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LITTLE BLACK DRESS

Equivalent to the iconic “little black dress,” this contemporary 4,022-square-foot lakefront home is a must-have. It’s stylish, effortless, and timeless... and like its fashion counterpart, once you own it, you can never go wrong. The home, that was originally built as a model, is situated in the upscale golf community The Concession. Brian Johnson, president and CEO of Johnson Homes of West Florida, a family-owned home builder since the 1970s, enlisted interior designer Amy Smith of Designs by Amy Lou for its design and staging, just as he does with all his other projects. Trust, the essential element of any successful relationship, is what keeps them together. ▶

Above: Low profile white leather seating in the living room is glamorized by indulgent black faux chinchilla pillows, and a posh emerald and gold cocktail table. When the weather is nice, a wall-to-wall sliding glass door can be opened to eliminate the barrier between the indoor and outdoor entertaining areas.

The dining room exudes Mid-Century modern flair, complete with a cream shag rug emblematic of the unforgettable design era. Although round, the marble-topped table gives the room an edge; its base, and the antique brass legs of the surrounding swoop chairs complement the intricate contoured lines in the artwork that was flown in from Milan by interior designer Amy Smith. The matte black chandelier is slender enough to not obstruct the view of the spectacular wine closet, powered by JennAir.



The smokin' hot kitchen features floor-to-ceiling white shaker cabinetry and matte white appliances with copper pulls from the Café Distinct by Design line. An urbane set of black leather and brass stools line up along the sleek Arabescato Pompeii Quartz waterfall island, which is smartly accessorized with a brass Moen faucet from Ferguson, Bath, Kitchen & Lighting Gallery. A trio of metal teardrop pendants, matte black outside and brass inside, impart high drama, and just beyond the opening, the Fossil Series Triptych by Grace Howl Contemporary Art transforms the hallway into a museum gallery.

“Brian is really good at letting us have our way with his projects,” jokes Smith. “I have never had him say no to any of our selections. He trusts our vision.” Besides trusting Smith, Johnson also makes it a practice to stay abreast of what’s trending. “We track trends on social media and see what’s popular in the markets that seem to be ahead of ours but are also careful not to miscalculate our own market by being too trendy,” Johnson explains.

So, when Smith presented black, and lots of it, to anchor the home’s palette, Johnson went along with it. “We wanted to achieve a modern vibe with drama,” says Smith, stating her case for the walls painted solid black and massive stone slabs she proposed. “I instinctively knew that I wanted black as my base.”

The designer’s belief in “letting the house tell her how it wants to look” never fails her. “I tend to let the home ‘speak’ to me,” she says. “If you try to coerce it or force things to fit that really don’t, you end up with a hodgepodge of items that tell no story.” Guided by the white walls, recessed lighting, and clean architectural details, Smith sensed exactly what she needed to add: furniture pieces that would be both chic and enduring, brass finishes throughout for the decorative lighting, hardware, and even appliances, and style-savvy accents like animal prints and rich jewel tones. “It just kind of morphed into this trendy New York vibe without me even trying,” she says. ▶



Above: Tall mahogany doors stained dark walnut, with over seven feet of glass, open to a stylish entry. A charcoal-colored antique-washed silk rug lays atop naturally aged white oak floors. An understated console features a high gloss lacquered top and shiny gold base fashioned into a Greek key motif. The collage of blackened brass decorative mirrors complements the cubed chandelier from Bee Ridge Lighting that hangs above the space.

Left: In a concentrated effort to bring impeccable style to the study, Smith chose a delicate black metal etagere and hung a stunning black, white, and gold abstract artwork above it. A pair of deep-seated Mid-Century modern lounge chairs swathed in a veiny velvet fabric sit before a solid glass waterfall desk. That, and the three-blade aerodynamic ceiling fan from Bee Ridge Lighting, take minimalism to the outer limit.





