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Healing

Healthcare facility design is close to the heart of Ohio's Karlsberger.

Karlsberger, page 84

plus

Perkins Eastman dislikes a 'cookie-cutter' approach
American Standard Canada taps high-efficiency fixtures
Talk about green: The many benefits of office plants



Lafia/Arvin says it finds design inspiration through master painters, architects and interior designers.

Lafia/Arvin
www.lafiaarvin.com
Employees: 8
Service: Interior designer
Monique Lafia, co-founder: "We are known for not taking the easy route, or [having just] one or a couple fabrics or colors in a room or residence."

Company Profile

Eye on the Masters

European trips help Lafia/Arvin develop design and furnishing ideas.

California-based design firm Lafia/Arvin has created rooms and homes for a wide variety of people – from *Fortune* 500 executives to athletes – such as Wayne Gretzky and Sugar Ray Leonard, and celebrities, like Kenny G and Rob Lowe. It says each of the numerous projects it has performed in its 10-year history has been unique.

Monique Lafia, the company's lead designer and co-founder, says her yearly trips to Europe – mainly to Italy, France, England and Spain – help her create new ideas to incorporate into the company's custom furnishing and design elements. "It gives me the opportunity to look around and see different types of wall texture, stone designs and light fixtures to incorporate," she says.

"We find inspiration for our design work through the masters – painters, architects and interior designers [who came] before us – and many of those great individuals come from Europe," she explains. The firm's style is classic European with contemporary flavors at times.

The trips usually last 10 days, but she was there for three weeks this summer to celebrate the company's 10th anniversary. Lafia says she meets with vendors in Europe to see their new products. Also, on her last trip, she took note of several railings designs, as well as fabrics, wall and floor designs, stone and draperies in Lake Como, Florence, Tuscany, Umbria and Milan. Lafia immediately incorporated the wealth of new design concepts from her Italy trip in several current projects, she says.

"We take the opportunity to take photographs of works from the masters, purchase books, and when we return, we incorporate items that we were inspired by into our custom-designed furnishing," she says.

Making Each Project Special

The company takes big steps to create new designs because its clients want to feel that their houses or getaways are special, Lafia says. "Often, you will see some design firms that have publications with very few fabrics or details," she says. "We are known for not taking the easy route, or [having just] one or a couple fabrics or colors in a room or residence. Down to every pillow [the design] should be special."

Lafia/Arvin considers the residence, architecture and family needs when designing a project. They strive to "create a beautiful aesthetic design that we view will be timeless," she says. "Unlike others, comfort and practicality are high on our list of considerations."





Communication is key, Lafia stresses. The long-term relationships the company builds with its clients help it during the project. "Lafia/Arvin will attempt to assist a client with any inquiry possible," she says. "We also are constantly following up with our clients, as quickly with all requests as possible.

'We expect as much from our vendors as we do from ourselves – quality of products that lasts, attention to our details.'

"We regularly e-mail and provide our clients with very detailed reports, except for some clients who want reports condensed to under a couple dozen pages maximum," she adds.

The company also ensures its staff communicates with each other. "We find that communication is essential - and it is quite easy with today's tech-

nology," she says. "During the day and at the end of the day, all of our assistants give us detailed logs of all the day's events so that we are in touch with even the minutest of details. Our assistants report to us on virtually every client decision."

After a project is completed, the company refers the client to specialists who provide services such as regular in-residence furniture restoration such as polishing wood and cleaning leather; fabric protection services for drapery, fabrics and carpets; and an antique rug company that specializes in maintaining rare rugs.

"Our goal is that a residence will look fresh with our design work 10-plus years later," Lafia says.

Company History

Lafia and Chris Arvin founded the company in 1997. Arvin, who has a background in business, finance and accounting, is responsible for the company's general business operations.

Lafia is certified by the California Council for Interior Design and the

National Council for Interior Design Qualification. Over the years, the company has worked with architects such as Richard Landry of Landry Design Group, Don Nulty, AIA, Hablinski + Manion Architecture and Appleton & Associate Inc.

Most of the company's design assistants have a similar educational background as Lafia, and all have cooperative and courteous personalities with clients, other office staff and vendors, and are attentive to details. Due to the magnitude and design detail of the projects, this is imperative, the firm says.

The company offers paid internships to students from Lafia's alma mater, the Architecture & Interior Design Program at the University of California Los Angeles. "We typically hire at least five people from the program, many of them long-term employees," Arvin says. "They are a vital part of our organization."

The company performs projects nationwide, as well as in Canada. In 2007, the Robb Report named the company one of the top-40 designers in the world. Also, "Franklin Report" listed it as the highest-rated interior design firm.

Meeting High Expectations

Lafia explains clients today are more cost conscious and want long-lasting products. One way the company meets those demands is by working with quality vendors.

"We expect as much from our vendors as we do from ourselves – quality of products that lasts, attention to our details – which they are familiar with after years of working with us," she says.

