

By Design



We invited three very different Niagara design powerhouses to share their views on the art of breathing new life into interiors.

By Susan Ferrier Mackay | Photography by Stephen Dominick

It's All About Knowing the Client

Wendy Edwards, a tall blonde in her mid-forties with porcelain skin and an air of understated elegance always knew she wanted to be a designer and she cites Hillebrand Winery on Highway 55 outside Virgil as one of her favourite projects.

Last year, her Niagara-on-the-Lake company, Edwards Designs Inc. (A.R.I.D.O.), undertook the transformation of what was once a tent at the winery into a permanent 'Pavilion Room' for meetings. Her biggest challenge was obtaining a consensus among a passionate architect, the client and herself, but with input from the client's executive team, Edward's vision for the interior prevailed. The result is a redesigned retail display area, a new cellar barrel room, and an updated restaurant with canvas-coloured textured walls, cork floors and natural colours.

"It's a look designed to appear both more contemporary and slightly less formal," says Edwards whose partner Mark, an architectural designer, is also her husband. "We worked with the architect who did all the drawings according to building code and was responsible for the actual space and then with the client presenting the image through colour boards, working drawings and little sketches."

Right now the company's ratio of commercial to residential work is between 35 and 65 percent but, says Edwards, "In

eight months that could completely flip around!"

Trained at Fanshaw College in London, Ontario, Edwards, a Niagara-on-the-Lake native, says variety keeps work interesting. At any given moment, she may be asked to work on a range of styles – everything from comfy-country, to fussy Victorian to sleek modernist. Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of her profession is the insight she gets into people's relationships. "Clients are on guard initially but as you work with them and they get comfortable, they reveal more and more of themselves, even down to their sleeping habits and who sleeps where. I always say that when we reach the end of the project, that's the point at which we should really start designing – because that's when we know our clients best."