene” in Victoria? Who are the best designers in Victoria? Is Victoria a good market to work in? Is there much competition in Victoria?

The design scene in Victoria has changed drastically since I began Meade Design Group in 2002. When I started my firm, I kept hearing the same five names over and over again, but, as time has passed and I have become more part of the design community, the list has grown. And this makes sense. Victoria is evolving into a sophisticated and cosmopolitan city considering its relatively small size. What other city our size has such fantastic opera, ballet, theatres, museums, and art galleries? Victoria even has commercial districts with distinctive style and purpose like Antique Row, Lo Jo, and the Design District.

I also see Victoria's design clients becoming savvier and more design conscious. They have access to many of the resources that we designers have to inspire us and keep us up to date on new methods and materials — the internet, television, magazines, and, of course, local design shops. Designers have had to raise their game and evolve to stay on top. However, informed clients are also better clients: they push their designers to imagine outside of the box and to introduce new concepts that keep the trends moving.

Victoria clients may have gained some skills in figuring out what they want their homes to look like, but designers are still needed to make it happen. The creative process of finding the right solution for a room, producing the best floor plan, sourcing complementary fabrics, creating a focal point that will make a room memorable, or even just finding the right piece of furniture or accessory in Victoria are all things that designers do.

I think what is critical to a designer's success in Victoria is not just being fantastically creative or gifted — although those attributes are important — it is also to

have great resources, team members, and trades people. A good designer is organized and can take a project from concept to completion, while keeping their client happy and producing a space that will become the next show piece to inspire more people to line up outside their door.

Designers of Distinction

In Victoria, we have an impressive community of interior designers, many of whom have been recognized for their work. Kimberly Williams and Robyn Meredith Bryson have both been featured in *Architectural Digest*, one of the top achievements for a designer. Bruce Wilkin and Bruce Wilson made the top 100 list of the best

designers by *Canadian House and Home*, as well as having their projects featured regularly in the magazine. Meade Design Group was fortunate to have one of its projects appear on HGTV's *Top Ten* as the sixth best games room on the continent for our project in Maple Bay; Robyn Meredith Bryson will be in a future episode of the same show for the award-winning home, The Radius Residence. Sandy Nygaard, J.C. Scott, and Teresa Ryback have all been featured in *Spectacular Homes of Western Canada* by *Panache*. Amie de Toro is a new Victoria addition with amazing international exposure — her work and home accessory line have been published in *Elle Decor*, *House Beautiful*, *Metropolitan Home*, and many more — and she is part of the wave of designers new in town.

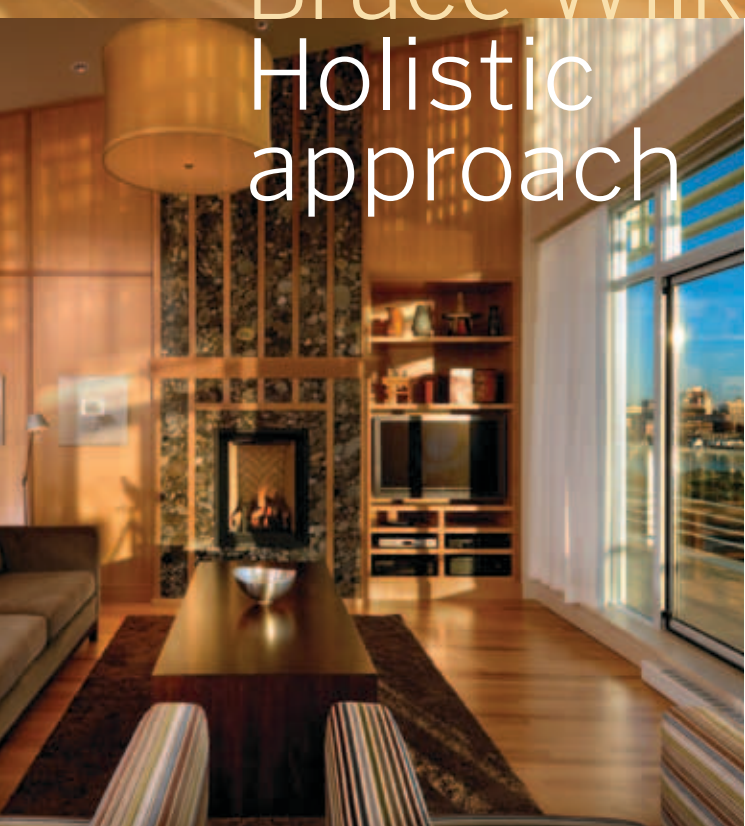
A decade ago, the sophisticated residents of Victoria had few options when looking for a designer. Now there is a wealth of options. The designers of Victoria are not just talented individuals — they are a diverse community that shares the goals of making this city a better place — even if it is just one room at a time.

