

COMING HOME

DIANNE DAVANT & ASSOCIATES INTERIOR DESIGN CELEBRATES 45 YEARS

STORY BY JAN TODD

When Dianne Davant Moffitt makes her annual trek from Florida to Blowing Rock each spring, she is coming home.

For the past few decades, she has split her time between serving clients from her interior design studio in Banner Elk and the firm's second location in Stuart, Florida. Residential and corporate design work has taken Dianne and her team all over the world to transform spaces in luxury country clubs and resorts, corporate yachts and jets, stadiums and businesses, upscale restaurants, and private homes of distinction.



Dianne Davant Moffitt in her living room on Chestnut Drive in Blowing Rock. Behind her, a fireplace constructed with Grandfather granite, taken from a quarry that used to be in operation on the southwest side of Grandfather Mountain. Photo submitted.

Founded in 1979, Dianne Davant and Associates is celebrating its 45th anniversary this year.

Dianne and her husband, Lee Moffitt—former speaker of the Florida House of Representatives and the founder of the Florida-based Moffitt Cancer Center—have shared several different homes in Florida and the North Carolina High Country during their 22-year marriage.

Their latest mountain move, though, is most significant, because the house is Dianne's childhood home in Blowing Rock. When her mother passed away in 2020, Dianne couldn't bear to see the beloved homeplace sold, so she and Lee decided to part with their High Country address in Banner Elk's Diamond Creek Golf Club and move into her family home on Chestnut Drive.

Built in 1938, the house was purchased by the Davants after moving from Lenoir in 1948 when Mayor Grover Robbins, Sr. persuaded Dr. Charles Davant, Dianne's father, to relocate his family and establish a medical practice in town.

“When I was young, my mother said she was always careful if she had to walk into my bedroom at night when the lights were out. I was constantly rearranging the furniture, and she was afraid she'd trip!”
- DIANNE DAVANT MOFFITT

Upon arriving, Dr. Davant built a small clinic, where Dianne was born, then established the Blowing Rock Hospital in 1951. He practiced medicine for more than 50 years before he died in 2003. His wife, Harriet, advocated for education and volunteered extensively in the area and was named “Woman of the Year” by the Blowing Rock Community Foundation in 2016. Dianne's brother, Dr. Charles Davant III, became a doctor and has practiced medicine in Blowing Rock since 1972.



In 2014, The Blowing Rock Historical Society placed a marker at the homesite to recognize the home's significance and honor the Davants' many contributions to the community.

Before the Moffitts moved into the historic home, Dianne had to do a few renovations. After all, remodeling and design are in her blood.

“When I was young, my mother said she was always careful if she had to walk into my bedroom at night when the lights were out. I was constantly rearranging the furniture, and she was afraid she'd trip!” Dianne laughs.

Dianne notes her parents made very few changes to their home in the decades they lived there. It was typical of mountain homes built in the 1930s, with a stone foundation, lots of dark wood paneling, and living space divided into smaller rooms.

Trees around the house had grown into a thick canopy, shading the home from sunlight. “Even with all the lights on, it was so dark inside,” Dianne recalls.

Dianne wanted to preserve the legacy of the home while transforming it to fit the Moffitts' lifestyle and incorporate the beauty of the outdoors. She opened up the kitchen to the living and dining areas and added an expansive covered porch and deck to create an outside living space with multiple seating areas, perfect for enjoying the cool mountain air.

To provide open access to the kitchen, which was originally reached by walking through the laundry room, Dianne had the large indoor fireplace dismantled and reconstructed on the porch.

“The fireplace is made with Grandfather Granite, which you can't get anymore,” Dianne shares. “The builder took every salvageable piece from the three-story fireplace that separated the kitchen from the dining room. That poor man lived inside our chimney for weeks, removing stone by stone.”

To bring light into the house, Dianne had skylights installed in the living room and added a bank of glass doors leading to the porch outside. She had trees on the property trimmed and thinned.



The Blowing Rock Historical Society erected a marker in front of the Davant home on Chestnut Drive. The home was built in 1938 for Miss Mary Arrington of Rocky Mount, then served as the longtime residence of Dr. and Mrs. Charles Davant and their children, Dianne and Charles (“Bunky”). Photo by Jan Todd.



Dianne Davant Moffitt (2nd from right) with her team inside her studio located at 5111 NC-105, Banner Elk. “We’ve been told we have the largest selection of fabrics, wall coverings and carpet samples in the Southeast,” Dianne remarked. Pictured from left are Pamela McKay, Margaret Handley, both partners in the firm, assistant designer Sarah Lafaille, Dianne and assistant designer Laura Olds. Photo by Jonathan Burton.



