

Designing Duo

SARAH EILERS AND SANDRA LUCAS CELEBRATE 25 YEARS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH A NEW BOOK THAT EXPLORES THEIR DESIGN PHILOSOPHY AND HOW THEY PUT TOGETHER ELEGANT, COMFORTABLE ROOMS IN THEIR NATIVE HOUSTON, TEXAS, AND BEYOND

By Alice Welsh Doyle • Photography by Stephen Karlisch and Julie Soefer



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: A Barry Dixon for Vervain mural wallpaper provides a focal point and hides the TV cabinet doors. • Designers Sarah Eilers (left) and Sandy Lucas • An artist created a design of dogwoods and native Texas birds to grace the walls of this Houston home.

Flower: Congratulations on your new book, *Expressive Interiors* (Rizzoli, 2020), and 25 years of Lucas/Eilers Design Associates. How have you managed such a successful partnership? **Sandy Lucas:** Because we don't work together! What I mean is that we are business partners, but we design our projects separately. It's wonderful to have a relationship and to have someone you trust to work with. We also do things together, like going on buying trips and sharing resources, and our work inspires each other all the time.

How did you two get started?
Sarah Eilers: We actually met in design school at the University of Texas, were sorority sisters, and became friends. We have many memories staying up late drafting projects by hand. After school, we worked together at a design firm for 15 years before coming together to start our own firm in 1995. What binds us together is a respect for design, for each other's distinctive aesthetic, and for our clients, both young and older. We share the idea that good design is . . . good design.

How do your aesthetics differ?
Sarah Eilers: Well, all you have to





do is look at our respective offices! Mine has an old-world partners desk and Queen Anne chairs, while Sandy's is sleeker and more contemporary with a clean-lined laminate desk that she designed with function in mind. But we both have Aeron chairs and the same bulletin board, although mine is neat and Sandy's is haphazard. And we do have different jumping-off points, for the most part. I tend to start by selecting the rugs first, while Sandy always considers the art first. **Sandy Lucas:** We actually have a lot in common as well. We are both tuned in to our classical design training; we emphasize that in our work, and it has become fine-tuned through years of experience—scale, proportion, flow, lighting, comfort, and practicality are so important to make rooms work, and they are not easy to achieve. Of course, the goal is to make it look easy!

I certainly respect the idea that it's not easy! So much planning goes into everything. I love your motto: There are no problems . . . only design opportunities. That's an

optimistic approach. Sarah Eilers: We have both learned over the decades that, even with the best-laid plans, things can go awry, and you simply have to be nimble and embrace the challenges that come your way. **Sandy Lucas:** Sarah and I regularly consult with each other when we are stumped on a project, and we have always helped each other in our own homes. Sometimes all you need is a fresh set of eyes to see something in a new light.

A fresh set of eyes is often needed in the writing process as well—even an editor needs an editor! Sarah Eilers: Exactly, and because we come from different backgrounds, we come to the table with alternative perspectives. We grew up in the same neighborhood in Houston, but our families were not the same. I grew up in a house of collectors and fine antiques, while Sandy's mother used her home more like a laboratory to try out the latest design trends or of-the-moment color combinations.

While a lot of your work is Texas-based, tell us about other

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT: Sarah's living room combines antiques with comfortable upholstery for an inviting atmosphere. • A stencil pattern creates a graphic element in a powder room. • Contemporary floral art and a pendant play off the wallpaper pattern.





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DECORATE: Q&A



ABOVE: Mixed materials keep this kitchen interesting in addition to practical. BELOW: Appliquéd floral patterns on linen bring charm to a bedside table.



locations and how the setting affects your choices. **Sandy Lucas:** When I was designing a second home in Utah, the clients wanted the interiors to reflect the Western location but in a refined way. “Western” is not one thing, and it can go in many directions. That’s why Sarah and I always look to the client and how they live for direction—we draw them out to determine what appeals to them. I recently started a project for a client who is originally from New Orleans, and we were all influenced by the rich design of the city. It is a treasure trove of inspiration, but it has to be appropriate and must align with your client’s wishes. For example, we wove the classic New Orleans fleur-de-lis motif throughout some of the design elements.

How wonderful to have flowers throughout! ❀

For more information, see Sources, page 70