

DIANNE DAVANT MOFFITT

A LIFELONG PASSION FOR DESIGN

40th Anniversary OF DIANNE DAVANT AND ASSOCIATES

By Jan Todd

In the past four decades, Dianne Davant Moffitt and her associates have brought a sense of style to the High Country like no others. Opened in 1979 in Blowing Rock, Dianne's interior design business marks its 40th anniversary this year.

Relocated to Banner Elk, the North Carolina studio of Dianne Davant and Associates houses a team of brilliant designers, busy at work bringing to life the homes of their clients' dreams.

Dianne splits her time between the mountain studio and her firm's second location in Stuart, Florida, about 40 miles north of West Palm Beach. Residential and corporate design work takes Dianne and her team all over the country, and even internationally, to cater to an influential client base on projects including the Miami Dolphin's professional football stadium, luxury country clubs, corporate yachts and jets, upscale restaurants and multi-million-dollar homes.

Yet no matter the price tag or size of the project, the goal is the same: to create a classic, comfortable, and enduring space that is as unique and extraordinary as



Dianne Davant pictured here in her office where she is looking over plans for her next project. Some of her local projects include work at Elk River Club in Banner Elk, Grandfather Golf & Country Club in Linville, Hound Ears Club in Blowing Rock and Linville Ridge Country Club in Linville.



Dianne pictured with her beautiful mother, Harriet, and two daughters, Ashley Winkelmann and Alyse Burke, at a family gathering.

the client.

Reflecting on her career, Dianne considers herself extremely lucky. "I've found my passion. Some people never find their passion in what they do. Even though I work very hard, it's a blessing, because I'm passionate about what I do."

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Dianne grew up in Blowing Rock, the daughter of what she called a "country doctor" and a genteel Southern lady. Charles Davant, known as "Dr. Charlie,"

and his wife, Harriet, came up the mountain from Lenoir in 1948.

The mayor of Blowing Rock, the late Grover Robbins, Sr., reportedly recruited Dr. Davant to establish his medical practice in Blowing Rock. "It was a very different town, then," Dianne described. "There were very few full-time residents in our community. Most of the town's population was folks who would come from the cities or from Florida to enjoy the cool mountain air during the summer months."

A physician was needed, though, and Charlie convinced Harriet to move to Blowing Rock, where they purchased a home on Chestnut Drive. He was instrumental in the support and opening of Blowing Rock Hospital in 1951 and served patients for more than 50 years, doing everything from treating chicken pox to delivering babies.

In fact, he delivered his own daughter.

"I was born in the middle of a snow-storm in a make-shift clinic," Dianne shared. "I was supposed to be born at the



Dianne is pictured here winning the blue ribbon at the Blowing Rock Horse Show in the mid-50s.



Dianne's mom, Harriet, her brother, Bunky, and Dianne showing their pony, Trigger, at the Blowing Rock Horse Show.



Dianne in high school at Salem Academy in Winston-Salem.



Harriet and Charlie Davant, Dianne's parents, pictured here in the early 90s.



Dianne with her brother, Charles Davant III, better known as Bunky. He has been a doctor in Blowing Rock for over 40 years.



Ashley, Alyse and Charles Davant IV in the late 1970s.

A Modern Take on a Mountain Home

Photographer Jonathon Burton

This home, located in Old Linville, was a remodel. The original home, a cottage that ended where the fireplace is in the living room, was purchased by a couple from Hilton Head. They added a large master wing and another den and converted the fireplace to a see-through tiled model so the fire could be enjoyed on both sides.

“They wanted a more modern element in their home,” said designer Pam McKay. The light fixtures used are modern LED fixtures. The circular floating light fixture in the living room ties in with the porthole inspired windows, added as a nod to the family’s love of boating and the ocean.

The designers incorporated some of the clients’ impressive art collection, including a Herb Jackson piece over the mantle.



On the reverse side of the interior fireplace is a family room. “There’s a television over the fireplace and a huge sectional couch where the whole gang can jump in there together,” said Pam. Two Norman Murphy paintings flank the windows on the far wall, and up in the interior soffit is a woven patchwork wall covering.

In the hallway leading to the master suite is a major art piece by Hunt Slonem – an artist from New York best known for his Neo-Expressionist oil paintings. “The art can be seen from the driveway, before you even walk



into the house,” said Pam.

