



**FIVE  
UNDER  
FORTY**

This year's **DESIGN WINNERS** share talent beyond their years and a complete dedication to craft.

Story by ALISON GWINN  
Portrait Photography by  
JENNIFER OLSON

« *From Left to Right*  
"Five Under Forty" winners  
Lori Gerety, Marcus Otten,  
Ashley Campbell, Margaret  
Selzer, and Jodi Cook on  
location at cocktail lounge  
Room for Milly on Platte  
Street in Denver.





# ASHLEY CAMPBELL

Founder and owner, Ashley Campbell Interior Design, Denver

DESIGN IS IN Ashley Campbell's DNA. While she was growing up, her parents owned a design firm with successful furniture showrooms throughout Wisconsin that employed a team of 25 interior designers. "Then, one year," recalls Campbell, "we took a Christmas vacation to the Vail Valley, and my mother started doing design projects in Vail." Her parents decided to move to Colorado when Campbell was in high school, and she's lived here ever since.

Headed into college, Campbell wasn't sure she wanted to follow her folks into the family business. "I had a giant respect for their work—it was a really beautiful and creative outlet—but I saw how demanding the job was." So she majored in English, earning her bachelor's at the University of Denver, with the aim of becoming a writer. After working various jobs while in college and through her early twenties,

Campbell realized that nothing but design made her "soul sing." So she sat down with her parents one night and said, "I might have to eat a little crow—I have a serious interest in the design world."

In 2005, after studying interior design at the Art Institute of Colorado, Campbell opened a small retail store in Cherry Creek North where she sold "cash and carry" items—unique artwork, accessories, and rugs. The store was a success—so much so that customers began asking Campbell to help them with their interior design. "So I went where my passion lay, which was high-end residential design projects, and closed the store in 2012." Ever since, says Campbell, "We've been so blessed to have so many wonderful clients that have always instilled the utmost faith in us."

Campbell, who has three boys of her own, says her mother's guidance has acted as

inspiration. "I have a huge respect for the inherent pragmatism in my mother's designs, which I think I inherited. I appreciate high-end design—but it's kind of like fashion: Anybody can look great in head-to-toe Prada or St. John or Escada, right? But it takes a real eye and real precision to take something from a flea market and pair it with a high-end piece."

Campbell, whose work has been spotlighted on TV design shows like *Building Belushi* and HGTV's *House Hunters Renovation*, enjoys a broad range of projects. "We try to accommodate any style, any budget, any size project. Our favorites are the large-scale remodels or the new-construction projects. New construction is exciting because if we get involved early, we form a great collaborative rapport with the architect, the builder, and the homeowner. It's really fun to dream those big dreams."

MEAGAN LARSEN



## DECISIONS, DECISIONS

"Interior design is such a personal process, with so many decisions at play. There are something like 15,000 decisions to make in a bathroom alone! Everybody goes into this process excited—who wouldn't be about building a new home or renovating one? But there are going to be times when a client doesn't want to make one more decision. That's when trust is key—if you trust your architect, your builder, and your designer, it will all work beautifully."

## TIME TO CELEBRATE

"There's an empathetic or intuitive side to design, and it's invaluable to be able to pick

MEAGAN LARSEN

up subtleties with clients. We end up knowing how your life functions, right down to how you organize your sock and underwear drawers! Many people will never have the opportunity to do a remodel or build a home, so it should be a celebratory process—you should be laughing and enjoying yourself. I think that's why I end up becoming lifelong friends with most of my clients."

## YOU'RE ON TV!

"I got a call on a Thursday night in 2014 from a producer for HGTV. She said, 'We need a designer quick for a house

that Jim Belushi is building in Southern Oregon. Can you get to his place tomorrow?' I said, 'Sure!' It was fantastic for so many reasons. I got to develop a friendship with Jim Belushi, who is every bit as charming and adorable in person as he is on TV and in movies. And the project was very real: We actually designed each room you see in the series, and we used a lot of locally sourced, sustainable materials that Jim has a fondness for. It was a blast."

## JE NE PARLE PAS FRANÇAIS

"I have a preferred style



for myself—I love organic, contemporary style with lots of textures and high contrast—but my designs are really client-specific. I've grown to appreciate that we can achieve just about any look—except French Provincial, which is off the table for me!"

