

# A HOME WITH HEART

BY ROSY ALVAREZ

Crystal Maki is the founder of Silverwing Interiors, an interior design firm that specializes in authentic, livable luxury for busy people. Her work takes her all over the country with current projects in Connecticut, New York's Upper East Side, Coastal New Jersey, and several large metropolitan suburbs. Her decade of experience combining trademark whimsy, timeless detail, and a brave eye for color breathes new life into any home.

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Maki's creative spirit and love for art led to a non-traditional career path. After moving to London to attend University, she fell in love with the old-world style and preservation on every corner of the city. The resemblance of English townhomes to the century-old brownstones in that of her native Brooklyn were both familiar and unique. Crystal recalls thinking, "What both New York and London did was expose me to all kinds of beauty". Living in both cities influenced her eye for design and would be key to her success later in life. Maki attributes her ability to predict evolving trends to being raised in one of the style capitals of the world. Growing up in a city of juxtaposing ideas; old and new, rich and poor, shiny and dull, dirty and clean, it was a balance of maximalism and minimalism that expanded her vision and kept her sharp. "NYC is a world of contradictions", it's glamorous and full of possibility. London is beautiful and steeped with history and tradition which makes me look at things from a different angle." she shared.

Long before founding Silverwing Interiors, Maki worked in network television production at WNBC New York and Good Morning America, which fulfilled her need to hunt for stories and keep her finger on the city's ever-changing pulse. While the role developed her skills in creative storytelling and conducting thorough research, it simply wasn't her passion. Maki's next move took her into the publishing world before deciding to complete a Master's Degree in Elementary Education. She spent the next 10 years as a teacher. While Maki enjoyed that period of her life, she knew it wouldn't last long after having children of her own. A handful of years after her third child was born, she was ready for the biggest – and final – career move.





Serendipitously, a friend expressed displeasure with her current interior designer then asked Crystal if she'd be interested in assuming the role and completing the home's design. She took this golden opportunity to begin building her portfolio and it was the catalyst for what has become her life's passion. The homeowners were so impressed with the outcome that they urged Maki to start her own business. "Working on their house led to my taking classes at the New York School of Interior Design, then the projects just continued to come in, I guess the universe supported my career choice", she shared.

Maki expressed gratitude for being able to start her career with people she knew. "I don't think I could have started with a stranger", she said. "For me, it was wonderful to work with friends because we already had a relationship based on trust. I think when there is mutual respect and admiration, it yields a higher level of creativity and everything is more harmonious. This shows in the outcome, one hundred percent." A good client/designer relationship is at the heart of what makes good design and Maki and her firm work to achieve just that. Her meticulous eye for detail always produces a breathtaking final product, but she makes sure to offer the disclaimer that good things take time.

While Maki's vibrant energy and personal grit are qualities to admire, she expresses a tinge of sadness that she never had a mentor to show her the ropes. Much of her early career in interior design was spent self-teaching, learning by doing, and gaining as much knowledge as she could from school. "Going to art school was amazing, but it was a lot of work, I did it while I had three children who, at a certain point, begged me to stop because it took up so much of my time. While I'm fortunate I had people along the way who shared their knowledge, there was never the one I felt I could call for absolutely anything. I'd love to be that for someone."

For any creative, a major element of differentiation is the style they're known for; those particular details in their work that make it special and subtly identifiable. As a newfound interior designer and entrepreneur without formal industry experience, this muscle can only be strengthened with tenure. Maki says, "I think design and art are so subjective. Time has helped me trust myself more in the decision-making process. However, there are visual things I just know innately, including the way colors interact and patterns work with each other - which isn't even about trust, it's just part of my fiber and artistic nature. It's taken a while, but I have come to terms with the fact that not everyone will like my work. I know now that if I stay true to my artistry, I will make a happy, functional, unique home for the right clients".







climbing rugs, art center, and personalized library, complete with chalkboard paint accents.

Experiences like these are the best reminders of why she enjoys her work. “I love the art of it all, and I am truly rewarded when I see real-time reactions as a home is revealed. I know my profession leans toward luxury, but there’s such a special element of everyday realism that shines through when clients realize their lives have been made better.”

Today, 10 years into her career, Maki has officially found her groove and could not be happier. I help people live in their homes well and come home to beauty. This feels really important, “I am grateful that I am able to make a positive impact in so many people’s worlds”, she says.

Alongside her love of blending old-world style and modernity, Maki is really known for incorporating a bit of whimsy into every project. When asked what whimsy means to her, Maki responded “It means fun, playfulness, and joy; something that makes you smile, or takes you back to your youth. Maybe it’s also a combination of adult, contemporary living, and the playfulness of being a child. However, to do it right, it must be refined or it can definitely border on tacky. I think the Brits do this very well”. Many of Maki’s designs incorporate statement architectural elements, bold color, patterned tiles, and enthralling art. Playing with patterns and colors fill her spaces beautifully and offers eye-catching and interesting designs that give her projects an extra layer of personality.

One of her favorite projects to date was for a family with two young children who relocated to New Jersey from Virginia with a baby on the way during the pandemic. Maki was commissioned to reimagine a lower-level playroom as a special present from the new baby to her two big sisters. Maki got to work and installed the playroom in two weeks while the family returned to Virginia to welcome baby Miles. What a tremendous surprise when, upon arrival, they were “greeted” by a rock wall, custom mural, indoor swings,

The pandemic has allowed Maki’s business to grow exponentially. While she’s excited about the new canvases that are coming her way, she also makes sure to stay true to herself and pick up the projects that most excite her. With glee in her voice, she detailed a funky pied-à-terre in the Upper East Side that she’s looking forward to working on. The owner rented out the apartment for years but when the pandemic hit, her tenant moved out. Maki was hired to take on the task of upgrading the entire unit. “The client wants it to be hot pink, black and white, with brass accents and neon signs. The client specified, ‘I want to visit and have a martini with my girls before we go out,’ which is amazing! It’s entirely in my wheelhouse, very go big or go home,” Maki says.

When asked if she had a dream project, Maki came up with a few. One of her earliest projects was a complete renovation of a Brooklyn brownstone and she’d jump at the chance to work on another. The list also includes a London townhome she can gut and remodel or a boutique hotel or restaurant. No dream is too big or out of reach for Maki and the same holds true for her clients.