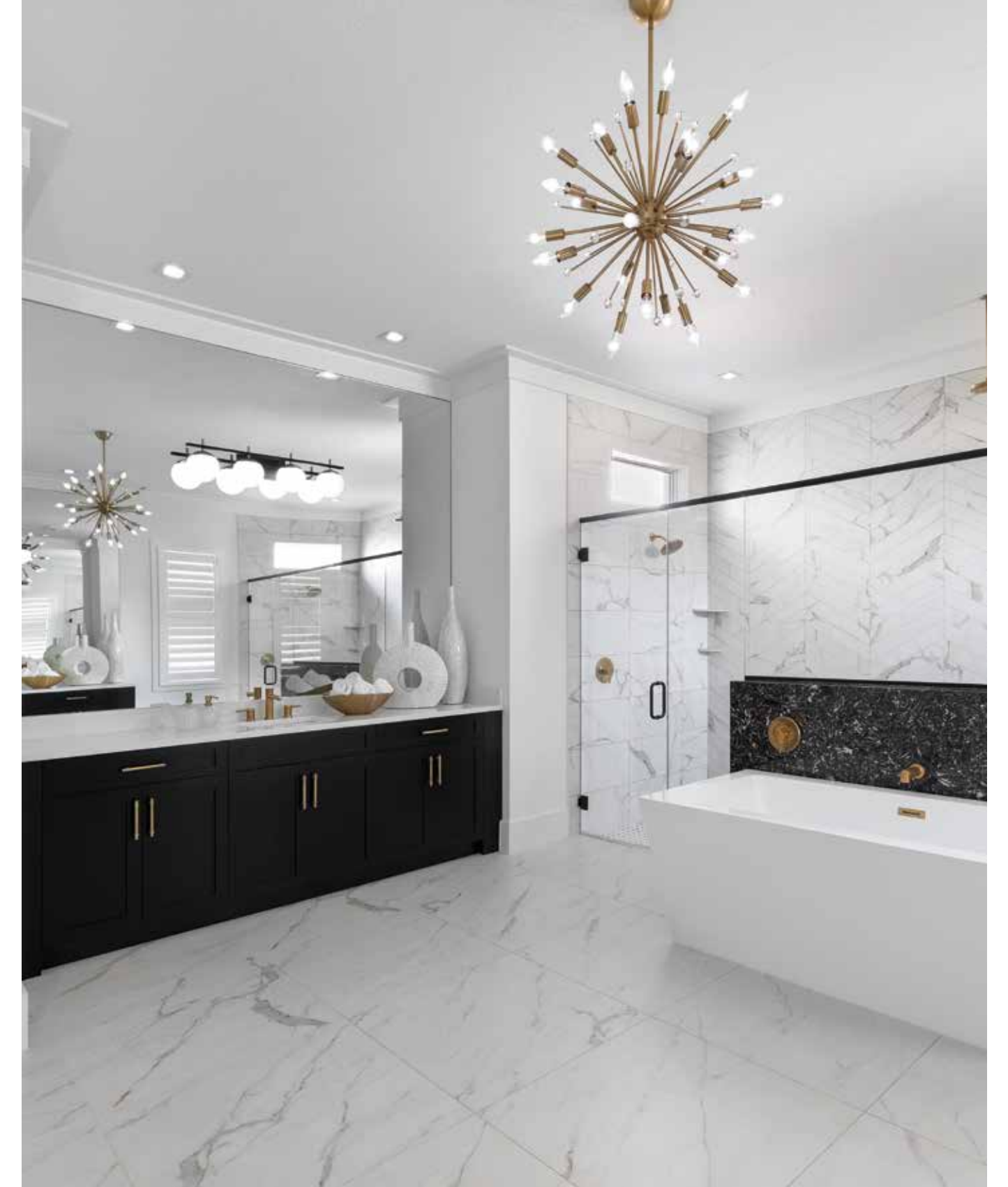
Above Left: Easily mistaken for the lobby of a chic boutique hotel, the master bedroom sitting area features a glam pair of gold-tone barrel chairs done in emerald velvet and accented by sexy cheetah-print pillows. Statement-making, nine-foot travelers palms in black clay pots from International Design Source stand in each corner, and a boxed starburst chandelier dangles overhead.