## OPPOSITES ATTRACT

"A designer friend of mine said to me several years back, 'Ashley, you pair things together that borderline don't work, but somehow you make them work.' At first I thought, 'Should I be offended by that?' But I realized she was right: I would never advise my clients to buy a matching bedroom set or a matching dining set. I find it much more exciting to mix finishes and materials. Sometimes, the more mismatched, the better. We like to bring things right to the edge."

## INSPIRATION

"I get my inspiration everywhere. I pore through all of the great design magazines. I have a manila file folder, probably six inches thick, of all the designs I find spectacular and want to do an iteration of. And Pinterest is awesome. With the pandemic, it's been a great tool for exchanging ideas back and forth. I do a lot of my best thinking at 3 in the morning. That's when I go to the think tank—it's like a lucid dream: 'There's the solution to that difficult space!' " »

ASHLEYCAMPBELL.COM





# MARCUS OTTEN

Designer, Exquisite Kitchen Design, Denver

“THERE ARE 10,000 different ways to do something—but only one way to do it right,” says Marcus Otten. That motto guides every detail of the designer’s work.

To hear his story, it would seem Otten’s career was fated: He’s one of 13 kids, most of whom are now involved in the building business, either designing kitchens, remodeling homes, or working in the carpet or countertop business. In Denver alone, Marcus has two brothers who work in kitchen design, including Mikal, who founded Exquisite Kitchen Design with his wife, Lisa. “Building is in our blood,” says Marcus.

The Otten brothers grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota, with Mikal coming to Denver in 1999 and Marcus following in 2002. “Mikal was my role model,” says Marcus. “He was always

doing such cool, creative things.” From 2002 to 2006, Marcus did installations for Mikal at William Ohs. When Mikal founded EKD in 2006, Marcus joined him to do installations, then technical design and drafting, and to work as a project manager before moving into design in 2014. “I learned a lot of very, very strict, perfectionist approaches from Mikal, always with the goal of creating timeless, successful projects.”

All that boots-on-the-ground training informs Marcus’ award-winning work today. “I know every aspect of the job from everyone’s perspective—that of the clients, designers, project managers, subcontractors, builders, drywall installers, and tile guys.” An important part of his job, he says, is imparting that knowledge to his clients. “Having all those skill sets allows me to best direct the client to a

successful design. My aesthetic includes clean lines, great portioning, movement, pattern, and texture. Everything has to be both pleasing to the eye and functional.”

Another trait that has guided his success? “I’m organized. I got that from growing up in a huge family,” says Otten, who works 70-80 hours per week, carving out free time to spend with wife Kenlys and 3-year-old daughter Valentina. “Can you imagine what would have happened if my mom wasn’t organized, trying to run a house and cook for 13 kids, an uncle, and a grandfather?”

“Perfectionism always pays off,” says Marcus. “The best thing I can hear a client say is ‘There’s no way we could have done this without Marcus. The process was so easy and fun. He took care of everything. Let’s do it again in our other house. He’s our guy.’”

FORTEM MEDIA

EMILY MINTON REDFIELD

## COAST-TO-COAST DESIGN

“If you want to work with me, I will give you everything I’ve got. I’ve done a wide range of projects, from a very small powder room to the most luxurious kitchens and baths, from California to the British Virgin Islands. We create from the ground up for each client.”

## A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE

“I take an organic approach: As I walk through our showroom with clients, there’s so much to see—we have about 12 kitchen vignettes. I watch their eyes and what they react to—that tells me so much. They are opening up, and I am listening. Ultimately, there has to be a synergy between the client, the interior

designer, the architect, the builder, and me. When you put those perspectives all together, it’s remarkable.”

## FORM VS. FUNCTION

“In the first round of design, I might have four to six kitchens designed on sketch paper, and then I present one that has the best of everything. But the client is very involved, and it’s a very intimate, emotional decision. It’s their forever home, so every single detail is critical. Some clients come in with practical needs, like ‘I have four sets of cutlery, four place settings, and we’ve got to make that work.’ When I hear that, the process starts with functionality, and then we make it aesthetically beautiful. The end result needs to look and feel exquisite.”

## PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

“The ideal project happens when a client wants to expand, to do something unique and innovate—they don’t just want something basic. They want to get inspired, to get pushed—that’s exciting.”

## TIMELESS, NOT TRENDY

“In my kitchens, you will never see the trendy color of the year, like a bold red. I don’t follow trends. I create designs using timeless pieces. Timeless design has to do with scale, fitting the architecture of the home, tying in details throughout the house, making it look like it’s part of the architecture. You’re never going to walk into one of my kitchens and say, ‘Oh, my god! That was so 2012! I can totally remember that feeling!’”

## GREAT MINDS...

“At EKD, we’re always helping each other, so you get the entire team of designers working together for you. We all sit down once a week and talk about the challenges we’re facing on projects. We have intimate relationships with other high-end designers across the country and go to shows across the globe. We have brilliant, very detail-oriented designers here, and none of them are copy, cut, and paste. We create everything from scratch.” »

MYEKDESIGN.COM







# LORI GERETY

Senior Project Architect and Director of Marketing, Forum Phi Architecture, Aspen

AS AN ARCHITECT, Lori Gerety is expected to see the beauty in perfect lines, wonderful views or exciting materials, but she sees beauty in surprising places, too. “There’s pain and beauty in flexibility,” Gerety says. “It can be jarring when a zoning officer says, ‘No, you cannot do that.’ You have to go back to the drawing board and come up with another option. But there’s always another solution, and there is beauty in that. You just may have to go through the mud to find it.”

After earning her bachelor’s degree from CU Boulder in environmental design, with an emphasis on architecture, the Colorado Springs native answered an ad in 2010 for a job at Forum Phi in Aspen. It was a fortuitous decision. “We’ve gotten bigger and bigger projects, and more interesting projects, and I really got to grow with the firm.”

Along the way, Gerety says, she has been lucky enough to be involved in almost all of Forum Phi’s projects, whether in a designer or

a mentor role. Most of the work is high-end, luxury mountain homes, but also includes some multifamily commercial work and a boutique hotel in downtown Aspen (a personal favorite of Gerety’s).

“When you start out at a small firm, you get exposure to everything,” she says. “I got the opportunity to have more client interaction and to get heavily involved in construction administration. I developed close relationships with clients, and then started to have repeat clients.”

Gerety—who splits her time between Aspen and New York City (where her husband works)—is a triple threat at Forum Phi. She works not only as an architect, but also as the firm’s marketing director and staff manager. “I absolutely love the staffing role because, not being in Aspen full time, I get to interact with everyone more. It’s been so busy that the question du jour over the last six months has been: ‘We have a potential project—

can you look at staffing and tell me when we could do this?’ ”

As for the marketing role, “I revamped our social media and also put together a cohesive portfolio of our best work. Our message is that it’s all about the experience. If a client is happy with the end product, that’s great, but we take it a step further: We want the entire process, from design through construction, to be a really great experience. Working with the kinds of clients we do in Aspen, we have the unique opportunity to provide a white-glove experience. We become the client’s advocate, their boots on the ground, and the middlemen where everything filters through us.”

No matter what the project is, Gerety says, “I really get inspiration from my clients. The reality is that most of our clients have lived very interesting lives and been very successful. It inspires me to learn about them, learn about their lives, and then create something that they’ll then spend that life in.”



## CRAWLING AROUND IN THE SAWDUST

“As a kid, I was always drawing—and I grew up on job sites. My dad was a home builder, and so was his dad, and his dad, too. My grandfather built not only his house, but most of the furniture and cabinetry in it. My mom said I was always crawling around in the sawdust, and that may be why I knew I wanted to be an architect from the age of five. In high school, I took all the drafting classes, and I was good at math and science. I thought briefly about being an engineer instead, but in my senior year, I entered a competition to design a bank and took first

STEVE FREIHON

DRAPER WHITE

place in the Four Corners states. My drafting teacher took me aside to say architecture would be a more challenging opportunity for me.”

## HIT REPEAT

“I started working on a home for a client in Aspen in 2012, and it was the loveliest family you could ever dream of. They were very professional, yet caring and appreciative and trusting. I finished the home in 2015. Then, they called us again in 2018 and said, ‘Hey, we want to do another home in Atlanta near where our son and daughter-in-law and three grandkids live.’ They had found a historic property and asked, ‘Can you

come look at it and make it work better for us?’ What made it ideal was the trust they had in me and valuing what we do.”

