

MASTER OF THE

The Natural

INTERIOR DESIGNER DONNA VALLONE FORGES A METEORIC CAREER OUT OF INNATE TALENT AND SOLID EXPERIENCE

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Years ago, as a kid in college, Donna Vallone would have laughed if someone told her she was destined to be an interior designer. She had her sights set on becoming a teacher.

Today, this Master of the Southwest has a successful Scottsdale design studio, has completed projects both in the U.S. and abroad, and is sought out by clients and by professionals in allied trades. Her daughter, Berkley, was named a Young Gun interior designer by *Phoenix Home & Garden*, and is part of Vallone's expanding firm. And one of her two sons, Zach, is the company's vice president.

Vallone recalls loving interior design as a child growing up in a small farming town in Pennsylvania. Her mother was a strong influence, the designer says, for even in a rural area, "she always had glamorous furnishings. I inherited her eye for the unusual and the beautiful."

Vallone's family relocated to Phoenix when she was in high school. At Arizona State University, she majored in education and minored in "home furnishings," taking courses for pure fun that were then part of a home economics department. Intent on teaching, she earned bachelor's and master's degrees in education and special education respectively. She taught elementary school for a few years, and later was director of education at a private psychiatric hospital.

Call it fate or karma, but her love for interior design bubbled to the surface after Berkley, her second child, was born. Vallone took a leave of absence from her hospital position. "I went back to school and took courses at Scottsdale Community College, in their design program, and I never went back to the hospital," she reports.

Along the way in her new career, she joined forces with two other designers and created Berkley House, named after her daughter. She later accepted a position at Wiseman & Gale Interiors, and credits then-owner Anne Gale—also a Phoenix Home & Garden Master of the Southwest—as having taught her the fine points of the business. Having been in a decade-long association with Gale before founding Vallone Design in 2001, she reflects: "I learned so much from Anne. She is the master of masters. She was the mentor of mentors, in creativity, design and in business sense."

Gale, now retired, says of Vallone: "She has an unerring eye for

design details, which makes her work very interesting and finished. We were sad to see her leave Wiseman & Gale, but glad that she was 'growing on' to start her own business, which has been a tremendous success."

The owner of the remodeled Paradise Valley residence featured on these pages had worked with Vallone on her and her husband's first home and, over the years, on others in Hawaii and Colorado. "Donna has elevated my taste," she comments, "but she is always open to hearing my ideas, too. She wants the finished product to look fabulous, but she has no ego attached to it."

In addition to homes, Vallone has put her stamp on several commercial projects, among them Paradise Valley Country Club, Silverleaf Country Club and the recently remodeled El Chorro Lodge.

Her skills have been recognized by architects and builders who have worked with her over time. Architect Mark Candelaria, AIA, also a Phoenix Home & Garden Master of the Southwest, comments: "She has the versatility to design and decorate a formal home, as well as a relaxed and informal home, with equal sophistication and execution."

Builder Greg Hunt has known the designer for many years. "I first met Donna on a remodel 24 years ago and immediately was impressed. Fast forward to 2011, and she still impresses me with her vast knowledge of materials and vendors, literally worldwide," he says. Adds builder Jerry Meek: "She listens well, processes thousands of elements, and produces design plans with ease, enthusiasm and enjoyment."

Years after entering her unplanned design career, Vallone, an Allied Member of ASID, says she is as much in love with it now as when she started out in the late 1970s. "I like the creativity. I like the clients. And most have become my good friends." □

Opposite: Interior designer Donna Vallone is seated in the exotic piano alcove of a Paradise Valley Mediterranean-style home designed by the late George Christensen, a well-known Arizona architect. Over time, Vallone has been involved in an expansion of the residence and phased remodeling of select areas.

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This page: The remodeled kitchen shows Donna Vallone's penchant for mixing diverse materials. An antique crystal chandelier lives well with cream-color painted and glazed furniture-style cabinetry. A table-style dining island (foreground) has a zinc top the designer had made in France. Next to the range, a second Calcutta marble-topped island contains a section of butcher block, and, in its base, two refrigerator drawers. Flooring is reclaimed oak.

Opposite: Vallone designed the foyer's built-in window seat, cozying up the carved wood unit with colorful cushions. Displayed on the walls are mementos from the homeowners' Far East travels.





This page and opposite: “Bumping out” the original dining room resulted in this dining/sitting room combination, which opens to a patio and offers ample space for various types of entertaining, says interior designer Donna Vallone. The large room is defined by hand-scraped pecan flooring and a box-beam ceiling made of natural oak timbers. Seating 12, the dining table is made of pear wood. Surrounding it are black-painted and gilt-trimmed Regency-style chairs with tiger-print velvet upholstered backs. The sitting area is an inviting setting, with its antique stone fireplace, quartet of easy chairs and an outsize tufted-leather ottoman/coffee table.





Left: With cream-color wall paneling trimmed in gold, a crystal chandelier and a free-standing pewter-clad tub, “her” side of the master bath displays a mood of “femininity and glam,” says designer Donna Vallone. The lady of this house comments: “Donna’s designs are timeless. They really stand the test of time—just like a couture gown that never goes out of style.” **Below:** An existing detached guest house was refurbished by Vallone in a recent renovation. Natural woven wood blinds and a botanical print on upholstered pieces lend the guest quarters’ sitting room an airy feel. **Opposite:** Created during an expansion project, this second-story loggia, with beamed overhang, provides a well-used venue for outdoor living. The alfresco sitting room is warmed by a stone fireplace flanked by built-in bancos. Bold-pink cushions here and on wicker seating, plus a colorful carpet, give the space an indoor quality. Lighting is provided by iron wall-hung lanterns and a candle-style chandelier.

See Sources.

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