

DESIGNING WOMEN

By Lisa Summers
Photos by Ryan Lely

As young girls, our hours are spent arranging doll-house furniture, planning our own fairy tale weddings (complete with handed-down tiaras and discarded bridesmaid gowns) or foraging in our own backyards for violets and hidden fairy dwellings. That often comes to a complete halt when we enter high school and then college. Practical considerations can upstage our girlhood daydreams as we prepare to enter the workforce with a marketable degree. It is no wonder that, years later, when cribs and strollers displace the car in the garage, when we find the workplace to be less flexible and sensitive to the duties of motherhood than we hoped, and when we realize maybe Art History was our favorite class for a reason, those latent desires to design and create worlds in which style and beauty reign supreme resurface. But the road to reinvention is rocky (and littered with Cheerios).

Meet five inspirational and hardworking Sonoma Valley mothers: a wedding and event planner, a landscape designer, a Green-certified architect, a visual merchandiser and a consultant who helps clients rediscover their inner-princess, all with successful careers in and of their own designs.

**Amanda Brummé,
Architect with Architects Nash & Nash**

From early childhood, Amanda Nash Brummé was designing three-dimensional spaces. "My sister and I were always going to job sites with my dad, who was a builder." After graduating from Tulane, Brummé received her Masters in Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania where she studied under Adele Naude-Santos who she says was "brilliant ... a wonderful mix of bold statements and an honest self image." Brummé always thought one day she might work alongside her sister, Grace Nash, also an architect. In January of 2006, the two formed Architects Nash & Nash and they now work side by side at their downtown Sonoma offices.

Brummé's first real architecture job was on foreign soil. About a year after graduating from Penn, she was hired by a San Diego-based architect who was starting a firm in Singapore. Brummé went to work in Singapore for a year before the firm broke off and moved to Jakarta, Indonesia. "It was an incredible experience working in Singapore and Jakarta. We were always a small, high-end design group within larger companies working on a large array of projects. My main project was a group of thatched-roofed cottages on the beach in Bali. I spent hours understanding and detailing the structure of the thatched roof, and understanding the religious and Feng Shui requirements, which were incredibly important there. Every project had a Feng Shui priest who would review the designs. The local craftsmanship was remarkable."

Eventually Brummé found her way to Sonoma where she met Kristi Amoroso at the Farmers Market in downtown Sonoma. Amoroso and her husband had recently purchased an historic Sonoma stagecoach house, built in 1860. The house had been given an addition in the 1940s and was in need of some family-friendly upgrades. At the time, Brummé was working out of her house, trying to manage motherhood and freelance architecture. She began a casual conversation with Amoroso about adding on to the couple's historic home, eventually leading to her first residential redesign.

Amanda worked closely with Amoroso and her husband to "keep the feeling and propor-

tions of the old house." When she created an additional wing she was careful to create a space that reflected the scale of the original house, giving the addition the appearance of a side cottage, which allowed the home to appear in its original presentation from the street. "The whole project was such a great lesson for me in running my own business, and about how important your clients are."

"For a lot of people, hiring an architect is often the most anyone has ever spent out of pocket. I try to help people upgrade for minimal costs. One of the most difficult hurdles for me, for running a successful freelance business was to finally get to the point where I could charge for my work without always apologizing or offering to do things for free. Getting my own office, out of the house, made a huge difference." Amanda now sits in an office right off the Plaza.

Brummé recently became certified by Build It Green as a "Green Building Professional." "I found the training incredibly inspirational," even for the stately old California homes she loves that are often riddled with complicated structural problems. "But I have a really great engineer!"

When both Brummé and her husband were working and their two sons were really young, things could get overwhelming. On one occasion, she admitted, she jumped into her vintage VW Carmen Ghia to run away. "I got as far as Watmaugh Street and I ran out of gas. My sister called to invite me to dinner and I said, 'Thank you very much but I can't. I'm running away. Can you bring me some gas?' And she brought me some gas and I drove to the coast. The next day my whole family joined me." Now that her children are older, every one is a little more in step with her work schedule. "Finally, I stopped expecting so much. I realized it's okay to cook a frozen pizza and watch a little TV."

Although receiving her education in the U.S., Brummé's first architectural jobs were in Singapore and Jakarta.



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Brummé constructs models of her projects to give her clients an idea of what the finished project will look like.