Who are the new kids on the block — the ones to watch? The new generation of designers in Victoria is energetic. They are not just stylish — they embrace technology and are savvy in social marketing tools like blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Technorati, all of which are becoming important parts of their business lexicon. Names like Lana Lounsbury, Tonia Di Intronio, Leah Rourke, Jenny Martin, Heather Draper, Ben Brannen, Acacia Interior Design, Danisha Rice, Amanda Forrest, and many others.

By Jennifer Ellis Gray
and David Lennam



Bruce Wilkin Holistic approach



Bruce Wilkin was born and raised in Victoria and decided to build his architecture and interior design practice here simply because, as he puts it, "Where else would anyone want to live?" As an architect and designer, he takes a very holistic approach to creating the couture spaces he has become known for. He is self-taught, drawing his inspirations and knowledge from his love of design, architecture, and travel and taking a very peripatetic approach to design. "Whether I'm working on a 1910 traditional home or from a pure modern approach, I take my intrigue and inspiration from the clients and the work itself." Currently restoring an iconic property designed by legendary Canadian architect Ron Thom, Wilkin is inspired by this jewel, respecting an aesthetic that holds as true today as it did in 1950.

Having garnered acclaim for his work through clients, magazines, and numerous awards, including being named one of *House and Home's* Top Canadian Designers, Wilkin finds reward in the purity of the process, ever in awe of the craftsman. "Craftsmen are putting their hands on something and, from nothing, beauty emerges. I'm simply the conductor."

Today, he notes that, as Victoria grows, his clients are coming from all over the world. A new generation is bringing their design inspirations; clients are more informed and clear about what they want, and this is creating a very dynamic culture for design.

Wilkin draws inspiration from his surroundings, wherever he goes. From the endless stimulation in New York City and London to the Calcutta marble of a casino in Las Vegas, "I am always looking, distracted and inspired — designers are great copiers."

Amie de Toro Indulging in colour

Amie de Toro lived and worked in Madrid, London, New York, and Buenos Aires before opening her own interior design firm in Victoria. Hers is an eclectic, travelled background amply illustrated in a professional style that identifies the varied nuance of cultural diversity but achieves a shared quality of the eclectic: a lasting, classic look.

Her designs — interiors for upscale residences and commercial properties, as well as a stunning line of home accessories — have been featured in *Elle Décor*, *House and Garden*, and *Metropolitan Home*.

Her Peruvian upbringing emphasized a vibrancy and boldness of colour, which is something she'd like to see more of — in abundance. "I believe we should all indulge in colour and stay away from being shy when using it."

A family trip to Venezuela, when de Toro was five years old, got her thinking about designing her own world. "I remember the moment I set my eyes on the city, I became absolutely captivated by the sight of houses and buildings that seemed to be suspended on mountains of exuberant tropical vegetation."

That started her drawing her own creations and, perhaps, laid an early foundation for a design preference that favoured simple forms yet engaged a temperamental spirit.



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“You don't have to add a lot of extra stuff to make it exciting.”

