

'Cause You've Got...Personality

by Cynthia Scanlon and Daniel Watts

photography by Watts Design

No matter what line of work one is in—interior design, banking, real estate—everyone has a “business” image. This image toes the party line, builds the career and flourishes in the corporate world. Yet, everyone has another side as well—one that shows an individual’s true self. This alterego makes an appearance in the business world only on rare occasions. We set out to uncover this alterego in the designers we profiled. Each were inter-

viewed twice. The first interview was conducted by a journalist with the idea of gaining insight into the designers’ careers, goals and companies. The second interview was conducted by the photographer, in an effort to find the hidden personalities of these unique individuals. Following are two profiles of each designer—a synopsis of who the business world knows, and a glimpse at who they really are.

I went to Woodbury College in Los Angeles. My design career evolved from there through my husband’s construction business. He built the buildings and I designed interiors.

“But I felt there was a void in my education. I wanted to learn more about the commercial world. So I went back to school and graduated from Arizona State University in 1994.

“Graduates in the interior design field have to be aware and terribly conscious about what the client wants. I think it might be difficult for young people to listen because they’ve just come out of school with all this design theory. They want to see it come alive, so they put their own image there instead of what the client wants.

“Right now we are working on the Mercy Living Center for St. Joseph’s Hospital, which will be for Alzheimer’s patients. It’s a very innovative approach in design. The Center will have six cottages on the property that will be very residential. Each cottage will house 12 people, and the idea is to make the people feel like it’s their home. The administration building will have a residential feeling on the exterior, but the interior will have office space.”

Sandra Evans, Designer
Knoell & Quidort Architects

PHOTO BY WATTS DESIGN

Photo Credit: Location courtesy Arizona State University.

For those who think of life as a natural progression of logical events revealed in sequentially perfect order, meet Sandra Evans, the 1995 poster child for the College of Design at Arizona State University. Her voyage to the Promised Land began with a series of stopovers that included fashion design, motherhood, residential interiors for builder homes, and a weekend holiday in the Formal Training Deficiency Islands. Despite the experience, her educational passport lacked real-world technical grounding—the kind of fluency one needs when talking to clients and city officials about permits, ordinances, specifications, change orders and building codes.

Enter the Interior Design program at the College of Architecture and Environmental Design and her six-year mission to earn a degree. Evans is dead serious about her commitment to the profession and to architecture in general. She has a deep respect for the art of building and the creative process. For her, she has found the Holy Grail, and honestly appreciates the opportunity to work with the staff of dedicated creatives at Knoell & Quidort Architects.

The general idea for the photograph was to cast Sandra at the pinnacle of her educational achievement. As we began to shoot film in between brief rain delays, a crowd of students maintained a vigil, witnessing Evans’ 15 extended minutes of Warholian fame. Her association with the college had included three semesters as a teaching assistant, and the elevated light standards seemed to symbolize a podium on which she had earned the right to stand. And the right to practice her design profession in the Big Leagues.

I wanted to be an interior designer ever since I was 10 or 11 years old. I graduated from Brigham Young University in 1974. I went out on my own in 1980 and have been on my own ever since.

"The most significant project I've done was the Embassy Suites Hotel in Salt Lake City. I did everything—all the public spaces, bars, restaurants, the offices, conference rooms and atrium areas. I made all the selections and all the finishes. The project worked, and I brought it in on time and on budget.

"The business of interior design is so dramatically different from 20 years ago. It used to be that people wanted to pay for things and expected to pay for things, but that's totally upside-down now. Everyone now wants discount and wholesale or what they think is wholesale. So the real challenge today for interior designers is to move from making a profit on product and merchandise to marketing our services like a doctor, lawyer or Certified Public Accountant. Lots of interior designers haven't made the adjustment, and lots of them are falling out all the time.

"Another problem we encounter is people wanting us to shoot their ideas. If we make our business shooting people ideas, we're not going to be in business very long. We put the work, the time and the background into it, and people think they can buy that for \$300. People either don't understand what goes into our work or they don't appreciate it, and that's a hurdle we have to get over.

"I wish my education had included money and business because design school was hopeless about these things. It just wasn't done. But today, the emphasis needs to be on business and marketing, and how to get clients and keep them. Being creative is practically secondary. So new people entering the field better understand the value and the necessity of social contacts. It's a real chore to go to all the parties and be seen with the right people. Many designers don't like it at all, but they better learn to do it."

Terry Powell, Owner E. Terry Powell Interiors



PHOTO BY WATTS DESIGN

Photo Credit: Location and furnishings courtesy DEAN WARREN, LTD

It was 1989 and the sun was setting on the Street of Dreams in north Scottsdale. Lights were blazing in all the show houses, illuminating design egos within each room. One such personality was that of Terry Powell, a designer who has built an interiors practice based on intuitive eclecticism and client stewardship. Unlike many designers who fashion themselves architects, Mr. Non-Flamboyant never aspired to architecture.

