

WINDOW FASHION

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Showhouse Showmanship

Make the Most of Your Showhouse Investment

By CHARLES PAVARINI III

I have been doing showhouses from the beginning of my career. I started as assistant to the legendary Ruben de Saavedra, ASID, and one of the lessons I learned from him was showmanship! His rooms were always a highlight of any showcase he participated in, and he knew how to use that spotlight to his advantage.

Upon starting my own design business, I recognized the showhouse as a “laboratory” to showcase new ideas and build my portfolio. While it has taken years of experience to become well-known enough to secure important rooms within well-known showhouses, each has contributed to my development as a designer, educated my staff to develop concepts quickly and communicated my style and creativity to the public and the industry.

1. Be Prepared to Start Small

My experience with the Kips Bay Showhouse is almost a storybook example of the challenges and benefits of showhouse participation. I first began applying to design a room in the prestigious Kips Bay Decorator Showhouse in 1993. I was rejected, year after year, for 10 years! Finally, in 2003, I was selected to participate. Being that I was a “rookie” with the organization, I had to draw a straw to select which of the remaining five or so rooms in the house would be mine. More well-established designers get the privilege of grander spaces on the main floor of the mansions—what was available to me and the other rookies were small spaces on high floors.

2. Make the Most of It

My straw translated into a 9' x 12' “library” with a 7'5" ceiling on the sixth floor. To market the tiny space, I developed the concept of a stateroom on a private yacht, later known as Cabin 17. This choice enabled me to incorporate all of the modern luxuries and high-end A/V into what appeared to be a modern reinterpretation of an ocean liner from the 1930s, complete with albino mahogany and stainless steel paneling, leather headliner and Art Deco antiques. It captured my design style, demonstrated how I could work with awkward spaces and spoke to the always ongoing need to integrate contemporary technology in an elegant, sophisticated manner.

3. Step Up Your Game

Given the positive response and generous press I received from Cabin 17, when I reapplied to Kips Bay in 2006, my room selection pool was very different. I now had the opportunity to develop a gracious space on the second floor of the mansion into something really special. Later known as “Buonanotte,” the bedroom featured highly stylized architectural millwork, hidden color-changing LED lighting and a Renaissance-style bed chamber, complete with drapery panels fashioned in traditional cutwork and cordonet embroidery.

My goal, as learned from de Saavedra, was to wow visitors by integrating cutting-edge technology into a residential setting, while always creating a space that drew people in. I drew

references to the past, as with the bed chamber, but executed them in totally innovative ways.

For such a large undertaking, we approached all the key vendors upfront and detailed how we would use their products and how they would benefit. All the work that goes into a showcase house needs to result in more than just a stunning room; with “Buonanotte,” we showed the industry how well we market their product, while also introducing them to an audience of fans, distributors and potential clients.

4. Create for the Clients You Want

By the time 2009 had come, Kips Bay asked if we would participate once again. This time we were offered the largest room in the house! With a staff of 11 associates, my business was in a much different place than when we had first participated. We were now more interested in securing significant commercial work and wanted to utilize the space to attract that type of clientele.

5. Leverage Your Relationships

So this time the concept was a Piano Lounge in a boutique hotel—the space was divided into two individual seating clusters for intimate gatherings and conversation. First off, as a testament to experience, we secured Stark to supply all flooring and all fabrics. I presented our concept to the principals at Stark, identifying all products we intended to use and

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MAKE IT WORK: Even with a much-improved room choice, the space we worked with in 2009 still had a number of challenges, primarily the ill-proportioned window elevation. The window openings are very low on the wall, so it was important to give the illusion they were higher for vertical drama in the space. Roman shades in a plush taupe velvet from Lelievre through Stark Fabrics, mounted at the ceiling behind the drapery pole, are drawn to the highest point of the window, making it seem as if the windows are actually full-sized and improving the overall proportions of the room.

Drapery panels of amethyst-tone woven wool are placed between the windows along the entire elevation to soften the room and give it a warm and cozy feeling in keeping with the mood of a lounge. These panels are mounted on clear acrylic rods with tabs sewn to the back of the gathered header; this could be done even more simply and cost effectively with rings. These could be operable, but in this case, the panels are meant to be fixed as shown in the photo.

The concept of illusion continues by using string curtains from Window Tech to soften the view through the window, detracting from the construction of the window bay, window panes and the view beyond. This “soft focus” view of what’s beyond further contributes to the intimate feeling we worked to impart on this massive room.

Hardware, fabrication and installation: Anthony Lawrence-Belfair, New York City. Fabrics: Lelievre through Stark Fabrics. Yeti Taupe H0 0004 0470, 25 yards, Apis Perle H0 0002 0222, 80 yards. (Photo by Daniel Eifert, New York City)