Unique personalities and styles dictate the design of each client’s home. This mountain home contains some traditional touches — exposed beams, wood floors — and blends with contemporary art and light fixtures.

The painting is hung on a pebble wall, and the ceiling has wall-paper that looks like birch bark. The floor is marble inlaid into a geometric pattern of the wooden floors.



The outdoor living room is designed in a style duplicating the indoor living room, with a see-thru tiled fireplace. The hearth and mantel, though, are constructed of concrete made to look like a wooden beam, while resistant to extreme weather conditions.

The glass wall of doors opening to the porch stack, so it can be completely opened up to provide a seamless joining of the indoors to the outdoors, perfect when entertaining guests. The furniture on the porch has the appearance of white birch bark but is actually weather resistant aluminum.

Catering to a Collector



Photographer Dan Forer

The Davant team incorporated a rare collection of Southwestern cowboy art in this mountain home in Linville Ridge. As an artist herself, Pam McCay said, “Designing this home was right down my alley. It was challenging, though, because you can’t just look in a catalog for these pieces. We had to have some of the furniture custom made. I flew to Scottsdale, Arizona to look



hospital in Lenoir, but I was premature. My mother couldn’t convince my father that she was really in labor, and by the time he realized how far along she was, it was too late, and the weather was too bad to make it off the mountain.”

As it turned out, “beating a deadline” was one of the earliest characteristics instilled in Dianne that would carry over into her future career as a designer.

“Even as a small child, I loved to rearrange things,” she admitted. “In fact, my mother said she always had to be very careful not to trip and fall when entering my bedroom after dark, because I was always changing the furniture around!”

Her parents paved the path for Dianne’s career in several ways, she said. “My mother taught me how to behave — not that it always took!” Dianne laughed. “I learned about manners and how to function in society. My mother is one of the kindest human beings you’ll ever know, and her sense of humor is incredible.”

That sense of humor came in handy, Dianne said. “I think my older brother, Bunky, and I were handfuls for her.”

Harriet is an art lover, said Dianne, and that interest was shared with her daughter. “She painted, and I did as well when I was young.”

In 2016, Harriet Davant was named Blowing Rock’s “Woman of the Year” for her years of volunteering, advocating for education, and dedication to help bring quality medical care and services to the community. She is now 96 years old



Dianne with her husband, Lee Moffitt, with the site of their Diamond Creek house in the background.

and resides at the Foley Center at Chestnut Ridge, which houses the Harriet and Charles Davant, Jr. Medical Clinic, named to honor the contributions of the couple.

“Bunky,” Dianne’s brother, would later become Dr. Charles Davant III, a geriatric medicine specialist who has been practicing for over 40 years in Blowing Rock.

From her father, who passed away in 2003, Dianne said, “I learned my father’s drive for work. He was on call all the time and had a real passion for what he did. I really miss him.”



This photo was taken at a family picnic at Dianne and Lee’s home. Left to right: Patrick Burke, Browning Proctor, Kylie Winkelmann holding her dachshund Dottie, Jack Proctor, Lee Moffitt, Alyse Burke, sons-in-law Eric Winkelmann (standing) and Drew Smith (standing), Ashley Winkelmann, Dianne Davant and Jenny Moffitt.

FINDING HER PASSION FOR DESIGN

Dianne loved the mountains, and spent much of her time outdoors, enjoying nature. “I was into horses — they were my thing,” she said. “I had a horse that I used to ride all over the Moses Cone Estate. It was like my second home.”

She attended Salem College in Winston-Salem, where she took the majority of her design courses. She moved back to the mountains and graduated from Appalachian State University with a major in Housing and Interiors, and minors in Business and in Art History. “All have come in handy in my business,” Dianne said.

After graduation, Dianne partnered with Sharon Moore to open her design business in Blowing Rock. “I had friends who were architects, builders, developers, and in real estate, so I had a wonderful referral base. After I’d done a few jobs, I started getting referrals from my clients,” she recalled.

The majority of her early work was for vacation homeowners from Florida, residing in Blowing Rock. Dianne started branching out into Hound Ears and homes around Grandfather Golf & Country Club. “When Linville Ridge and Elk River developments got started in the 1980’s, I could tell the growth was headed in that direction, so I opened my own studio in Banner Elk, about 30 years ago,” she said.