As a high school student, his love of contemporary art soon gave way to furniture and accessories.

The pre-shoot interview took place at his home, an expanse of diverse styles, textures and moods. As we watched his daughter playing on the swing set outside, he reminisced about credibility, control

of creative freedom. What we had here was a realist who had carved a niche for himself in upper end residential interiors. He conducts his practice with a clear idea of what it takes to survive in today's market.

The concept for the photo was simple—illustrate Terry's mastery in blending divergent styles encountered in residential design.

True to his claims of total accommodation, we walked the warehouse together the day

before the shoot, identifying pieces to stage in the composition. We selected, discarded, re-selected, arranged and re-arranged until the right mix was in place before us. As he took his place at the "lectern," his demeanor was calm, reserved in tone and confident in movement—the Maestro.

We've been successful because people like the idea of personal service. We successfully market against the large firms and educate the clients about our personal service and involvement. We're one of the few companies where the partners—Christopher Connelly, William Francis and myself—are involved directly with a project rather than turning it over to a production staff. Clients like to know they are not paying for a huge staff. In today's market, that's become quite appealing to people.

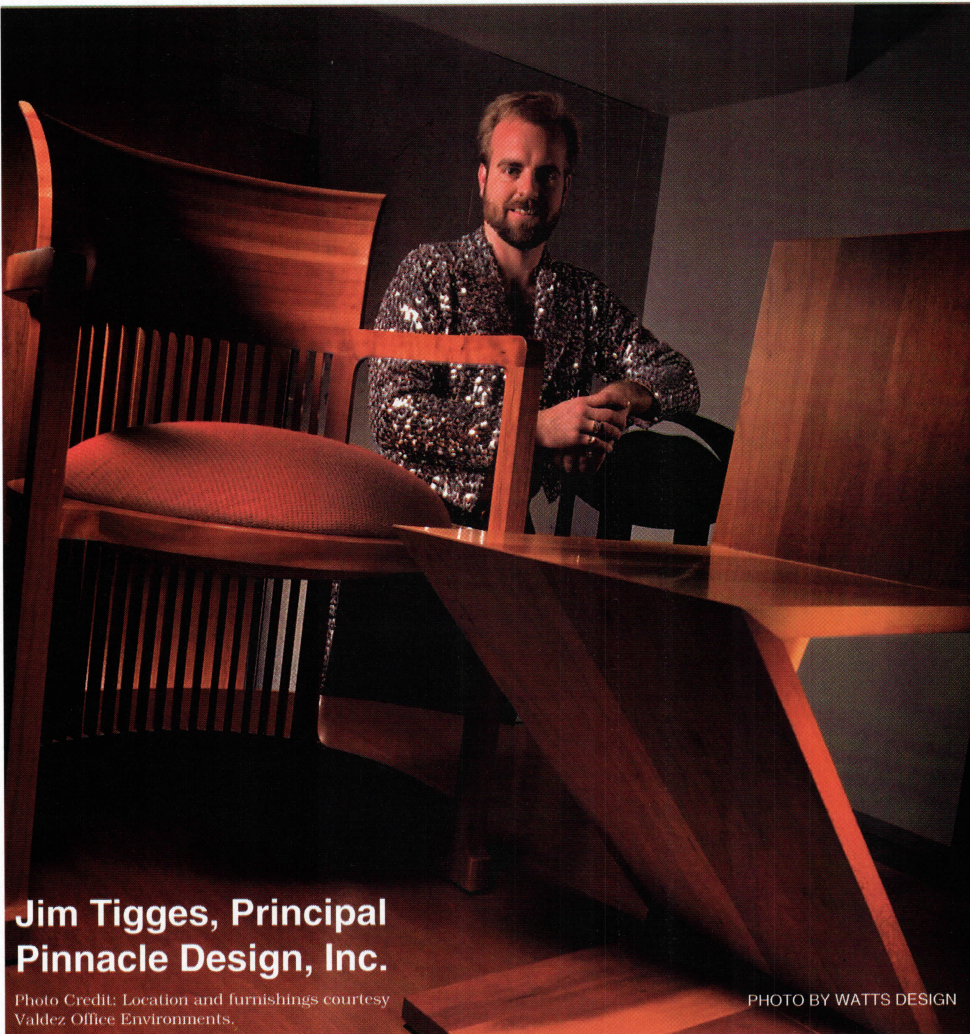
"If I were to ever leave the field of interior design, I would go into accounting. I'm a left-brain person, and with accounting, things have to come out right. There's a finality to it. Whereas in the creative process some people don't understand it and sometimes a project never comes to a conclusion. With accounting, when it adds up right, you're done. I also like business and finance, which is unusual for a designer. But I enjoy running the business and financial sides of the company along with being involved in the creative side.

