



Ruth Livingston

Multifaceted Tiburon designer

BY P. J BREMIER PHOTOS BARBARA RIES

Visitors who step into the chic showroom of Ruth Livingston Studio on Tiburon's historic Ark Row enter a space of artful contemporary home furnishings, accessories and objets d'art defined by Livingston's singular taste.

The experience made such an impression on yacht broker Pat Gallagher that she recently

hired Livingston to redesign her Alameda condominium. "I had just sailed to Sam's for lunch and happened to walk in," says Gallagher. "Immediately, the style of furniture, the flow, the curves and the feeling that there was something unique there appealed to me."

San Rafael resident Mitzi Cohen had a similar experience. She was so taken with

Livingston's showroom that she hired her to redesign her home four years ago. "I absolutely adore her work," says Cohen. "She has exquisite taste."

Livingston's studio, while creating instant admirers, is just one expression of the talented designer's identity. A Tel Aviv native who speaks four languages, served as a lieutenant in the Israeli army, and holds an MBA in marketing as well as a certificate in interior design, Livingston has been influencing contemporary design in Marin for more than 25 years.

While she embraces clean lines and a restrained approach, she punctuates her interpretation of design with elements of bold surprise—a conical occasional table crafted from stripes of mahogany and maple suggests a joyful exclamation point; a glass cocktail table resting delicately atop oxidized metal recalls a dramatically shaped branch; and drapery finials of woven steel resemble airy coils of twigs.

Livingston's showroom is also where she runs her busy residential and commercial interior design studio, develops and markets her stylish collection of furniture, and operates Ruth Livingston Home, a renovation division for properties, owned by her firm.

The scope of Livingston's interior design work is wide, from residences and hotels to offices and retail shops to staging properties for resale. "Every design is a solution to a challenge," she says, "and I like to come up with creative solutions. Whatever style it is, I always make sure it's unique to the client and the property."

The process is a collaborative one that involves the client, architect, other consultants and a select group of local artisans, including Deborah Childress, Kyle Reicher and Eric Powell, just to name a few.

Livingston adheres to the form-follows-function concept. "I space-plan first for lifestyle and activities and then consider style

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—RUTH LIVINGSTON

and colors,” she says, “and I like furniture to be practical and, of course, decorative and sustainable.”

Bob and Crystal Benbow hired Livingston to work on their Tiburon home—twice: first on some bathrooms and then, ten years later, when it was completely remodeled.

“Ruth used a recurring theme of curves,” says Crystal Benbow. “It’s in the cabinets, the dining table, even the handles on the refrigerator. It gives the whole house a sense of bending and movement. Personally, I think she has amazing taste and an eye for design.”

And a timeless one: “We didn’t know then if, or when, we would remodel,” Benbow says, “but Ruth visualized the whole plan so well that when we did remodel, the bathrooms fit in perfectly.”

Livingston began designing furniture as a teenager, producing pieces for her family that were made in a relative’s factory. Over the years, she designed many individual works, but it wasn’t until the 1995 San Francisco Decorators Showcase, and the debut of her Revolving Column Bookcase, that she began to consider creating a collection.

Today, her eclectic 60-piece collection encompasses seating, case work, tables and lighting. It is represented in nine trade showrooms nationally as well as in the Tiburon showroom, which is open to the public.

A Ruth Livingston design is defined by simplicity and function, often with references to

nature, and are either lively with geometry—cones, spheres, balls—or graceful with fluid lines. They're also serendipitously inspired—memories of Mediterranean sand dunes (the Wave line), an unraveling basket (the Woven Steel bases), her Asian travels (the Bamboo line)—and offered in a variety of finishes and a choice of natural textiles. She is committed to producing eco-friendly furniture and uses sustainable materials and nontoxic glues and finishes in her products. Only her handwoven Tibetan rugs are made offshore. This year, Marin County will recognize Ruth Livingston Studio as an official green business.

Livingston's signature pieces, in addition to the Revolving Column Bookcase, include the Athena, Mercury and Apollo wood armchairs and the Wave line's sofa, lift television cabinet, console table and dining table. Small tables in the Woven Steel and Striped Cone lines have received prestigious design awards.

With so many accomplishments to her credit, what are her favorites? That's easy, she says, relying on an answer she gives often at speaking engagements. "My two boys, Jordan and Michael," she says. "They're my best creations."

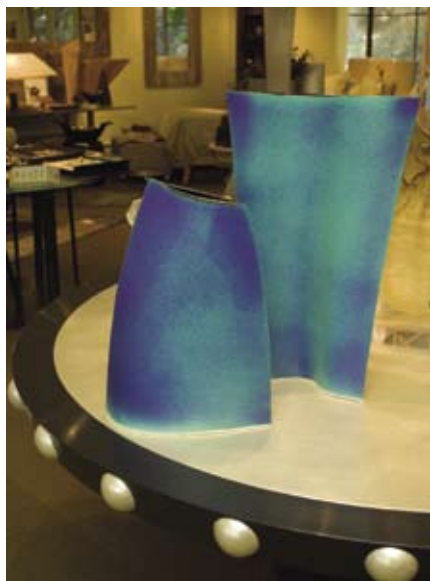


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