

# Five Designers

WHAT'S ON THEIR RADAR

BY KATIE MCNEW | PHOTOGRAPHS BY KILLY & MAX BURKHALTER

**Trends fade, yes, but style—that's eternal.** Whether they're experts on hotels, homes or restaurants, these five designers know what's hot and what's not in the world of design, as well as how to add their signature stamp to any interior. We asked for their advice on how to make a space tell a story all its own.



# 1

**Lauren Rottet**  
President and Founding Principal, Rottet Studios  
Project: Hotel Alessandra, GreenStreet

**When you were working on Hotel Alessandra, who was your inspiration?**  
Dominique de Menil, who was such an icon in Houston, and who epitomized the contrast between complete sophistication and the oil business.

**What's your most unique design request?**  
A man in Dallas once requested a fire pole from his office to his father's office, so that when the secretary called him, he would just appear, and no one would know how he got there so fast.

**What's your favorite material to work with?**  
Glass, because it reflects and absorbs, and it's so versatile and durable.

**Name one must-have accessory for the home.**  
White-linen hand towels.

**What's your best bang-for-your-buck decorating tip?**  
Instead of using an accent wall, paint a rectangle on the wall as a backdrop to frame furniture. It's incredibly powerful for holding the eye and giving the wall presence.

**Name a home-decorating trend on the rise, and one on the way out.**  
I hope industrial chic is on the way out! Collectable furniture is on the way in; people are being more discerning with their purchases and want to know the pedigree of the piece before buying.

**What's an easy DIY project anyone could do?**  
If you have a guest coming, fold your towels and washcloths neatly and wrap them with a big ribbon, so they look fresh and special.

**Name a simple element that makes a big impact.**  
Focusing of view. Use your curtains and furniture to direct the gaze through the window towards what's pretty to clean up the ugly.

**What's your favorite Houston design-savvy hot-spot?**  
The Great Hall at the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, where the lovely old building meets the totally modern Mies van der Rohe addition.

PHOTOS BY KILLY

# 2&3

**Kelie Mayfield and Erick Ragni**  
Architects and founders, Mayfield and Ragni Studio  
Project: CITYCENTRE Multifamily Apartments

**What's the most challenging design you completed?**  
*Ragni:* As Frank Lloyd Wright once said: "The next one."  
*Mayfield:* We do these art fairs every year that have no budget and an extremely short time frame, and they always need to be installed in three days and taken down in a day. So how do you design a rectangle that looks different every year with these constraints? We learn a lot from these design exercises.

**What's your most unique design request?**  
*Ragni:* We've designed unusually large showers... that can accommodate lots of people.  
*Mayfield:* For one corporate client,

we did a 60-foot entertaining bar that housed everything from a video art installation, to library bookshelves, to yoga balls and customizable chairs that all folded back in.

**What's your favorite material to work with?**  
*Ragni:* This is totally the arrogant-architect answer, but space.  
*Mayfield:* Mirrors and concrete.

**Name one must-have accessory for the home.**  
*Ragni:* Nest Thermostat. I just put it in my house, and I love it. It's a smart thermostat that learns based on your behavior and makes your house more efficient.  
*Mayfield:* Sonos player.  
*Ragni:* Interesting that we both went tech.

**What's your best bang-for-your-buck decorating tip?**  
*Ragni:* You need less space than you think you need.

*Mayfield:* You don't need formal dining rooms or formal living rooms.  
*Ragni:* Or the guest room. Or an office for him and her.  
*Mayfield:* We help clients realize that space can be convertible, and used in many different ways.

**Name a home-decorating trend on the rise, and one on the way out.**  
*Mayfield:* Everything is shrinking. People are realizing that they don't need big houses or big offices. Everything is becoming much more efficient these days.  
*Ragni:* And thus we see a rise in multifamily developments, as people become empty nesters and downsize. Media rooms and

theaters are going out for sure.  
*Mayfield:* Technology is advancing. You can be watching something and take it to your tablet or your iPhone. You don't have to go to that big experience.

**What's your go-to design aesthetic?**  
*Mayfield:* Modern sensibility.  
*Ragni:* Timelessness with a twist. And a twist is not style. It's personality.

**Name a simple element that makes a big impact.**  
*Ragni:* Another cheesy one, but something unique and customized to that person.  
*Mayfield:* A first-impression piece. For example, an exaggerated, long, reception, "everything" desk that's a one-of-a-kind, one-off piece. That's one of our signatures.

**Name your favorite color pairings.**  
*Ragni:* Black and grey.  
*Mayfield:* We like greys.

**What's your favorite Houston design-savvy hot spot?**  
*Mayfield:* Noguchi Garden, outside the Museum of Fine Arts.  
*Ragni:* Bistro Menil. There's restraint. And that's hard to find in a restaurant. Same with Tiny Boxwoods. It feels genuine.

