

# hospitalitydesign

## *Meet the Minds Behind Restaurant Design - Anna Schmidt*

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*By Jana Schiowitz*

Anna Schmidt  
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With a design approach using clean lines and balanced colors, designer Anna Schmidt creates hospitality spaces that are full of distinctive details. Although Schmidt only opened her firm eight years ago, she is not new to the industry, with experience spanning 15 years. After graduating from Oklahoma State University with a degree in interior design with an emphasis on facilities management and a minor in hotel and restaurant administration, Schmidt landed her first job at a commercial furnishings dealer doing space planning. It wasn't until a few years later that she discovered her forte while working at a firm that specialized in restaurants, collaborating with such clients as Darden Restaurants and Walt Disney Regional Entertainment. Those experiences gave her the know-how to go out on her own in 2003, and since then, she has created memorable spaces for a variety of restaurants and bars. Here, she talks about her love of Broadway, Caribbean dreams, and what she finds visually pleasing.

**HD:** Did you always know you wanted to be a designer? Go into hospitality?

**AS:** Actually I did not, but was always a lover of the arts—painting, dance, art, anything Broadway, and I loved to travel and see fantastic spaces. There was always a business side to me early on though. When I was 16, I told my parents that someday I would have my own business, not yet knowing what that would be. I went to college and entered into the hotel and restaurant program at OSU, only to quickly find out a year into the program, and after taking a required 'hotel and restaurant space planning' course, that I could combine my interests in both.



**HD:** Restaurant design is your forte. What attracted you to this design niche?

**AS:** I have always had a passion for the hospitality field, and to me restaurants can be such an experience! Some of my fondest memories with family and friends are at restaurants. The food of a restaurant is always the most important factor, and when I can create designs to enhance the mindset behind the menu, it's very fulfilling. Restaurant design to me is also very expressive and dramatic, and let's just say, most who know me know I'm all about expression. Call it my love of Broadway.

**HD:** What was your big break?

**AS:** I don't think I've ever had that 'one big break,' but I have been fortunate to have had several key people in my past believe in my ability. They gave me the chance to take on challenging projects. With every challenge a person continues to grow, and that's what I always hope to obtain from my career—continual growth.

**HD:** Where do you get inspiration?

**AS:** I take in a great deal from everyday experiences, and I constantly study what's around me visually—textures, form, and light. The ocean is also very inspiring for me. When I'm by the water, my mind races with fresh ideas.



**HD:** Do you have a favorite completed project?

**AS:** I would have to say currently my favorite is Vince Carter's Restaurant in Daytona Beach that we completed in January of 2010, an upscale-casual dining establishment. The client really allowed us to create and dream. We were able to add so many intricate details to a fantastic structure...the best part was that the client completely trusted our team with every move, and everyone was very pleased with the outcome. I am very proud of the work we did for this space.

**HD:** What restaurants do you love for design? For food?

**AS:** For design—Tao Asian Bistro in Las Vegas...now THAT is a dining experience. Another fantastic space is Buddakan in Philadelphia. Easy to see how much I like Asian-inspired interiors? For food, I really love the crepes at Island Creperie in Bradenton Beach, Florida, and I had the most wonderful Italian meal this past year at Vincente's Restaurant in Wilmington, Delaware. The owner even sang to us! It was awesome. Eating out is such an adventure on so many levels.

**HD:** What is the most important thing to remember when designing a restaurant or bar?

**AS:** It is so crucial to remember the operational flow of a space. I really study this with each project. If a restaurant doesn't flow well once it's open, it can be so detrimental for the owner and staff.



**HD:** What has been the biggest shift in restaurant design you've seen over the past few years?

**AS:** I have seen a shift in owners wanting their spaces to be 'comfortable.' For a while, it was all about the flash—not to say a little spark is a bad thing from time to time. However, it seems that most restaurants want a space where the majority will feel at ease...a place that they can frequent much more than once a month.



**HD:** What would be your dream project?

**AS:** A restaurant in the Caribbean near St. John where the owner demanded that I stay nearby during the entire duration of the project!

**HD:** Where do you see restaurant design headed?

**AS:** I think that restaurant design will continue to evolve, especially around technology. Having a place where people can enjoy their dining experience, but also have the option to carry on business activities will only continue to grow.