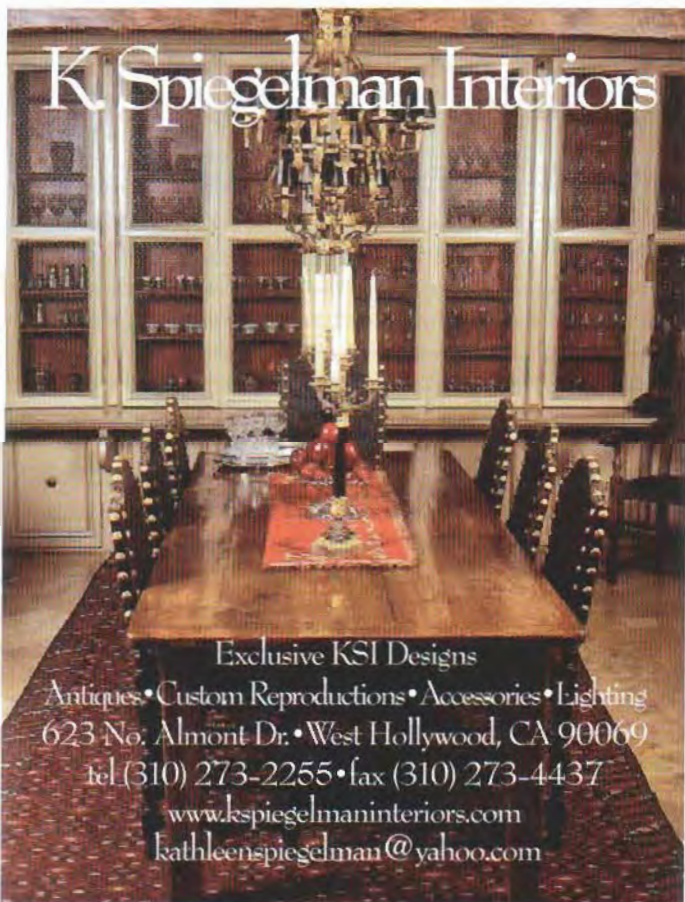
Customers also want environmentally friendly products. Lafia says the company today uses carpet and upholstery with more natural fibers, as well as less-polluted paint and paint finishes. Arvin adds that it also offers recessed can and other lightings as an option for its clients with bulbs that last up to seven years.

"We added that product after one of our clients, Tim Mason, the CEO of England's Fresh & Easy and Board of Directory member of its parent company Tesco PLC, called the company after he and his family watched the film 'Inconvenient Truth' and wanted to do anything he could to save the environment at his personal residence, in addition to his dramatic accomplishments in this regard for Fresh and Easy," Arvin says.

Euro-Inspired Line

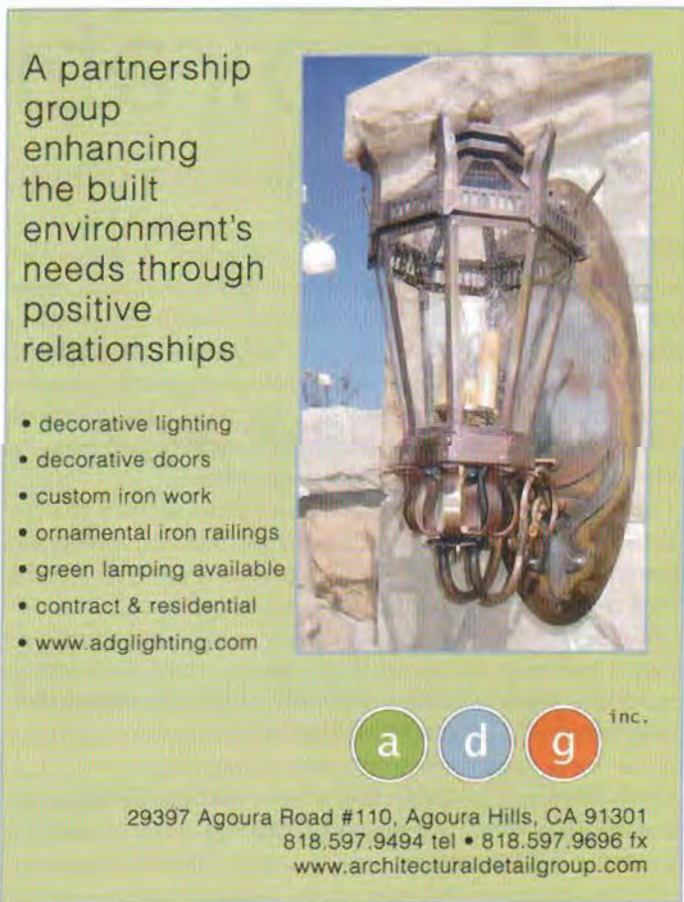
The company is also in the process of developing a furniture line, to be introduced in 2009, Lafia says.

"It will be a combination of some European furniture and design elements and items that are missing when shopping for clients," she says. ■



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