Above Right: The master bedroom's Lucite four-poster canopy bed is fashioned with patterns including velvet cheetah print, African mudcloth, and a banana leaf motif reminiscent of the Beverly Hills Hotel — a favorite of the Mid-Century glitterati. High-gloss white Art Deco nightstands and two emerald "alligator skin" lamps sit in front of massive gold mirrors that draw the eye upwards. A sculptural, Cubist black credenza adds dimension, and not to be outdone, the black and white geometric patterned wool rug refuses to lay low.



The ironic thing about staging: you never want it to look "staged." Smith achieves this with her designs by giving each room its own character and uniqueness. To do so, she asks herself the following questions: Who would live in this room? What would they want to do here? How would they want to feel?

Imagining the future residents helps Smith give the feeling of "real life" to a home, even if it's yet to be inhabited. "When you take the answers to those questions and then put them together like a puzzle, you have the perfect mix of design," she concludes. Johnson, too, has a few magic tricks of his own. "I did about 40 mini LED puck lights in the ceilings to accent the rooms," he says. "I've seen this before in pictures and love how it emulates stars in the sky." ■

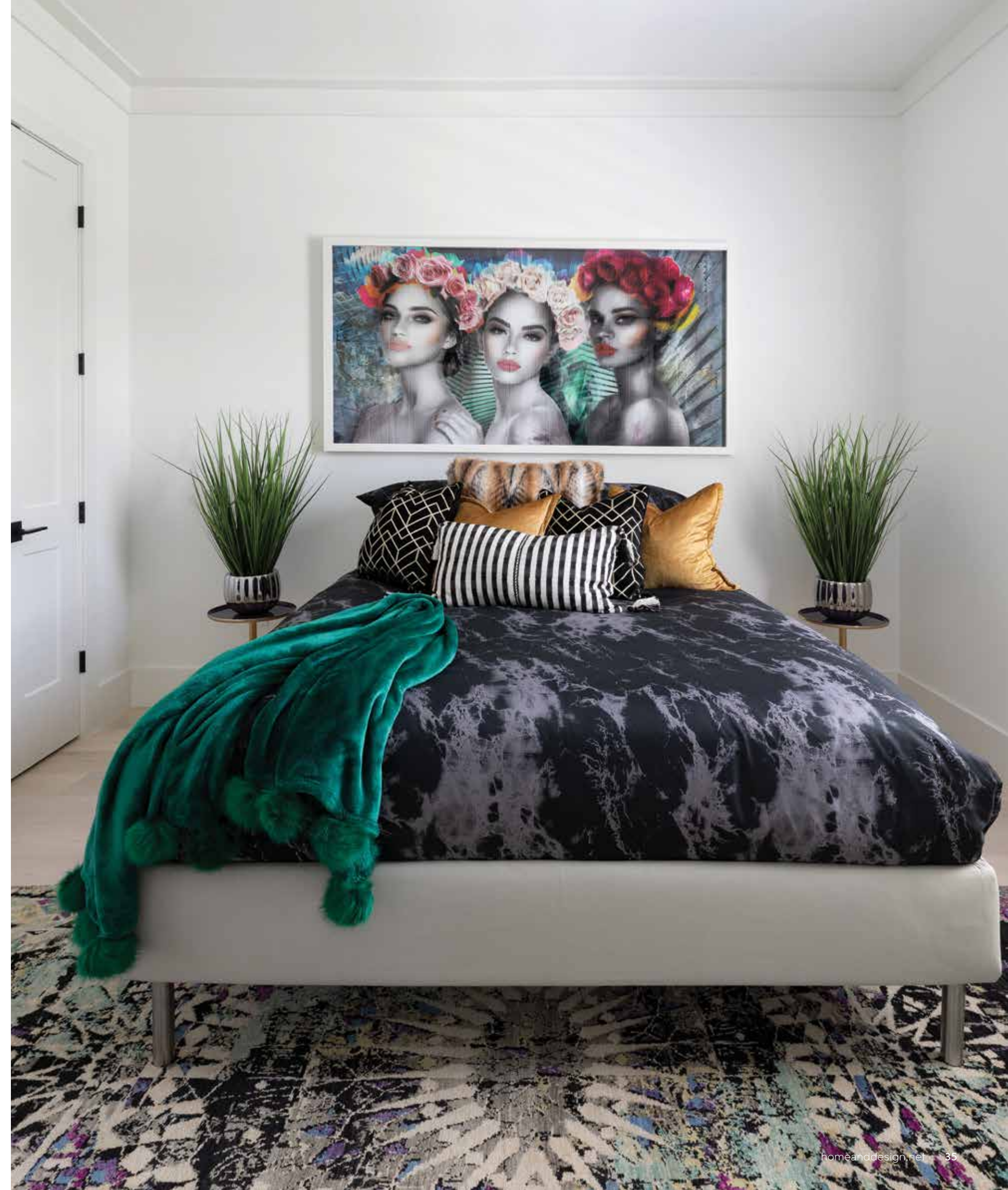


Above and Left: It's no-holds-barred panache in the master bath, where the walls and floors are treated to the ultimate: Calacatta Oro marble, grouted with sparkly gold. The floating slab of black Cosmic quartz, a focal point Smith was very excited to create, imparts a trendy, color-blocking vibe in the "insanely large" shower. The stand-alone tub has an appropriately modern silhouette, and the "Sputnik-style," 24-light chandelier from Bee Ridge Lighting radiates in brass and intermittent crystal — bringing a quirky, Mid-Century modern personality to the room.



Above: Smith retrofitted the black European two-door cabinet with a white acrylic front to embrace Grace Howl Contemporary Art's kinetic Vortex art hanging above it. And in the bath, she selected a black and white Moroccan tile to add extra character to the space.

