

WELLNESS BY DESIGN

SOUTHWEST FLORIDA'S TOP DESIGNERS
SAY THE HOMES THAT BEST SUPPORT
WELL-BEING START WITH
REFINEMENT, NOT ADDITION.

Long before you consciously register a room's layout, lighting, smell or temperature, your body has already begun to respond. A bedroom can leave you feeling restored or oddly depleted. A kitchen can either gather people or keep them moving through. At a time when home design is inundated with health gadgets and upgrades, these three Southwest Florida designers—each driven by formative health experiences—take a grounded approach. Rather than chasing optimization, they design spaces, following the fundamentals of how people move, gather, rest and recharge at home.

BREATHE EASY

In 2019, burnout pushed Naples designer April Raque to study wellness. She became a Mayo Clinic and National Board Certified Wellness Coach, where she learned how impactful our surroundings can be on overall well-being. Two years later, she founded Wellness Design Group

on that idea. It wasn't long before she faced her first major challenge: a bungalow renovation for an immunocompromised client managing Lyme disease and mold sensitivity.

She started with what could not be seen. According to the World Health Organization, indoor air pollution remains a health risk, and while most homes register within safe limits, the cocktail of low-grade toxins (from cleaning products to off-gassing furnishings to synthetic fragrances) can tax the immune system over time. The homeowners had already begun the renovation with mineral-based drywall and brought in April to finish with zero-VOC paints, solid wood cabinetry and glue-free furnishings over standard solvent-based adhesives and composite surfaces.

While most healthy individuals don't require such rigid source control, low-grade pollutants can contribute to symptoms such as headaches and

Bjorn Wellander



From left: CID Design Group’s Jenn Zella recommends Effe Perfect Wellness. Architect Mark J. Leonardi integrates a meditative water feature, and designer April Raque integrates house plants. Previous spread: High-design gyms like this one by Annie Braehler of Euro Trash keep you consistent.



Lisa Kahn-Allen built her practice, Finding Sanctuary, on this neuro-sensory connection. A decade ago, when her daughter, Chloe—who has autism and oppositional defiant disorder—stopped responding to conventional therapies, Lisa turned to design. She outfitted Chloe’s bedroom with plush carpet, low-lying furniture, soft pillows to punch or sink into, and a speaker for music. Her daughter started emerging noticeably calmer, and better able to regulate her emotions.

When designing a home, Lisa works to identify the clients’ distinct formula for comfort and joy—the sensory inputs they’re most attuned to, the objects that hold meaning. For one, that may be an environment layered with texture; another may require clean lines and neutral colors. Rather than strip spaces of their character, the self-described maximalist juxtaposes moments of visual density against clear space. By displaying heirlooms with intention, she avoids the

SLEEP SUPPORT

With wellness design, the key is to prioritize where you spend the most time.

Minimizing cumulative exposure to low-level chemical emissions supports long-term respiratory health. Standard mattresses manufactured with polyurethane foam can off-gas volatile organic compounds (VOCs) during sleep. In Naples, **Harbor Springs Mattress Co.** provides a localized solution through handcrafted mattresses made from organic cotton, pure wool and botanical tree-sap latex, delivering structural support without synthetic additives. [harborspringsmattress.com](https://www.harborspringsmattress.com)

fatigue. Conscious moves can help reduce the load. Beyond low-VOC or zero-VOC paints—which are now readily available—and solid wood, April advises minding your flooring. Even natural options can hide offenders in their adhesives. Click-lock systems offer a glue-free solution.

After limiting toxins, the most effective mitigation for indoor air pollution is the simplest: airflow. Because standard AC units recycle stagnant air, tightly sealed

modern homes can become chemical traps. Opening windows for 15 minutes a day (preferably with a cross-breeze) freshens things up. Some wellness designers rely on mechanical Energy Recovery Ventilators to pre-filter and dehumidify outdoor air before it enters the home.

MIND YOUR PEACE

Our surroundings are always acting on our minds, whether we realize it or not.



Courtesy Effe Perfect Wellness; Nick Stighio, Carlos Escobar

AROMATHERAPY

These local candle brands offer a smarter, soot-free way to set the mood.

Local purveyors offer clean alternatives to synthetic ingredients. Naples-based **Pepper Street Studio** (pepperstreetstudio.com) blends soy and apricot wax. Bonita Springs’ **Poured Candle Co.** (pouredcandleco.com) offers soy wax candle-making classes. In Fort Myers, **Nokomis Home Fragrance** (nokomishomefragrance.com) uses sustainably sourced wood wicks and reusable gold tins.

visual clutter that forces the brain to process competing stimuli, increasing cognitive load.

Lisa says a home’s ambient environment matters as much as the built one. Chronic, low-frequency noise above 40 to 45 decibels (the sound of a refrigerator or AC) can disrupt deep and REM sleep, so she dampens humming appliances in echoey rooms with layered rugs, curtains and upholstery. But perhaps the most powerful tool for a healthy home, she says, is nature. Biophilic materials and natural views are essential in her designs.



A kitchen that opens to an alfresco dining table, a work desk facing a verdant view—even brief glimpses of greenery have been linked to lower stress. “Being well as a human always comes back to the natural world,” Lisa says.

RESTORE AND GATHER

At the core, wellness design is about creating a space for how you live—and want to live. Jenn Zella brings that approach into CID Design Group’s projects. Her home, designed after a severe bacterial infection sent her down a health research path 15 years ago, serves as a case study. Near her bedroom, a dedicated indoor-outdoor suite holds a workout area, an infrared sauna and

a steam shower generator to help with her asthma symptoms.

She’s clear that not everyone needs or benefits from a full recovery setup in their home. Rather than accumulating expensive gear bound for abandonment and visual clutter, she suggests auditing your health goals, preferences and habits, and choosing accordingly.

Portable equipment that can move between homes or rooms as routines change earns higher consideration. Design matters here, too. Studies in neuroaesthetics suggest that beautiful, harmonious design triggers a positive response in the brain, lowering cognitive friction and increasing our willingness

to interact. Italian wellness brand Effe Perfect creates marble and porcelain hammams and saunas that integrate seamlessly into standard bathrooms.

Beyond home spas and high-design fitness equipment, Jenn taps into household rhythms to create spaces that pull people together, whether that means constructing a glass-walled office that allows a working parent to pop in and out of play, or building a dedicated crafting nook for spontaneous creativity. In her home, Jenn keeps a marble chess set in full view. “When it’s out and available, it has a gravitational pull,” she says. Through intentional design that supports the routines and rituals that make life richer, a healthy life starts at home. ■

Naples designer Lisa Kahn-Allen’s Finding Sanctuary practice centers on creating spaces to calm the nervous system. Zen gardens, such as designer Leslie Connell’s project at Moorings Park (below), offer a peaceful spot for daily meditations.



Brie Williams, Tina Sargeant