The star of the show, an antler chandelier. Lighting is one of a designers favorite things to pick out for each room. Space designed by Margaret Handley, photo by Veronica Sandoval.



A kitchen lover's dream work space. Space designed by Margaret Handley, photo by Jason Hatcher.

"It was so exciting when they started to cut branches and trees and the view opened up. We can now see Cone Manor plus all the lights in Blowing Rock, which are so pretty," Dianne observes.

In the original floorplan, all the bedrooms were upstairs. Mindful of steps as they grow older, Dianne said they considered installing an elevator but ultimately decided to transform a den into the primary bedroom suite. They expanded the room to include his-and-her baths, each equipped with a private walk-in closet.

"I could live in my closet," Dianne jokes. She tucked a desk into her closet, setting up a private workstation where she could scatter her papers and materials out of sight from the rest of the home.

Even with all the changes, the Moffitt's home still feels like the place where Dianne grew up. The laundry room contains its original wormwood cabinetry and artwork that hung next to the washing machine when Dianne was a child. A door leads to the outside, where her mother used to hang laundry on the clothesline.

"Standing here, I can still smell the fresh linens after they'd dried in the sun," Dianne muses.

Dianne salvaged the wooden doorframe from the den, where the Davants measured the heights of children and grandchildren over the years. She placed it in the laundry room as a nostalgic nod to celebrating family milestones.

"We don't have a signature design style. If you come in and want a gothic castle, we can do it. If you want a LEED-certified home, something traditional or something super contemporary, we can do that, too."
- DIANNE DAVANT MOFFITT

Throughout the home, Dianne has incorporated work by local artisans and manufacturers including an iron base for her dining room table constructed by Boone-based Charleston Forge, and a custom sink in a guest powder room by Doe Ridge Pottery.

Renovating her childhood home was a labor of love, and as always, Dianne crafted their personal living spaces with the same energy, creativity, and "nothing is impossible" attitude that has defined her award-winning design business.

A Team of Professionals

No matter the price tag or size of the project, at Dianne Davant and Associates, the goal is the same: to create a classic, comfortable, and enduring space that is as unique and extraordinary as the client.

"We don't have a signature design style," Dianne explains. "If you come in and want a gothic castle, we can do it. If you want a LEED-certified home, something traditional or something super contemporary, we can do that, too."

Dianne attributes much of the firm's success to her team of designers, three of whom she named partners in the company last year. Margaret Handley and Pamela McKay are based in Banner Elk, with Priscilla Hyatt Council in the firm's Florida location. Dianne considers the three women "family."

"We've worked very closely together all these years. At times, the office was like a nursery, with our children playing on the floor while



Dianne (right) and her brother Bunky, pictured beside her, prepared to ride in the Blowing Rock Charity Horse Show in the early 1950s. Their mother, Harriet, stands to the left of Dianne's pony, "Trigger." Photo submitted.



The Davant house after a snowstorm in 1961. "It snowed a lot more when I was a girl," Dianne recalled. "We played outside, even in the winter, and built igloos when it snowed." Photo submitted.

we were doing our jobs," Dianne shares.

"My philosophy in managing staff has always been to hire good people and let them go. I am not a micromanager. I just expect them to be great. I know they can do the work, even if they don't know it themselves at the time," she says.

Margaret, who joined Dianne in 1996, notes, "I have learned so much about this business in my years working with Dianne. I think of her as a mentor and best friend. She has shown me how to gracefully be a strong-willed woman."

Margaret earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Georgia. She is a LEED GA-certified professional, which means she has a documented understanding of current "green" building principles and practices. She and the other designers incorporate earth-friendly features in their designs, presenting options such as LED lighting, fabrics made from natural materials, and locally sourced supplies.

Pam came to work for Dianne in 2001. She studied Art Marketing and Interior Design at Appalachian State

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Luxury Mountain Getaway

Designed by Margaret Handley



Margaret Handley, ASID, partner and senior designer. Photo submitted.

The homeowners of this elegant home had owned a house in Blowing Rock for years — but always had their eye out for something with a view. When they found this property in the Mayview Park area of Blowing Rock, they jumped on it. Designer Margaret Handley worked alongside the builders, Enterline and Russell, to create an elegantly casual home with a nod to “old Blowing Rock.”

Reclaimed timbers were used for ceiling beams, and reclaimed wood was used for the floors as well. The owner has an extensive collection of antiques from her mother, and making space for these heirlooms was a big consideration in the design, Margaret said. They also incorporated an extensive collection of art and pottery by local artists. ♦

Home photos by Jason Hatcher.