Right: Visitors will find their guest room irresistibly alluring now that Smith has made it her own; she removed the headboard from the white linen and stainless platform bed and replaced it with a flirtatious, pop art image of Three Ladies from Rugs As Art. Slender side tables — gold pedestals with chunky square bases — are a funky substitute for traditional nightstands. A silky, marbled duvet cover is juxtaposed by geometric black and white, and solid gold accent pillows, and the Glyph rug — also from Rugs As Art — introduces unexpected pops of fuchsia, yellow, and periwinkle to the room.





Above: Clean lines characterize the contemporary exterior. Iron corbels custom-designed by Johnson support the roof and its chocolate-brown concrete tiles. White stucco in a shiplap-like design brightens the home's façade. The contrasting light and dark finishes of the exterior are indicative of the sophisticated scheme that lies within.



Above: The massive pocketing sliders, a result of Johnson's brilliant construction, make the lanai a veritable continuation of the interior. To appoint it in comparably high style, Smith repeats the black and white color scheme with a geometric rug and furnishings of black rope-loomed shells with white cushions. The tongue-and-groove ceiling is constructed of cypress stained in a finished called Boudreaux, which unexpectedly, runs down the range hood of the "fully loaded" outdoor kitchen.

In the living room beyond, Smith's "perfect black," Sherwin-Williams Tricorn Black, coats the swanky great room's entire focal wall. The built-in fireplace is adorned with crystals and lights up in alternating jewel-tone colors for incomparable drama. On either side is a mini bar clad with antiqued glass tiles in lieu of the anticipated mirrors.

Written by Robin Hodes
Photography by Jimmy White

Luxury Home Builder
Johnson Homes of West Florida
941.747.6165
johnsonhomeswfl.com

Interior Designer
Designs By Amy Lou
5317 Lena Road, Unit 107
Lakewood Ranch, FL 34211
479.926.5718
designsbyamyLou.com

Resources:

Bee Ridge Lighting
3909 Bee Ridge Road
Sarasota, FL 34233
941.922.2626
beeridgelighting.com

The Concession Residences
7700 Lindrick Lane
Bradenton, FL 34202
941.348.3448
theconcessionrealestate.com

Ferguson Bath, Kitchen & Lighting Gallery
2451 17th Street
Sarasota, FL 34234
941.951.0110
fergusonshowrooms.com

International Design Source
1734 Northgate Boulevard
Sarasota, FL 34234
941.552.2550
ids1.com

Grace Howl Contemporary Art
419 Central Avenue
Sarasota, FL 34236
941.539.5302
gracehowl.com

Rugs As Art
6650 South Tamiami Trail
Sarasota, FL 34231
941.921.1900
rugsasart.com