—Sandy Nygaard

Sandy Nygaard Naturally simple

One of Victoria's most sought-after interior designers for the past 15 years, Sandy Nygaard's work is amply displayed in the interiors of award-winning signature private homes, upscale salons like Carreiro The Studio, iconic Victoria businesses like Rogers' Chocolates, and sophisticated residential developments like the Leiser Building restoration, The Gateway, Tuscany Village, and, of course, the elegant Brentwood Bay Lodge and Spa.

Nygaard Interior Design's work was recently featured in a four-page spread in the book *Spectacular Homes of Western Canada* by Panache. Another of her homes won multiple industry honours, including the CARE and SAM awards last year.

Favouring contemporary, clean, and uncluttered designs, Nygaard is quick to challenge the temptation to overdesign. “You don't have to add a lot of extra stuff to make it exciting.” Natural materials that bring their own energy help keep it simple, letting the colours and textures of the materials do all the work.

Nygaard didn't come into interior design by design. She was an artist painting faux finishes for other designers. But when she and her partner built their own house, the move from two dimensions to three pushed her in a new direction.

“New ideas make me passionate and putting it all together — it's a puzzle all the time so it's lots of fun.”



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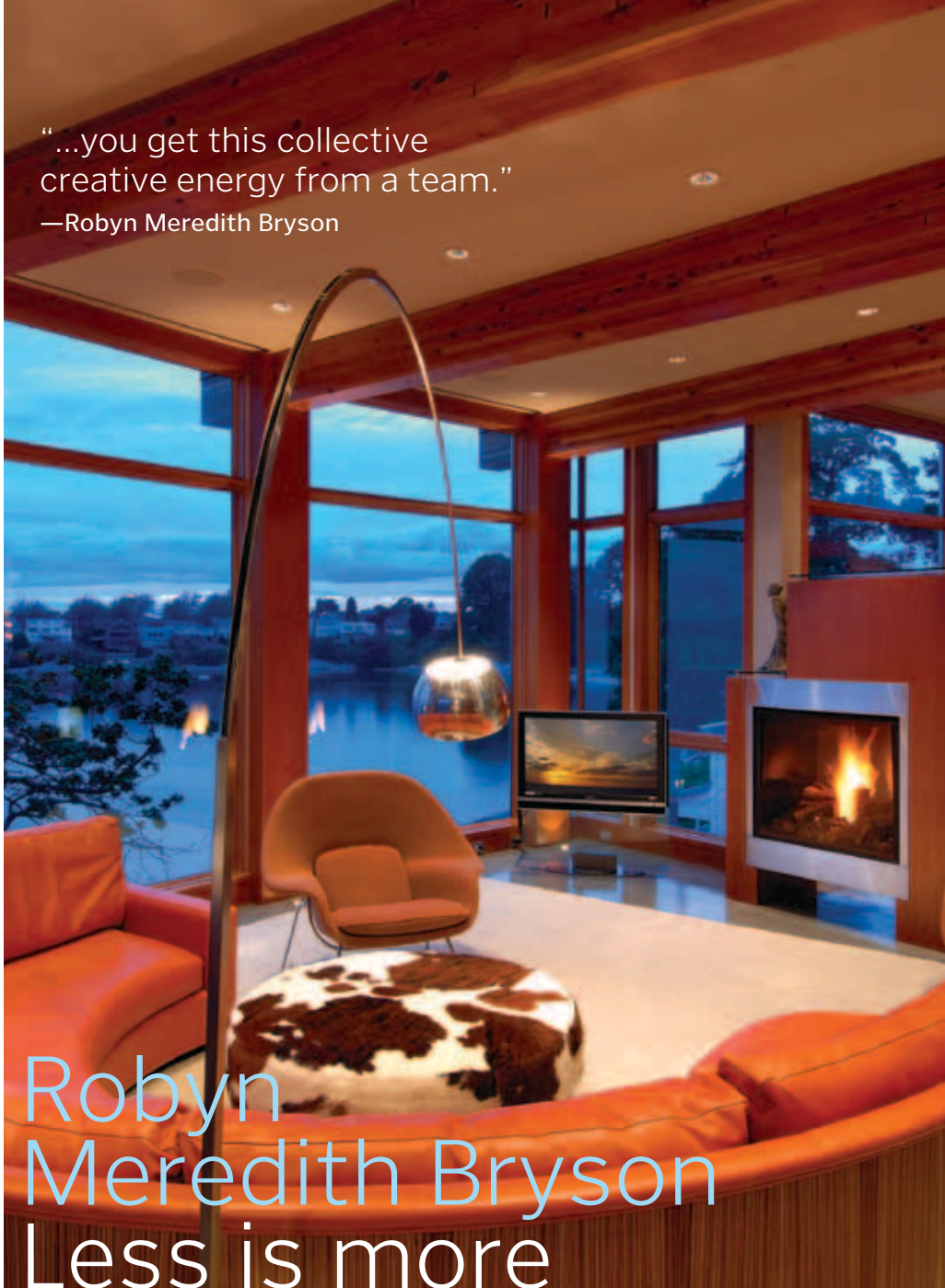
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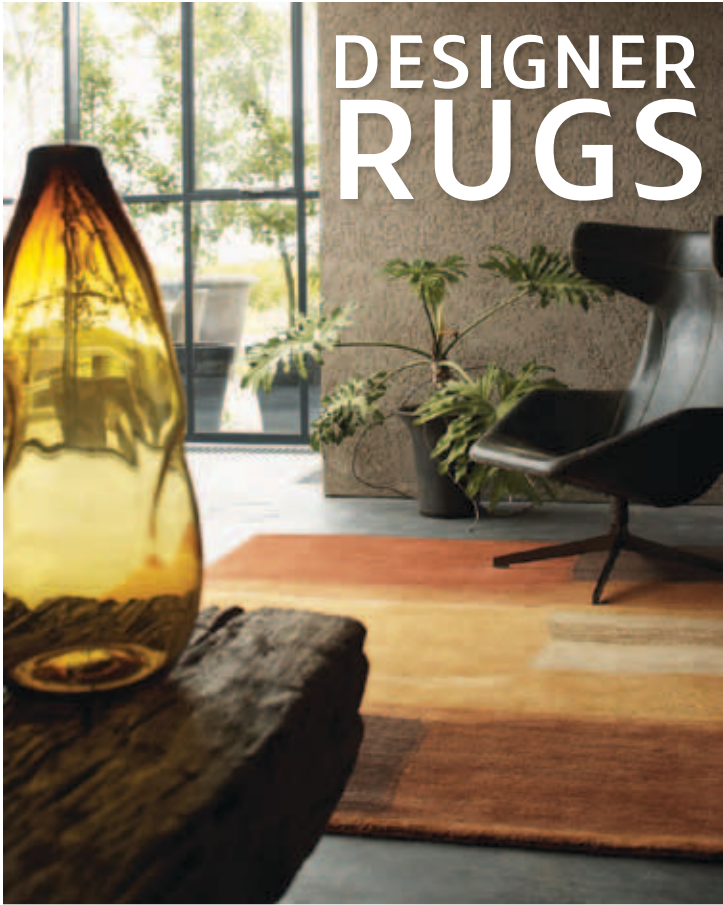
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Designing a modern home for a young family has given the world quite a window into the work of Robyn Meredith Bryson. Comprised of expanses of glass, her design looks upon Gonzales Bay and has drawn admiring attention from local passersby to international media and was featured in *Architectural Digest* in May 2009. “The Radius Residence gave me the opportunity to help this young couple marry their vision with function, while navigating the limitations of their building site.” Understanding the local landscape is something that comes naturally to Bryson: she has been practising as a designer in Victoria for 35 years. In the mid-1970s, she had quite a progressive vision for the time. “I wanted to work as a design consultant from Victoria, making interior design accessible to more people.”