Many of her clients, after seeing Dianne’s work on their mountain homes, wanted her to come to Florida to design their other residences. The demand for



Dianne’s grandson, Luke Winkelmann, is a member of the United States Snowboard Team. He is pictured here after winning a silver medal in New Zealand.



at hand-carved mesquite furniture for this project.”

The client has several Black Forest antiques, plus Adirondack furniture and lots of bronze sculptures that were incorporated into this very masculine design. A Peter Fillerup antler chandelier is used in front of the picture window, flanked with window treatments woven in a southwestern motif. The leather chairs have clawed feet and arms, and a bronze bear sculpture is set on a tree trunk cocktail table.

The bar has a floating live-edge top that looks like a huge piece of a tree. The gate in the back leads to the wine cellar.

Designing a Castle

Photographer Dan Forer



The Davant team has had the luxury of designing a variety of styles — including what they called “the castle,” a private home in the Elk River Club in Banner Elk. The owners, from Dallas, Texas, are originally from North Carolina and wanted a home where they could gather their friends and family for magical times in the mountains.

The owners wanted a gothic style for their new home, with lots of stone, multiple fireplaces, and gothic arches throughout the interior.

Margaret Handley said she studied up on gothic architecture to tackle this job, which required a nationwide search for the perfect complements for the home. As luck would have it, a large castle near Miami had recently been demolished, and Dianne, who was also working on this project, called the clients to explore the salvage yard with her. They found stained glass from the 1500’s, handcrafted in France, light fixtures, and other items to incorporate in their home. Other pieces were sourced from all over the world.



Some of the heavier pieces had to be lowered into the home by a crane during the construction phase.

The wine room features antique gargoyle sconces, stained glass windows, and iron gates.

An antique newel post and custom iron railing graces the staircase in the home.

Design by Location

Photographer Dan Forer

Whether in the mountains or by the sea, location and views play an important role in interior design. Designer Priscilla Hyatt Council described this project in Florida, “The surroundings of this home are so breathtaking that we had to be sure to live up to that in the interior. The panoramic view of the ocean influenced our crisp blue and white color palette.”



Designers Dianne Davant Moffitt and Priscilla Hyatt Council found the perfect pieces to bring function and beauty to this cozy sitting nook in one of their Florida home designs. “We took a trip to Antique Row in West Palm Beach where we found the roll top desk, a pair of veined marble top and splayed paw feet brass base accent tables, gold leaf iron floor lamp and the large oblong octagonal mirror. These special pieces are what truly put the finishing touches on this space,” said Council.

A Home for the Future

Photographer Dan Forer



Professional education and study enabled the Davant team to collaborate on this LEED Gold certified home in Florida. “It was a unique and special project,” said designer Priscilla Hyatt Council, who worked with Dianne on the home. “The clients of this home did it right! From our initial meeting we had all these amazing team members involved which helped us to work together the clients’ dream home a reality.”

With expansive views of the St. Lucie River in Florida, the open concept of this home was designed to bring the exterior in. As a LEED Gold certified home, sustainable materials were used throughout — including reclaimed Heart Cypress on the ceiling with pecky cypress accents, quarter sawn teak cabinets and porcelain Neolith kitchen countertop and flooring.

her services in the “Sunshine State” became so great that opening a second office there made sense for her business.

Dianne even had a third studio location during the early 1990’s in Big Sky, Montana. “Some of my Florida clientele had vacation homes in Montana, and I designed their homes there. It was a lot of fun, using Western themes, and I’ve carried a few of those ideas over to inspire some of my projects in the North Carolina mountains.”

DESIGNED FOR SUCCESS

Dianne said much of her success is shared with her team of designers. The Banner Elk team — including senior designers Margaret Handley and Pam McKay, and design assistants Nicole South and newly hired Kinley Sanborn — run the North Carolina studio.

Margaret has worked with Dianne for



Blowing Rock staff. Heather Simon seated on the left. Back row: Margaret Handley, Angela Tuck, Pam McKay, Nicole South. Seated: Gary Fox, Dianne Davant and Pete Brown.

23 years, and Pam has spent 18 years with the firm. They each have a distinguished list of clientele, though they often collaborate on projects together.

Priscilla Hyatt Council, a fourth generation Miamian who grew up in Hound Ears, moved back to Florida to help run the firm’s Florida location. “She’s a star-

let,” Dianne said about Priscilla. “She started with us as an apprentice about ten years ago and has spread her wings down in Florida.”

