

# An Eye for Design

Story by Shea Allen | Photography Submitted

There is a reason they say work is a four letter word. For so many, a job is what we labor through five days a week in order to enjoy the sweet reward of the weekend, then it's back to the grind on Monday morning. Sure, we're pleased with our work and far be it for us to scoff at any job in this economy, but our hearts do not go pitter patter at the sight of quarterly reports and strategy plans.

Then there are those fortunate few who live to work rather than work to live. They are the dreamers who were just crazy and gutsy enough to dive head first into their dream to make it a reality. Penny Bowen is one of those anomalies who truly relish every morning she gets to wake up and go to work. The owner of Penny Bowen Designs, Inc. and Bella Interiors, Penny knew from a ripe old age of pre-teen that design was her passion and that one day it would be her livelihood, but she couldn't possibly have known then where her career would have taken her.

"In middle school, I took a drafting class and immediately fell in love," Penny said. "I knew from that point that I would definitely go into architecture or design of some sort. I don't remember ever wanting to do anything else."







LaRiva Condo dining area in Perdido Key of Pensacola, FL (2012)





Lobby of local business in  
Starkville, Miss. (2012).





A custom designed kitchen in local Columbus, Miss. (2011)

As one of Mississippi Business Journal 2012 50 Leading Business Women, Penny's designs are notably seen around the world as far as Canada and Mexico. She reached for nature for inspiration bringing the colors of the Caribbean and neutral tones from the sand to the fabrics and textures in the room (next page). Her designs also can be seen close to home in places such as locally owned businesses in Starkville, Miss. (left).

Penny's design inclination started showing even earlier than her middle school drafting class. As an army brat, Penny and her family moved all over the world every few years, and with each move, Penny tasked herself with making her new room home in a way that was uniquely hers.

"I loved decorating my room and redecorating my room every time we moved," Penny said. "My parents always seemed to buy a fixer-upper everywhere we moved, so I always lived in a construction environment."

As a child, Penny's room was her sanctuary – her constant home base regardless of if that base was in Germany, Guam, or the U.S. – and she credits her military upbringing with molding her into the successful, outgoing, and flexible person she is today.

Penny attended the Art Institute of Atlanta and later transferred to Mississippi University for Women to complete her Bachelor of Arts in interior design, which helped her hone the talent that was innate within her.

"I have always been an organizer, and I like order and balance," Penny said. "I believe school is necessary to gain vast knowledge of your career choice, but design is something you must be born with. Thus, to be a great designer, you need both."

During college and after graduation, Penny worked for a local architecture firm where she gained invaluable building design and drafting experience. After five years at the firm and not wanting to neglect the interior designer inside her, she yearned for a hands-on way to combine her two design passions into one career and found herself working for a local flooring company. There, Penny was able to work with clients to add the finishings to their home with everything from flooring, paint, wallpaper and draperies.

Armed with construction design knowledge and interior design expertise, Penny started Penny Bowen Designs, located in downtown Columbus, in 1996.

"It was a home-based business that specialized in custom home design, drafting and interior design consultation, which utilized both sets of design skills that I love so much," she said. "It is rare to find an interior designer who has such knowledge of building design and construction. I think it gives us the smart edge over other designers with only artistic abilities."





Outdoor living space in Mexico. (2012)

Penny is an entrepreneurial triple threat with her architecture experience, design talents, and passion to please her clients. But what has made her most successful are the relationships she builds with each of her clients. It is her ability to listen to her client's wishes and ideas that has turned her clients into friends. It is that personalized attention to her clients that eventually led Penny to open her second business, Bella Interiors, in 2006.

"After years of designing custom homes, additions, and renovations and providing interior design consultation, I saw the need for a one-stop shop for selecting finishes and furnishings to complete the whole design," Penny said. "Bella is truly a dream come true for me because I love what I do and thrive on the opportunity to help a client from start to finish."

Bella Interiors is Penny's second business, which focuses more on the interior decorating portion of renovations. It features a unique blend of architectural samples, flooring, rugs, furniture, lamps, window treatments and other home décor items.

Penny's success with Bella Interiors has even surpassed her own expecta-

tions. Perhaps one of the most surprising accomplishments for Penny is that Bella designs can be seen internationally as she has designed home renovations in Mexico and Canada. One of Penny's favorite designs was for the Baxter family in their Akumal, Mexico home.

Akumal is nestled between Playa del Carmen and Tulum on the beaches of the Caribbean Sea in Mexico. The family enlisted Penny's help to remodel their bathroom and kitchen. For the job, Penny drew inspiration from the local surroundings while keeping the design modern. The opportunity allowed Penny to travel to Mexico many times throughout the project, which was not only a treat for Penny to work in paradise, but it also served as inspiration for Penny to open her eyes to designs from different cultures.

"The owner and I shopped at market in Atlanta and various towns in Mexico to purchase all of the furnishings and accessories for the home," Penny said. "Whether it be contemporary or traditional, my job is to refine my client's style and take it to the next level."





Perhaps what makes Penny such a successful designer is not her impeccable tastes, but her listening skills. She spends her time getting to know her clients so that she can create designs that mean something to them and that speak to their personalities. Through the time she spends getting to know her clients, she is able to gain a strong understanding of what designs will work for them in their space so that the end result is loved by the homeowner.

“I love getting to know my clients personally,” Penny said. “I feel that is the only way to create a personalized space for them.”

With all the hard work and success Penny has seen through the years with her two businesses, she is still humbled and honored to be asked to help people with their design needs.

“I feel truly blessed to be able to do what I do every day,” Penny said. “It is very satisfying to create happiness for others. My goal in every project, large or small, is to look at each one with individualized focus to make it the best space possible for the owner.” ♦

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