Bryson credits her aesthetic and approach to her craft to her earlier schooling at the Vancouver School of Art and her experience working in house for a developer where she worked on an array of commercial and residential projects. She is passionate about her work, espousing a “less is more” approach to her designs.

Bryson is excited about the new materials that are being created today. “There is so much happening around the globe: people are harnessing technology and this is leading to innovative materials that are allowing designers to have greater scope in what they can create.” For Bryson, design is all about people: “From the distributors to the sub-trades to the clients, you get this collective creative energy from a team, and the results are brilliant.”



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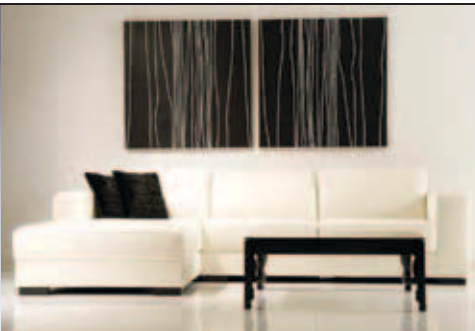
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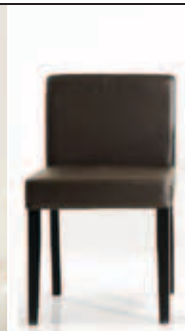
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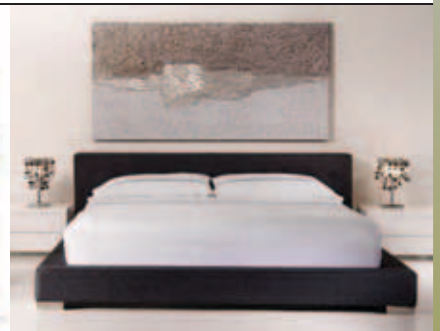
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Kimberly Williams Attention to detail

A lot of Canadians have heard about Victoria's Docksider Green project, but they may not be familiar with the interior design talent behind it. While working with a number of commercial, residential, and hospitality clients, Kimberly Williams Interiors (KWI) is building its reputation based on noteworthy design and a commitment to green practices. Docksider Green is becoming a world-renowned LEED Platinum community, while the Long Beach Lodge in Tofino is riding quite the wave of success. From gathering a number of Care and Georgie Awards to international media attention, including *Architectural Digest*, this smaller, boutique firm is making a big name for itself.

Comprised of four designers, KWI specializes in delivering a distinct West Coast contemporary style with a commitment to innovation, quality, and attention to detail. "We work with a broad range of clients and benefit from a design community that is open and shares information," says Amber Kingsnorth, an interior designer with KWI. "We also have this amazing talent on the island: there are so many craftspeople we have built trusting relationships with and that is key." The design firm especially loves working on smaller resorts and that translates into residential design. "Clients ask us to recreate a feeling that they experienced at one of our resorts. We get a sense of what the client wants, and then we help them create a real space that will work for them."

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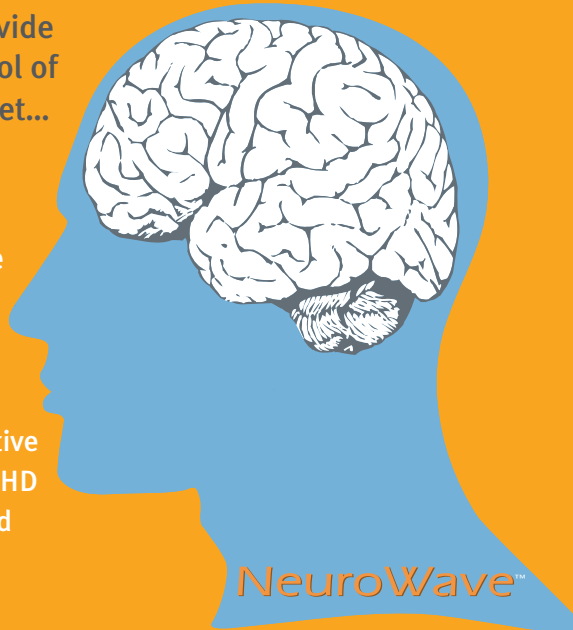
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Bruce
Wilson