Each of the designers at Dianne Davant and Associates is a professional member of ASID (American Society for Interior Decorators) — a distinction that sets the firm apart from others in the High Country.

“It’s about education,” Pam explained. “We’ve studied design and know building codes and regulations. It goes beyond just being good at making things look good, or just having a knack for decorating.”

Dianne explained that to be a professional member of ASID, designers must complete interior design education from an accredited institution, participate in continuing education, and pass the National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ) exam. “Passing the exam is a big deal,” she said. “It takes

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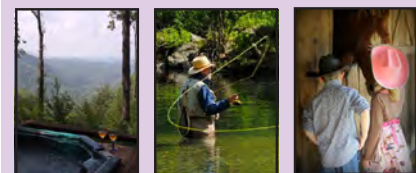

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Stuart, Florida staff. Seated on the left: Priscilla Hyatt Council, Carol McCarvill, Alyce Kavanagh. Back row: Katie Giana and Dianne Davant.

years of education and experience and a lot of hard work. It is very difficult.”

“An allied or associate member of ASID hasn’t passed the exam,” she continued. “When clients hire a designer with a professional ASID designation, they know they’re hiring someone who has a much higher level of education that what we’d call ‘decorators.’”

Margaret added that in some states, including Florida, a license is required to practice interior design. “If a state requires a license, you can’t call yourself an interior designer unless you are licensed — it is a distinction that many people don’t even know exists.” All of the senior designers in the Davant firm are licensed in Florida.

In addition, Margaret is LEED GA certified — Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Green Associate — which means she has a documented understanding of current green building principles and practices. Margaret and the other designers in the firm have taken many continuing education courses in LEED principles to incorporate earth friendly features in their designs.

“I just completed a house that was Gold LEED certified,” Dianne said. “It is a totally sustainable home, which is very expensive to do. There must be solar power, and materials used must be sustainable — materials such as bamboo which are easily regrown, reclaimed materials, and easy to produce materials that have the least impact on the environment.”

“Even if a home isn’t LEED certified, part of our jobs as designers is to make smart decisions,” added Pam. “We should pull from local resources, present options such as LED lighting, and select fabrics that are made from natural materials instead of synthetics that use a lot of chemicals to produce.”

The level of education and professionalism, along with their design philosophies and commitment to their clients, has resulted in a reputation second to none in the High Country.

Dianne served as Vice President of Interior Design at City Furniture, a major furniture retailer in Florida.

Dianne gives much credit to Amanda Clopton, who served as her in-house CPA for 20 years, and recently retired.

DIFFERENT BY DESIGN

The Davant team doesn’t have a trademark “look.” Every job is completely different, just as every client personality is different, explained Pam, who has gained the reputation as a designer who likes to “push the envelope” in creativity.

“Our process varies by the scope of the project,” continued Pam. “Sometimes we do full construction, other times we just change paint color. We work with lots of different types of clients, at all budget levels.”

For a new build, the designers get involved at the planning stage, before the ground is broken. “In looking at plans, it is rare that we don’t make a tweak or

two,” Dianne commented. “It’s good to be involved at that stage because we can look at things with a fine-tooth comb and change things up as needed.”

Throughout the process, the designers work side-by-side with the architects and builders. They serve as advocates for the client and are the contractor’s allies as they lay out options for the client and translate the client’s vision into builder’s language.

No matter the size of the job, the most important part of the design process, according to Dianne, is, “Communication, communication, communication.”

“Most people know what they like, the general direction they want to go,” she elaborated. “They’ll know if they want eclectic and funky, contemporary, transitional or traditional. We work with them to pull out their innermost vision.”

Pam added, “We’re really good listeners, which makes us good at what we do. Our job is to give the client a house they’re comfortable in and they’re happy to live in every day.”

Margaret agreed. “It’s about what our clients want — not about our personal preferences. We take what we learn about our clients and put a design together to suit their needs, something that will be comfortable for them and inviting to their friends.”

“We don’t ever want to force our ideas on people,” said Dianne. “There are designers who are noted for always doing a certain look, but that’s not how our team thinks. We like to be creative, not go back to the same concepts time and time again.”

Dianne’s favorite part of the process? “The installation!” she exclaimed. “That’s when everything comes to life. We have these visions of what the end product will look like, but when we unpack everything, accessorize, and get the paintings on the wall, it is so rewarding.”