## ‘A FEW MORE SUNSETS’

“What’s great about designing in Colorado, and Aspen in particular, is the quality of life. We get to capture the views and speak to the experience that clients want to have. We had a client a few years ago who said, ‘Hey, I just want more sunsets in my life, so I bought this property. Can you make it happen?’”

## LESSONS LEARNED

“Everything affects everything else. How you do anything is how you do everything,



and nothing lives in a vacuum. We really can’t be compartmentalized when we’re designing, because every little thing affects every other thing.”

## CHALLENGES LEAD TO CREATIVITY

“Aspen Street Lodge is my proudest project, and that’s because all the difficulties with planning and zoning took us two and a half years to work through. Aspen’s very particular about what is allowed in town, and because of height restrictions, we took a two-story building and made it four stories, including the basement. We had to be extremely creative with design. When I walk through the property now, all those memories come flooding back—but they are things only the architect would know!”

## THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD

“I have two autoimmune diseases, and walking through those health challenges over the years taught me that the healing journey is never linear and that everything is true until it isn’t. We all want to draw a line in the sand and say, ‘This is right and this is wrong, and that is the way it is,’ but that’s only true until what you believe is debunked. I feel like the design process is the same way: You’re walking a tightrope between what the client wants and what the possibilities are. We set out down a linear path, but it never works out that way.” »

FORUMPHI.COM





# JODI COOK

Owner and Principal, Cook Design House, Denver

**THE RECIPE FOR** great residential design? Sure, it includes scale, perspective, color, and texture—but for Jodi Cook, it’s also about having true connections with clients.

“The thing I love about residential design is the people,” she says. “I come from a huge family, which gave me practice in seeing the best in everybody. In my personal life and my professional life, I place a great deal of emphasis on my relationships. Being authentic and approachable with a dose of humor is the path to happiness. When you’re a good person who does what you say you’re going to do, people appreciate it.”

Cook grew up in a Wisconsin farmhouse built by her great-grandfather, then went off to the University of Wisconsin at Madison to earn an undergraduate degree. “I started out as a business major and then had a quarter-life crisis. I panicked when I tried to imagine what I’d actually be doing each day,” remembers Cook.

“But I’d been taking art classes for fun, and my counselor suggested I switch to the interior design program. I couldn’t believe people actually got to do design for a living. It was like the gates of heaven opened.”

After a brief post-college stop in Minneapolis (“arctic”), Cook moved to Colorado and landed her dream job at Slifer Designs in Edwards. “There are certain crossroad moments in your life where you think, ‘Wow, that really set me on a course,’” she says. “One was switching my major to interior design; the second was getting the job at Slifer.” It was there that she picked up “all the practical, nitty-gritty knowledge I needed, learning AutoCAD, construction management, and the fixed-finish side of the industry.” In 2009, she moved to Denver to work for a residential design firm, where she built out her résumé by learning about furnishings and client management.

In 2016, she founded Cook Design House

in Washington Park, and she’s been slowly building her team ever since, creating a style that Cook describes as “an approachable take on timeless, tailored elegance.” She and her two senior interior designers currently have a full roster of residential work: four new construction projects, seven large-scale remodels, three small-scale remodels, and three non-construction jobs (furnishings, light fixtures, wallpaper, and the like).

Cook, who lives in Centennial with her husband, two kids, a cat, and a “COVID puppy,” says that, fundamentally, “Good design should make people feel at home, whatever that means to them. They should be surrounded by the things that mean something to them, like the quilts my mother made for my kids’ beds. I try to find that balance between sophisticated and approachable and real. It’s my job to help you translate your tastes and preferences into a design for your home.”



## MAKING THINGS BEAUTIFUL

“As a child, I was good at art—but I was also always rearranging the furniture in my room. If my mom was hanging wallpaper, I was right there, and if she was picking furniture, it was the best week ever. I always loved making things beautiful, whether it was baking a cake and decorating it or moving furniture around.”

