

Contemporary custom steel wave-design dining table and angled chairs float on a polished concrete floor. Photograph courtesy of Mary Anne Smiley.



# BUILDING MOMENTUM

Venerated interior designer Mary Anne Smiley  
adds *build* to her firm.

BY PEGGY LEVINSON



The challenging round kitchen shows off Mary Anne Smiley's design prowess. Photograph courtesy of Mary Anne Smiley.



Left: An interesting labradorite slab used for the custom dining table enhances the room. Photograph by Holger Obenaus. Below: Windows and doors by Finesstra. Photograph by VistaBee



North Dallas residence designed by Mary Anne Smiley Design + Build. Photograph by Holger Obenaus.



Last fall, in the middle of the pandemic, Mary Anne Smiley had no thoughts of starting a new business. Her thirty-year-old design company—known for her use of pure color, original fine art, and pearl finishes—was quite busy with 10 ongoing projects. Smiley and her senior designer, Dani Burbidge, were running among design sessions with old and new clients, to installations to check on construction. But a series of dissatisfying experiences with different contractors had her quite frustrated. “The client hires us to make their home just as they want it. If the contractor or furniture builder doesn’t execute and the client is unhappy, we take all the steps to rectify the situation. Not only is it time consuming, but it’s very expensive for us,” Smiley states.

At the same time, her friend Lisa Doolittle was laid off from her position with an elevated custom homebuilder. She offered herself as an extra hand during the holidays, and quickly proved to be an expert in all the technical building steps; she was results-oriented and focused on clients’ satisfaction. Not only that, but she also had a loyal following of some of the most talented subcontractors in town. This turned out

to be serendipitous timing, and Mary Anne Smiley Design + Build was born in January. This new service has also allowed the firm to begin developing custom homes at Lake Athens. “We have procured two of the last lots sold on Lake Athens to custom build two new homes. Lake Athens is one of the most sought-after locations for getaway lake homes because of its pristine beauty, spring fed lake and beautiful surroundings of pines and hardwood trees and it’s proximity to Dallas—a mere hour and fifteen minutes away,” enthuses Smiley.

In addition to her design work, Smiley is proficient in AutoCAD—the design software that architects, engineers, and construction professionals rely on to create precise 2D and 3D drawings. So the design process for her Design + Build clients is fast, streamlined, and participatory. In a remodel project, an AutoCAD drawing uses the existing structure’s floor plan and clearly shows the desired changes along with the art and furniture placement and lighting plan. A client can say, “I want two chairs there instead of one,” and the drawing can be amended to allow for it easily, before construction begins. Now the expanded team is happily working on 25 projects instead of 10. **P**