"One of the most challenging projects I've worked on was a 6,000 square-foot office remodeling. The project was very hands-on and time consuming. We worked around people, relocating them as we renovated. But the people were good to work with.

"Those people just entering the field should remember that any kind of experience they can get is valuable. They can draw from it. Try to be open to various experiences out there, and learn from them whatever they might be. I feel that any person should be able to get valuable information from any job even if it's finding out that's not what they want to do."

Whoever said all work and no play makes Jack a dull designer, needs to take a closer look at Jim Tigges. Part of a three-man practice that offers both interior and landscape design, he faces the all-too-familiar David and Goliath syndrome when marketing for work. The preconception that only Goliath-sized firms can handle large commissions is disproved on a regular basis throughout the Valley. Pinnacle Design recently completed an expansive

commercial office interior on time and within budget using a slingshot loaded with an aggressive work ethic and personal commitment. Significant work, however, demands significant hours to execute. The Davids of the world universally adopt a seven-day work week and consider the rare off-weekends as stress release. For Tigges, his weekend nirvana finds him in sequins, engaging his passion for dance—West Coast Swing. Born out of the post-World War II era, this couples' dance style rewards expressive individualism—the type of individualism required to unexpectedly propose marriage in front of 600 entrants in the middle of a national competition, via loudspeaker. Much like a dance sequence of inclinations and movements, successful interior design requires an ability to create environments that are equally choreographed. With a chorus line comprised of contractors, suppliers and owners, the music can change with the wave of a baton. To Tigges, the challenge is to make his next curtain call.



**Jim Tigges, Principal
Pinnacle Design, Inc.**

Photo Credit: Location and furnishings courtesy Valdez Office Environments.

PHOTO BY WATTS DESIGN

I don't know how to do anything half way. It's really easy for me to be focused. I only know how to consume myself. And I've been consumed with this business, particularly the last nine years since I started my own firm. Somebody said to me, 'Judy, you've done a great job. Your company is recognized. Be happy with it and continue to make it better.' And I'm trying to focus on doing exactly that. I guess I like the rise, I like the challenge. That's what gets me going and makes me happy.

"As far as projects go, I think we accomplished a lot by doing the America West Airlines facilities consolidation. It was important from an economic standpoint for Arizona. And we've just moved Del Webb corporate offices into the old Western Savings conglomerate on 24th Street.

"I think the most challenging aspect of business is retaining quality personnel because we're nothing without them. As one grows from two people to 17, as we have, it's a challenge to keep each of your clients happy. Our big push this year is our quality management program. That's our focus. We also make sure our standards go higher than even our client's standards.

"If I wasn't in interior design, I would like to write. I've got this natural side of my brain besides my design brain, and writing would be my dream. I would want to write nonfiction that required research. Maybe I'd follow interesting women in business. But it would have to be nonfiction. I'm totally bored with fiction and don't read any.

"My advice for newcomers to the interior design field is to get out if you don't love it. You have to love it because it's hard work. Also, you've got to take opportunity and make it happen for you or else you're going to go by the wayside. You've got to do it for yourself. No one will do it for you. And you have to be passionate."



**Judith Nordburg, Principal
McCarthy Nordburg
Architectural Interiors**

Photo Credit: Location and writing pen courtesy Flax, Inc. Chair courtesy The Knoll Group.

PHOTO BY WATTS DESIGN

Swing open the full-height, shimmering glass doors, walk in and absorb the interior. The receptionist is vogue, light levels are low, and the leather chair I sit down in redefines the art of waiting. A feeling of calm is pervasive throughout the lobby. The ambiance is deafening.

At McCarthy Nordburg, what you see is only a fraction of what you get. Underneath the presentation boards, drawings and gloss lies a structured design philosophy dedicated to client education. Judy Nordburg is adamant when it comes to the individuality of each client, and believes the best work is born out of research. Rubber-stamp design is the kiss of death. As a result, the wheel is reinvented on a regular basis. So strident is this mantra, the closest the firm comes to stylized blasphemy is specifying patterned sheet linoleum flooring in commercial office lunch rooms.

A disdain for the prototypical is also evident in the technique used for client presentations. Competing with larger firms for upscale commissions has given rise to the McCarthy Nordburg Traveling Road Show. And it also gave life to a concept for the photo shoot. Theatrics seemed to be the name of the game. Presentations conceived experimentally often become events in themselves. For a law firm interior, a mock court room atmosphere was completely scripted and choreographed. Airline protocol headlined an America West presentation which featured uniformed attendants and inflatable airplanes. Whether playing to a full house or corporate board room, when the stage lights come up, McCarthy Nordburg knows how to walk the walk.