

A “perfect afternoon” with Theresa Casey

By Jeffrey Fisher

I recently spent a few hours with Theresa Casey from Casey Design Planning Group and, although we had never met, I felt like I was catching up with an old friend. Theresa is a Calgary transplant with degrees in design and art history. She designs thoroughly authentic interiors using her finely honed artistic sensibilities.

Q Describe your personal style.

Theresa: Comfortable. I don't like being uncomfortable in clothes or interiors. No matter what I'm designing I want

there to be a cozy spot. I also have a great respect for scale, proportion and architectural integrity. I think of my spaces as dramatic and richly layered, with plenty of surprises.

Q What's your most prized personal possession?

Theresa: My grandmother's desk, which came from Dublin. When she died I had it shipped over and it connects me back to her and Dublin. My grandfather, who I never met, bought it for her in the 1930s and that connection is really important for me.



Q How would you spend a perfect day?

Theresa: I would get up and read the *New York Times* and then go to the St Lawrence antique market. Afterwards I'd meet friends for lunch at Ceili Cottage on Queen Street East.

And because it's my perfect day I would go to the Tate Modern in London to see Louise Bourgeois's sculptures and Mark Rothko's paintings. Then it's off to Ladurée in Paris for tea and macarons. Followed by tapas in Barcelona and dinner in India. And that's my perfect day!

Q What inspires your creativity and designs?

Theresa: Definitely art and travel. There are tons of artists that I find inspiring and travel is so thrilling and interesting. With both I appreciate the luxury to look, observe and just pause for a moment.



Photos: Ted Yarwood





Q Do you have a style icon?

Theresa: Carmel Snow. She was a cousin of my grandmother's and the editor of *Harper's Bazaar* from 1934 to 1958. She coined the term "New Look" for Dior's debut collection, and discovered Diana Vreeland, Richard Avedon and art director Alexey Brodovitch. And she was the first to publish Truman Capote. I absolutely admire her level of excellence and her vast array of interest in different things.

Q Do you have a favourite décor memory from childhood?

Theresa: I remember as a child being at my aunt's house in one of the old established areas of Calgary. I was there with all of my many cousins and their

friends, hanging out in her cozy living room with the fire going. I remember the high baseboards and old newel posts and loving that sense of the past and feeling of belonging.

Q Who most influenced you to choose your career path in design?

Theresa: An artist friend from Ireland whom I roomed with at university while she was completing her masters in fine art. I was inspired by her use of colour, her fearlessness at jumping into projects and her passion for all creative pursuits.

Q Are there any well-designed spaces in Toronto that you admire?

Theresa: I love the interior space of the store Avenue Road.

Q Do you wear a signature perfume?

Theresa: Not a perfume as such, but I wear an orange blossom-based cream that I love—Royal Hunt Bouquet. It has a fresh smell that is familiar yet hard to place. I used to get it at Anthropologie, but they no longer carry it so it's time to find it online.

Q Tell us about your own home.

Theresa: My husband Rob and I looked for about a year for our current house and when we drove up I immediately knew it was the one. It's a tiny little box of a house but there's something that just grabbed me about it. We were originally going to just renovate the first floor and then it developed into



the second floor and then we ended up gutting the entire house and re-planning it.

The plan is really clever because even though it's a small space it works better than our previous large Victorian house. It was built in the Deco era so I designed the kitchen based on an ocean liner and I found old brass at a scrap-metal yard to edge the cabinets. I found beautiful brass grills originally from the Carlu that I used as doors on a built-in. Rob and I were both highly involved in the planning of the house. To the point of nausea really.

Q If you could live and work in any city other than Toronto, where would it be?

Theresa: Either New York or London. I love the energy of both cities.

Q Do you have any favourite design books?

Theresa: *Vogue Living: Houses, Gardens, People* and *Axel Vervoordt: The Story of a Style*.

Q Any favourite designers?

Theresa: Drawing on my art background, Sonia Delaunay. I love her use of colour and blocking. Her sense of fun makes me laugh. As for actual interior designers, I like Andrée Putman because none of her projects looks the same. She approaches each with a fresh eye and creates interiors that are original in design and highly detailed in execution. It's what I aim to do with my work.

Q When it comes to interiors, where do you feel your clients' shouldn't be budget conscious?

Theresa: Space planning. It's my number one priority. If you can't afford anything else, get a good space plan. It doesn't matter how many beautiful things you put into a space, if it doesn't function it's always going to miss the mark.

Q If I gave you unlimited funds to buy something for yourself tomorrow, what would you buy?

Theresa: A cottage in County Clare, Ireland.

Q What lesser-priced retailers do you think work with high-end interiors?



Photo: James Reid



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Theresa: I think West Elm does a good job. And I've done a lot of Ikea kitchens. I used to love Caban and I'm sad it's gone. I also like buying vintage because it's a great way to add style without costing a lot.

Q Do you take on any design project great or small?

Theresa: I'll do small projects. For me it's more about the connection and if I think I can work with someone and their expectations.

Q Any design trend of late that you would like to see abolished?

Theresa: (Laughs) I don't even like the term "design trend." I'm more interested in things that have longevity and meaning.

Q What's your favourite go-to colour?

Theresa: I do like red. I reference back to my colour theory courses when I studied fine art. Red is psychoactive. Even before you know it, your mind responds to red. It's a power colour.

Q Do you collect anything?

Theresa: What don't I collect? I collect vintage luggage, keys, art, glassware, silverware, teacups, teapots. I like stuff. Correction, I love stuff.

Q Do you have a favourite travel destination?

Theresa: I love Barcelona. It's thrilling to see the over-the-top Gaudí architec-

ture contrasted by the contemporary Barcelona Pavilion. And then there's the Picasso Museum and the Miró Museum. The food and people are great and there's a beach right there. What more could you want? **H**

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