

A Flawless Fusion

After meeting at the New York School of Interior Design, this design duo joined forces to start their own company, Villalobos Desio. Together they blend various cultures in their designs, as well as old and new pieces, to create unique stories for their clients.

By Christine Aebischer

Growing up in Italy, Mercedes Desio has fond memories of helping her stepfather design floor plans; while in Colombia, Alberto Villalobos' favorite childhood game was going to the country and building houses. After each of them studied business and realized it wasn't for them, they decided to follow their passion for interior design, which led them to the New York School of Interior Design, and to each other. "We got along really well, we're both foreigners, and [the company] was a way for us to kind of be known and to stay here," says Desio. "It was a gamble, really, and it paid off."

In addition to their design company, Desio and Villalobos also launched an antiques showroom, ETOS, in New York City. The pair's international background coupled with their love of travel provides them with limitless inspiration, while their eye for antiques allows them to add one-of-a-kind elements to capture their clients' backgrounds. "A house needs to reflect [the client] and their history," says Villalobos. "It's not just about the designer, it's about representing [the client]."

This philosophy has led Villalobos Desio to several projects throughout the U.S. and abroad, and also to the Kips Bay Decorator Show

House, where they were a featured design firm for this year's event.

Making Old New Again:

Incorporating antiques into a room not only helps the pair keep their designs fresh, but it also creates character in the space that can't be duplicated. "Everything is mass produced today. Even the most expensive pieces, you know it's never one-of-a-kind," says Desio. "Every [antique] is a new beginning."

For Villalobos, antiques create a "modern memory" for the client,

"something with a little bit of humor." They "help clients create history and a moment in time in their houses," he says.

Desio and Villalobos travel around the world searching for the perfect pieces, either for their own showroom or their clients.

Combining Cultures:

Between their own differing cultural backgrounds and their various cultural influences, the twosome incorporate European, African, pre-Columbian, Asian and American styles in their designs. This may

sound overwhelming, but Desio describes it as “organic.”

“It is not without challenges, but we are both with different backgrounds. It is easy in a way – we bounce ideas off each other and put each other in frame. It’s what makes our style work.”

The Dating Game:

“When the relationship between the client and us is a good one, it’s like fun dating,” says Villalobos. “Like dating, every client and project has a different view ... it all depends on the chemistry with the client.”

Each project claims Villalobos’ heart, making the end bittersweet — “breakups are hard” — but the promise of the next relationship makes the moving on process easier. “As long as the relationship with the client is good, we’ll go anywhere,” says Villalobos.

“Now you can tell which is the Latin lover of the two of us,” jokes Desio.

Their Must-Haves:

No matter the theme of a room, some things can’t be sacrificed. For Desio, lighting is the most important element, for both the space in general and individual items. “It can either make or break a room,” she says. For Villalobos, no room is complete without an end table. “You need a place to put your drink,” he states.

Luxury That Lasts:

While homeowners are looking to make their spaces as beautiful as possible, it’s also important that every space is functional, according to Desio and Villalobos. “They want to use every room,” he says, so they strive to make every space “luxurious but comfy.”

One of the ways they achieve this is by using outdoor fabrics in indoor spaces, such as on couches, headboards and dining room chairs. These fabrics, which are especially useful in homes with children, ensure that the spaces can be both aesthetically pleasing and user-friendly. “You don’t want to compromise look, and you don’t want to have a sofa you have to get rid of in a year,” says Villalobos.

Staying Neutral:

Having worked with many art collectors, the designers find that keeping colors neutral is best so as not to overpower the pieces. “The room has to be a neutral box,” says Desio. “Every surface and every piece has to be spectacular and beautiful.” The pair loves to work with different shades of gray, incorporating color through fabric and art.



MIDTOWN PIED-A-TERRE NEW YORK CITY

FEEL “We wanted to create a relaxing environment designed to make our client feel at home during his short stays in New York. By crafting a warm gallery setting, we afforded him the ability to display his art and artifacts. Our goal was to transform the space into a cabinet while also ensuring that it was clutter-free and sharp, the ideal setting for contemplation and recharging and the ultimate pied-a-terre.”

Kips Bay Decorator Show House:

Villalobos Desio was one of the younger firms chosen to design a room in the Madison Avenue mansion, and as such, they were given the smallest one in the house. While designing a room in a confined space and with limited time presented its challenges, overall the duo doesn’t think they could have asked for a better experience. “It was a great learning experience, seeing what we can do in a short period of time and learning from others who have been [in the industry] longer,” says Desio.

“It was a big honor,” says Villalobos. “We’re really happy how it turned out.”



round lamp



NOMAD EAST 29 ST. NEW YORK CITY

FEEL “We wanted the interior to have the same humorous and kinetic feeling as the young couple living in it. This is communicated by focusing on highlights from their travels and diverse interests. We created a basic canvas that the clients could use to voice their personality and comfortably continue to embellish once our job was finished. We wanted the couple to be an integral part of the process and we encouraged them to express the essence of their style.”



side tables



asymmetrical tables



scroll tables