Personal touch

While Bruce Wilson is a self-professed "architecture school dropout," he's gone on to build a profound body of work that touches on a variety of design disciplines. He landed in Victoria by chance and established his eponymous firm in 1992, designing everything from furniture and exhibits to interior spaces. Today, he specializes in residential architectural projects, drawing upon his varied background. He credits his own home in launching his career in interior design and architecture. "I had designed and built my own home on Ten Mile Point and people who visited would ask me who designed it, and things progressed from there."

With over 15 years of experience, Wilson finds inspiration in the novelty and challenges of each project. "Every project is different; each one is about a personal nature. I enjoy bringing the disparate parts together." Wilson is also enthusiastic about the changes he is seeing locally and internationally when it comes to green design and his clients' desire to feel good about their purchases and



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“Every project is different; each one is about a personal nature.”

homes. With accolades pouring in, including recognition as one of *House and Home*'s Top Canadian Designers, Wilson says that his proudest achievement to date is his work on the Vancouver AIDS Memorial. “For me, when a project makes an impact on people’s lives, I feel that I am really successful. The Memorial is an example of the finest spiritual and poetic expression of design.” ::



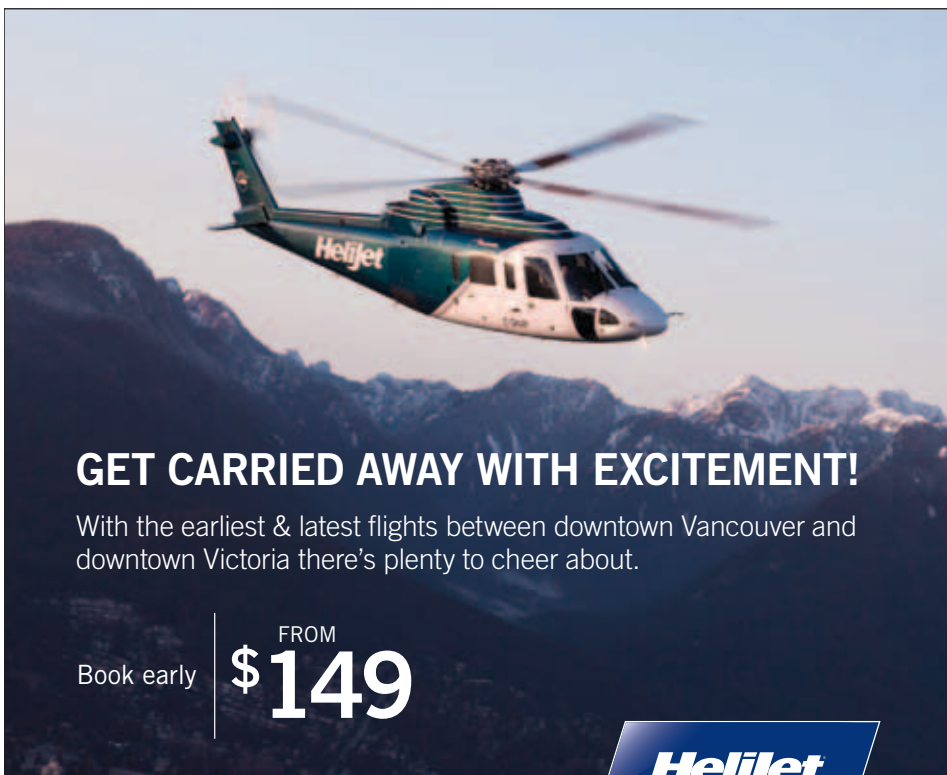
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