## NOTHING HAPPENS IN A VACUUM

“I called my company Cook Design House because I wanted it to be about a group of people working together as a team. Good design doesn’t happen in a vacuum—it’s a collective effort. We all reach a point where we’re stuck on a project. Maybe you try to build a room around a certain coffee table and it’s not gelling, and you ask someone else and they say, ‘Well, it’s that coffee table—just take that out.’ A fresh perspective helps when you get too close to a project.”

## AMAZING GRACE

“Every job is a unique puzzle. If it’s an existing structure, it’s about marrying the exterior architecture with what the client wants to do inside and making sure there’s a grace between the two. If I see a contemporary home where inside they have Rococo mirrors and a Louis XIV table—whoa! Some people buy a home because it’s in the right neighborhood at the right price and think they can make it what they want, but the exterior needs to align with their design preferences.”

## THE FOUR MOST COSTLY WORDS

“Almost 50 percent of our work is large-scale remodels. Usually, a client will say, ‘We want to remodel the kitchen and the primary suite,’ but then something called scope creep happens. A contractor I know says, ‘The four most expensive words in construction are ‘While we’re at it...’ You start to rearrange the kitchen, then you knock out a wall. Next you redo the floors, then the stair treads and the railing, and then you decide to paint and redo trim. All of a sudden, the entire house has been remodeled.’”

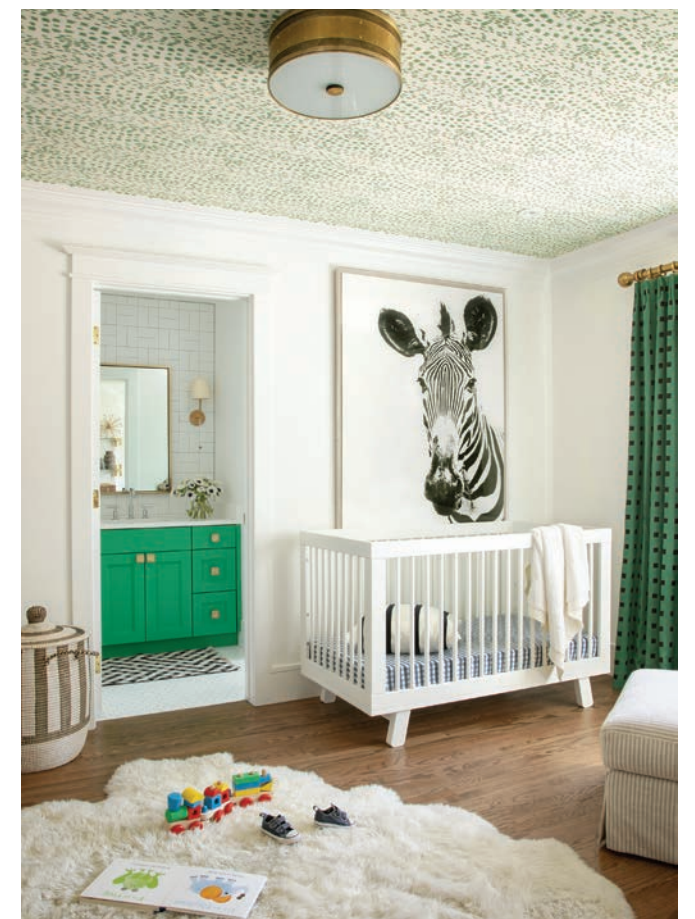
## ALL EARS

“Return clients say they like to work with me because I hear what they want, not what I think they should do. But I’m also there to save them from themselves if I think they’re making a really bad decision. Somebody’s watching over their shoulder to make sure they don’t make any mistakes.”

## OLD MACDONALD

“Someday, I’d love to have a hobby farm with Jersey cows and chickens and a great kitchen garden. Because I grew up on a farm, I didn’t even know you could buy spaghetti sauce in a jar until I was in high school! I love the idea of having some space and a quiet life. I’d love to wake up, collect some eggs, pat the chickens on the head, and then retire to my pottery wheel in the shed or eat some fresh cucumbers. Doesn’t that sound amazing?” »

