

# COWGIRL™



# INTERIOR DESIGN

# BALANCING BEAUTY & FUNCTION

JENNIFER ROBIN INTERIORS

BY CHRISTY NIELSON

**INTERIOR DESIGNER** Jennifer Macdonald is a Northern California native, born and raised in Portola Valley and later in the foothills of the California Sierras. Inspired by her mother's design talents, Macdonald always knew she wanted to be an interior designer herself. To make her dream come true, Macdonald embarked on her formal educational journey earning her first degree in Art History from UC Santa Cruz. She then moved to San Francisco where she received a second degree in Architectural and Interior Design from the Academy of Art University.

Macdonald got an internship at a small firm while she was in school before eventually landing a job at Backen, Gillam & Kroeger Architects, a renowned firm with two locations in Northern California. Macdonald worked her way up from intern to lead designer at the firm. She ultimately left the company in 2007 to start her own full-service interior design company, Jennifer Robin Interiors (JRI), located in San Anselmo, Calif. (Robin is Macdonald's middle name.)

Macdonald says her professional mentors taught her a lot that helps her succeed on her own. "I learned that interior design and lifestyle go hand in hand, that interiors have to be a balance of beauty and function, and that interiors need to reflect who your clients are, but also complement the architecture and landscape." Macdonald says she is not a designer who stamps a signature look or brand onto her clients' projects. "I take my cue from my



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clients and develop a home that reflects them but still stays true to my design principals."

Architect Luke Wade worked with Macdonald at Backen, Gillam & Kroeger in the 2000s before they both left the company to start their own firms. (He founded Wade Design Architects in San Anselmo, Calif., with his wife Ani Wade). Wade and Macdonald have collaborated on a number of projects over the years, and he has nothing but admiration for her work.

"Jen has an incredibly intuitive sense for what will fit a project aesthetically—what I mean by that is she understands what the architecture is aiming for and has clarity about how her design vision can integrate and develop out of an established direction," says Wade. "We get a good feedback loop going, where her thoughts on finishes and furnishings help me tune the architectural detailing." He says

this helps them both tailor toward a more cohesive end result.

Macdonald says this is exactly what interests her most about the work she does—the iterative progression of the projects. "I work primarily on new construction homes, and this process involves the collaboration of architects, contractors, sub-contractors, landscape architects, lighting designers, furniture designers, artists, clients, and more," she explains. "What starts as a dream—a sketch on a paper—evolves to create a 'dream-come-true' home for the clients."



This wine country home was designed for large family gatherings and entertaining.



Indoor/outdoor living is celebrated at this mountain home in Truckee, California.

MACDONALD ADDS that it is very noticeable to her when interiors are layered on top of architecture rather than being fused together with it. She works to ensure that the finishes, lighting, plumbing, furniture, and fabrics complement and highlight the architecture's strengths. Often, Macdonald designs her own pieces to complete the look she's working on with her clients. "I think it is important to customize special one-of-a-kind pieces for each client," she says. "Each client's vision, family, and home is unique and needs to be celebrated as such."

Initially, JRI specialized in projects in the wine country of Northern California, but the business has now expanded to include clients in any location that celebrates indoor-outdoor living. Macdonald is known for her ability to "reimagine luxury living." She is a master at mixing traditional elements with modern lines and organic materials to create stunning, seamless interiors for projects that range from residences to wineries, restaurants, retail spaces, and hotels.

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"Luxury living does not need to mean interiors too precious to enjoy," explains Macdonald. "Luxury living to me means beautiful, elegant homes that are durable enough to handle indoor-outdoor living and realistic family life." She adds, "Not only do interiors need to handle the wear and tear of real life, but they also need to stand the test of time — to be classic and enduring, never trendy."

Macdonald's creativity, work ethic, positive attitude, organizational skills, and design knowledge have earned the praise of colleagues and clients alike. It has also made her the recipient of several professional accolades. Macdonald won the San Francisco Design Center's (SFDC) 2017 Designers of Distinction award in the Residential/Transitional category. This award comes on the heels of JRI's receipt of the SFDC's 2015 Designers of Distinction award in the Designer to Watch category. Macdonald was also named in Luxe magazine's 2017 Gold List.

To learn more about interior designer Jennifer Macdonald and to see more examples of her work, visit [jrobininteriors.com](http://jrobininteriors.com).

**RIGHT:** Sliding barn doors flank the focal-point fireplace in this wine country living room. **BELOW:** The master bathroom in this Lake Tahoe home is all about the layering of finishes and textures. It features a reclaimed wood vanity with concrete countertop and integral sinks.

## Decorating Pointers for a Rustic Home

Do you want to decorate like a pro? We asked interior designer Jennifer Macdonald to share her best advice for accenting a Western home.

- **Think Texture.** Incorporate and layer reclaimed woods, metals, and stones with textural fabrics and chunky rugs.
- **Be Authentic.** For example: select real wood, not porcelain tile made to look like wood. Avoid “faux” if possible!
- **Choose Character.** Select natural materials that can patina and age beautifully. This patina can add so much character to your home over the years!
- **Utilize Antiques.** I suggest at least one antique item per room; they add soul to the home.