The living room, with a magnificent valley view, features reclaimed timbers on the ceiling and around the entry, an antique sideboard (left), rocking chairs handcrafted by a local artist, and a burled wood slab coffee table made by a local woodworker.



The family loves to watch sports and enjoy the adjacent wine room in this large gathering room. The husband wanted several games in the space, and Margaret found an antique foosball table which has become a fun focal point of the room.



The stonework around the kitchen range complements the fireplace in the living room. In both, Margaret and the owners worked closely with the mason to incorporate large stones (“shiners”) chosen by the owner.



The wife loves to take a daily bath, so a view from the tub was important. In their main home in Charlotte, the owners have a beautiful crystal chandelier in their bath, and wanted something similar in their mountain home.



During construction, the owners noticed how beautiful the view was from the attic area. Designer Margaret Handley went back to the architect and they carved out a wonderful space with a delightful reading nook.



Dianne spent most of her childhood outdoors, she said, riding her Welsh pony, named Charlie, “all over town” and on carriage trails at Moses Cone Park. Photo submitted.

University, and then in 1993, she opened the Art Celler Gallery in Banner Elk, which she has continued to run throughout her career as an interior designer.

Her work takes her all over the world, acquiring key pieces for her designs, or collaborating with clients who have sought her innovative creativity from near and far. “We are very fortunate as a firm that gets to do a little bit of everything, catering to our clients’ unique tastes,” Pam says.

Priscilla is a fourth-generation Miamian who moved to Boone as a young child when her grandparents purchased Hound Ears Country Club in 1987. She graduated from Watauga High School and then enrolled in the Interior Design program at Cape Fear Community College in Wilmington. She scored an internship at Dianne Davant and Associates in 2008 and then joined the firm full-time.

When Dianne needed extra help to manage her design work in Florida, she asked Priscilla to make the move back to her home state.

“The lessons I’ve learned from Dianne, Pam, and Margaret have been priceless,” Priscilla notes. “I am blessed to call these remarkable women my mentors, friends, family, and now partners. It feels surreal!”

“We are very fortunate as a firm that gets to do a little bit of everything, catering to our clients’ unique tastes.”
- PAMELA MCKAY

Each of her partners is “equally versed” in any style or design skill set, Dianne observes. All senior designers in the company are ASID (American Society for Interior Designers) certified, a distinction that sets the team apart from others in the High Country. The certification indicates an elevated level of education and experience and having passed

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Dianne and Lee Moffitt added a large porch to the original Davant home in Blowing Rock, extending their living space into the outdoors. The porch has multiple seating areas, an outdoor bar and kitchen, and a fireplace that was relocated from the interior of the home, where it once separated the kitchen from the dining room. The remodeled space features a more open floor plan, ideal for entertaining. Photo by Jan Todd.

the National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ) exam.

“Some people say they ‘dabble’ in decorating, with little awareness of what is required to be a professional designer—the years of experience and study needed,” Dianne explains.

The NCIDQ exam, which the official website indicates has a general pass rate of about 50%, measures core competencies in building systems, codes, construction standards, contract administration, design application, professional practice, and project coordination.

“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.”
- PAMELA MCKAY

Their professional designations enable the team to work side-by-side with architects and builders on both residential and commercial projects. During a new construction or renovation, the design team reviews building plans and may suggest changes in the placement of doors, windows, or overall layout to accommodate furniture arrangement or to better match the lifestyle goals of the client.

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

Before beginning a project, the designers interview the clients very thoroughly to understand how they live.

Right: An antique cabinet, set against the knotty pine paneling, is useful storage in Dianne Davant Moffitt’s kitchen. It was an heirloom belonging to her grandmother. Above the cabinet is a painting by Bryan Keith Smith depicting a bench next to Bass Lake, where Lee Moffitt proposed to Dianne in 2001. As a wedding gift, one of the couple’s friends arranged to get the bench for them, and it now sits in their backyard on Chestnut Drive. Photo by Jan Todd.

Classical Villa

Designed by Priscilla Council



This Florida home, located in Lake Wales, was completely transformed from its original décor — with dark hues, layered wallcoverings and draperies, and heavy carved furniture — to a Mediterranean-

style villa that maximizes natural light and showcases the views and gardens. The property overlooks rolling hills and gardens and the famous “Singing Tower”, a Carillon in the Bok Tower Gardens. ♦

Home photos by Dan Forer.

Priscilla Council, ASID, partner and senior designer. Photo submitted.



The foyer is captivating with its original pecky cypress ceilings, preserved from the home’s original design. Warm brass tones of the French market lanterns enhance the organic beauty of the wood, achieving a harmonious visual balance in the entry room. Antiques grace each end of the hall: a secretary from the family’s collection and a three-drawer painted neoclassical marble-top cabinet Priscilla discovered during a shopping excursion on Antique Row in West Palm Beach.