COOKDESIGNHOUSE.COM



KIMBERLY GAVIN

TOP: EMILY MINTON REDFIELD; BOTTOM: KIMBERLY GAVIN





# MARGARET SELZER

Founder and Principal Designer, River + Lime, Denver

**LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION.** We all know how important it is—and that may be doubly so when designing mountain homes. Just ask Margaret Selzer, founder of River + Lime. “So many of our projects are vacation homes in the mountains with the prettiest backdrops imaginable, and we try to celebrate that. We have built-in art outside every window, so we want to design spaces that are beautiful but don’t compete with the unbelievable views.” Selzer grew up in Cortez, left to earn her bachelor’s in interior design from The University of Arkansas’s Fay Jones School of Architecture and Design, and then returned to Colorado in 2004 to work at OZ Architecture. “That’s where I learned how interior design is applied in the real world—understanding what it means to be a member of a team all working together for a

common goal. I couldn’t do what I do now without that experience.” In 2012, Selzer founded her own firm, River + Lime. Its striking name comes from a Boston intersection where she lived during a college internship. “I just knew I would have my own business one day, and River + Lime felt right.” Running her own company, she says, “gave me the opportunity to create a team and an environment that fit the way I wanted to work. At River + Lime, our goal is to produce phenomenal work, but within an office environment that also celebrates being a healthy individual. I think people come to the table more creative when they are fulfilled outside the office.” Today, River + Lime is a team of four—“small but mighty,” as Selzer describes it.

“I work with the best clients and the best teams, because I think good energy attracts good energy.” Fifty percent of the firm’s work is with developers on larger mountain resort development projects, mostly residential; the other 50 percent is working one on one with homeowners doing residential design, also primarily in the mountains and often for clients who live out of state. “One of the biggest challenges for our clients is logistics, but as we like to say, ‘If you aren’t local, we will be.’ These homes are beautiful for a reason, and it’s not because they’re easy to get to.” Selzer describes her style as “approachable luxury,” and says her clients “don’t want a home that is high maintenance. They want to be able to come in from the outdoors and live easily in their home.”

JESS BLACKWELL

DRAPER WHITE

## EARLY INSPIRATION

“My dad always had magazines around the house with home plans and black-and-white exterior renderings. As a kid, I loved to flip through them and study the plans—I was really drawn to them. I also loved art, so in college, interior design seemed like a nice balance of the creative and the practical.”

## FAMOUS LAST WORDS

“When you ask clients, ‘What do you want your home to look like?’ they sometimes struggle, but everyone can describe how they want a place to feel. One client said she wanted to feel calm. Others want to feel excited, or to feel energy. Sometimes we’ll check back in with the word while we’re working on a project to make sure we’re still on track.”

## WHAT’S THE QUESTION?

“I’m really inquisitive. I get to know people in a much more intimate way than, say, their CPA. I love that. We know one client has a certain special smoothie every morning, and that’s something we need to incorporate into their kitchen. It’s a bit of push and pull between form and function, but that’s fun—creating this beautiful environment that supports the way someone wants to live. How amazing is that?”

## COWBOY HUMOR

“We were designing this very contemporary bathroom and found a vintage photograph of cowboys sitting on a fence. When it’s on the wall, it looks like they’re just staring at you while you’re in the bathtub. The space was beautiful, but we wanted to add

just a bit of humor. It’s a cliché, but I think pieces like that find us.”

## FAST FASHION? NOT.

“I love beautiful things that last. I hate fast fashion coming into the interior design space. We recently had a rep mentioning the price point of a rug and saying it could be easily thrown away. I thought, gosh, I don’t want to buy things with the idea that they could be thrown away. What we do has an imprint, and I want it to be a positive one. I like to think about someone’s core values, the ones that last.”

## THE WRITE STUFF

“My most prized possession is a little writing desk that I use as a nightstand. It’s been in my family since 1867. Inside the drawer are the names of our family, in pencil, and a

note to always keep it in the family. Things have a life and a meaning. I am the keeper of this table right now, but it will have a life after me. What makes an environment special is having things around you that you love. My grandfather was a carpenter and had an old wooden toolbox that he kept in his truck. I now have it in my bar and use it to hold liquor bottles. I love to have a piece in my house that reminds me of him.”

## BEST COMPLIMENT

“A client once said, ‘I never knew I could live in a space like this.’ That has always stuck with me—the fact that they had a space designed for them. Some people think a space is just a space, so when you can show someone how their space can have meaning, that’s special.” ❖