

Rinfret sets standard on design

By Michael C. Juliano, Staff Writer

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Cindy Rinfret of Greenwich has designs on homes far and near.

Rinfret, a 1981 graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design, in 1991 opened Rinfret Home & Garden, a 4,000-square-foot shop at 354 Greenwich Ave., after moving to town with her family from New York City. Since then, she has beautified the interiors of about 400 homes in the United States, most of which are owned by investment bankers and celebrities.

"We work anywhere people want to send us," said Rinfret, who studied design at the University of Copenhagen School of Architecture and owns her design firm, Rinfret Ltd. "I'm very fortunate to have clients that let me do the work I do."

Rinfret's portfolio of work includes Regis Philbin's Greenwich home and a current redesign of Tommy Hilfiger's penthouse at the Plaza Hotel in New York.

She also is designing the interior to a four-floor penthouse atop The Ocean House, a 19th-century inn in Watch Hill, R.I., being rebuilt completely by Greenwich investor Charles Royce and other financial backers.

"It's just astounding," Rinfret said of the space offering 360-degree views of the ocean. "It's special to me because I went to the Rhode Island School of Design."

Rinfret's Greenwich home, Laurel Hill, was featured on the cover of the holiday 2009 issue of Traditional Home. She also was chosen as one of an elite group of designers in the Andrew Martin Interior Design Review and has been included in the Western Interiors Gold List for U.S. interior designers.

Having featured many of her design projects in her book "Classic Greenwich Style," Rinfret is working on a second book titled "Inspired Family Living" to show that interiors can be simultaneously functional and beautiful.

"Most of our clients have children and dogs," said Rinfret, who has worked on homes in Massachusetts, California and Colorado. "As beautiful as our interiors are, we design for real life."

Despite the slow economy, her business has done well enough to keep all 12 employees, Rinfret said.

"My loyal customers helped," she said.

Last year was a rough year for interior designers as homeowners put off improvements in the shaky economy, said Donna Straat, president of the Connecticut chapter of the American Society of Interior Design.

"People have been a lot more careful about what they want to do, but it's beginning to pick up again," she said.

Rinfret is one of several local interior design businesses that have made it through good times and bad, said Mary Ann Morrison, president and chief executive officer of the Greenwich Chamber of Commerce.

"In that business, a good part of it is relationships and customer service," she said.

"You're dealing with a very personal environment. This is their home."