The backyard of this Mediterranean oasis in Lake Wales, Florida, offers a glimpse of gardens which, once matured, will become a spectacular complement to the home’s view of the Bok Tower Gardens, a National Historic Landmark.



The elegant living room is adorned with a custom mural inspired by a wall in the famous drawing room of the Layford Cay Club on New Providence Island in the Bahamas. The original Venetian chandelier adds to the ambiance, while custom furniture ensure it is an ideal space for entertaining. Attention to detail is evident in the custom-painted palm tree containers. Enhancing the room’s grandeur, a large custom antique mirror wall reflects the surrounding grounds and the Bok Tower.



The family room is inviting with its original brick floors arranged in a herringbone pattern, guiding people in to a cozy space. The design of the room revolves around the linen floral chintz fabric, drawing inspiration from the surrounding grounds. Custom furniture blends seamlessly with antiques from the family’s personal collection, adding character and a sense of history to the room. The Venetian glass wall clock serves as a striking focal point.



Mountain Modern

Designed by Pamela McKay

This elegant “mountain modern” styled house in Banner Elk’s luxurious Eagles Nest incorporates many natural elements to blend with the outstanding views from the home. ♦

Pamela McKay, ASID, partner and senior designer. Photo submitted.

Home photos by Paul Sherar.



The primary bathroom is divided for the homeowners, with each side providing a private vanity, shower and water closet. The oversized soaking tub is accessed from either side. Custom cabinets are locally sourced from High Country Cabinets. The shower tile, floors and vanity tops — featuring waterfall edges — were fabricated by Classic Stone Works in Newland.



Comfortable eating areas flow easily from indoors to the deck. Pamela McKay sourced Vanguard furniture for the dining room table, dining chairs and barstools. Custom lighting from Hammerton Studio is repeated in layers with the linear fixture over the dining room table and the large pendants over the island.



Each of the five guest bedrooms on the lower level of the house has access to the exterior, with private seating for every suite. The stone fireplace features a custom copper paneled chimney breast and steel mantle — a combination utilized throughout the home.



Living spaces flow from one to another, indoors and out from the great room in this Eagles Nest home. Natural elements such as the nickel gap ceiling, timbers and custom stone complement the scenery outdoors with a large blown rock crystal glass and steel chandelier from Hammerton Studio takes center stage.



The partners of Dianne Davant & Associates attended a trade show in Paris. From left, Margaret Handley, Priscilla Hyatt Council, Dianne Davant Moffitt and Pam McKay. Photo submitted.

“We pride ourselves on outstanding customer service, personalized design, and going above and beyond to make our clients happy. Those things only come by spending time listening and putting together a design that not only suits the clients’ needs but gives them the home of their dreams.”
- MARGARET HANDLEY

“Do they have [a] family? Do they have pets? Do they like to entertain? To cook? Are they casual or formal? What are their likes, dislikes, and personal styles? We’re usually very successful in reading the clients so we’re prepared to deliver a design they’ll love,” Dianne explains.

Designed to Grow

The past few years have brought growth to the design firm, and the momentum is expected to continue.

Margaret shares, “Our business has thrived as people have come to the High Country and discovered they could work remotely while living where they wanted.”

Pam notes their business is no longer seasonal. “We used to slow down in the winter, but now we are busy year-round,” she observes. “Even during the height of the pandemic, we didn’t slow



Design team in the Florida studio of Dianne Davant and Associates. From left, Elisabeth Altvater, design assistant; Dianne Davant Moffitt; Priscilla Hyatt Council, partner; Jeannette Gore, administrative assistant; and Alyce Kavanagh, operations manager. Photo submitted.

down. Builders were considered essential workers, so we were out on the job sites working. People wanted to live up here more than ever.”

The ability to work remotely has brought younger families to the mountains and into their base of clients, Margaret explains. “In the past, many of our clients were retirees with second homes in the area. Now, we’re working on more primary homes with younger families.”

As they look to the future, the partners plan to be intentional about how they grow the business.

Margaret shares, “There are so many opportunities out there, but we can’t get ahead of ourselves by taking on more than we can do. We pride ourselves on outstanding customer service, personalized design, and going above and beyond to make our clients happy. Those things only come by spending time listening and putting together a design that not only suits the clients’ needs but gives them the home of their dreams.” ♦



Dianne Davant Moffitt (left) and Priscilla Hyatt Council celebrate summer at the firm’s hospitality tent at the Symphony by the Lake held annually at Chetola in Blowing Rock. Photo submitted.