



Corporate-exec-turned-interior-designer Wanda Alexander sits in the guest room she designed for her Virginia home.

HGTV Inspired Me

From info tech to design trek: Wanda Alexander gives clients what they want – with a little Panache

ONCE WANDA ALEXANDER GOT HER FIRST TASTE OF DESIGN SCHOOL, she ditched her high-paying corporate job and never looked back.

Alexander always had a natural talent for interior design, but pushed it aside for her stable corporate job in the information technology industry — a job she managed for more than 25 years. To quench her decorating thirst, Alexander devoted her nights to watching her favorite HGTV shows, such as “Sensible Chic” and “Divine Design.”

But in 1991, her company began a restructuring initiative, and her once-stable six-figure job became uncertain.

Inspired by her favorite HGTV shows and bolstered with some formal design education, Alexander took the leap and created Panache Interiors. She modeled her business after “Sensible Chic” by promising her clients to make their homes look like a million dollars without the high cost.

“My mom and I used to watch (other design) shows and say, ‘I can do that for a lot less money,’” Alexander says. “I keep that in mind whenever I decorate a new home.”

Before starting her business, Alexander noticed that people who had home renovations usually complained about their designers and decorators.

“Decorators, on occasion, will do what they want to do,” Alexander says. “Some people would hate stripes, but their decorator would do stripes anyway. You can’t do that and expect your client to walk away happy.”

About the Subject

WHO: Wanda Alexander, Panache Interiors, Leesburg, Virginia
WHAT: Left the corporate world to create her own interior design firm
INSPIRATION: “Sensible Chic” and “Divine Design”

To ensure her clients leave satisfied, Alexander meets with all members of the household to get a sense of each family member’s style – another idea she got from watching her HGTV shows.

“It’s really important that the house reflects the people living in it and does not reflect me,” Alexander says. “It’s a process that a lot of decorators just miss.”

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– wanda alexander

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Alexander has redesigned more than 40 homes across the country, including properties in Los Angeles, Miami, Virginia and Maryland. Her clients include professional athletes, politicians and television personalities.

“The best part of what I do is seeing a person’s face light up when they step into their new home,” she says. “I can do this forever.”

—by Whitney Boyd
photography by Bonnie Horseman

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FULL PAGE AD
COVER 3