She likes it best when she can do what she calls “a big reveal” — with the client staying away during the installation so she and her team can present the end product, with everything complete. “And I do mean everything,” said Dianne.

“We’ll even unpack clothes and kitchens for our clients,” Dianne said. “We’ll have things in place to the nth degree, down to the toothbrushes if they wish.”

Once, Margaret pulled a load of groceries on a sled — uphill in the snow — for a client coming to their newly decorated mountain home for Thanksgiving holiday. “We wanted them to walk in and have everything ready for their vacation, includ-

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Photographs of various projects of Dianne Davant & Associates from the Florida Office. Interiors were featured in "Florida Design Magazine" recently. The console, featured upper right, is by our local company, Charleston Forge.

ing the ingredients needed for their holiday meal."

The "never say no" philosophy that Dianne employs when working for clients has inspired the work ethic of all designers and staff on her team. "As Dianne often says, where there is a will, there is a way," said Priscilla. "There are so many obstacles we face as interior designers but learning how to face those obstacles and find solutions is what makes a project successful."

Dianne stressed that it is important to her to complete every job on time, no matter what. "I remember one job in Palm Beach, and there was a piece of furniture we had ordered that was a central piece in a room. I was on the balcony talking to the supplier, and I told them I'd jump off the balcony if they didn't get it delivered on time," she laughed.

"The supplier couldn't produce the piece by the deadline, but they gave us a beautiful loaner so I could have the house finished for the "big reveal", with everything in place, and I just had to switch out

the ordered piece when it came in," recalled Dianne. "Never say no. If the client wants it, we'll get it done, by golly!"

DESIGNING INTO THE FUTURE

Thinking over the past 40 years, Dianne said many things have changed. "Clients are so much more educated about design now," she said, citing internet access to sites such as Pinterest, and television networks and shows devoted to remodeling and design.

"As far as style, things have become much more contemporary," she said. "Clean lines, natural elements, and a connection to the outdoors. Right now we're doing a lot of what we call 'mountain modern,' a look that balances sleek design and comfort, with the home blending into the surroundings and the views and landscapes incorporated in the design."

"But then, we still do a lot of classic mountain homes," she continued. "Some like the traditional. People are so different — that's what makes our jobs so much fun."

Location is paramount in design, said Dianne, and her homes are living proof. Married to Lee Moffitt, who served as Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives and founded the H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center and Research Institute in Tampa, Florida, Dianne and her husband own two homes of distinction — one on the St. Lucie River near Stuart, and one in the Diamond Creek development in Banner Elk.

"There's almost nothing in common between the two homes," she shared. "Our home in Banner Elk is a true mountain house, Adirondack in style. The house in Florida is very light and airy, and the colors are all water colors, to blend with the river. A home should reflect the area it is in."

Regardless of the location, regardless of the time, Dianne said the basics have remained the same in her business. "We want every job to be beautifully done, whatever the style. We want to get inside our clients' heads and give them the very best of what their visions are." ♦

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A Tale of Two Homes

Dianne Davant Moffitt and her husband, Lee, own a home on the St. Lucie River in Florida and a home in the Diamond Creek community in Banner Elk.

“There’s almost nothing in common between the two homes,” Dianne said. “Our home in Banner Elk is a true mountain house, Adirondack in style. The house in Florida is very light and airy, and the colors are all water colors, to blend with the river. A home should reflect the area it is in.”



The warm colors and stone accents in the kitchen of the Moffitt’s mountain home blends with the outdoors.
Photographer Todd Bush



In the Moffitt’s mountain home, rustic natural elements are used in the design, blending with the wooded surroundings.
Photographer Todd Bush



The Moffitt’s sunporch in their home on the St. Lucie River features a tropical flair, with the focus on the beautiful waterviews. Photographer Dan Forer



The Moffitts love to entertain, and the kitchens in both of their homes serve as gathering places for family and guests. This kitchen in their Florida home features a marble topped center island with colors that flow like the river. Photographer Dan Forer



In a traditional mountain home style, with exposed beams, natural log railings, and a deer antler chandelier, the Moffitt’s North Carolina home is warm and cozy.
Photographer Todd Bush



The main living area of the Moffitt’s St. Lucie home is designed with light neutrals and colors that complement the hues of the river. Photographer Dan Forer



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