

Artful Living

WINTER 2014



Lakes | Sotheby's
INTERNATIONAL REALTY



Design From a Distance

Using in-town talent for an out-of-town project perfects the process.

BY IVY GRACIE

So your vacation home needs some updating. Or a complete face-lift. Maybe it needs to be torn down so you can start from scratch. How do you make that happen from a distance? Starting close to home could be the answer.

Talla Skogmo, principal of Talla Skogmo Interior Design in Edina, says that a long-distance project isn't much different from one right at home. It can be relatively stress-free when you work with someone you've worked with before — even if they're not on-site. "The comfort of working with someone you trust far outweighs the distance," she says.

Skogmo, a veteran of out-of-town projects, spearheaded a vacation home teardown for a long-time client who relocated from Minneapolis to Manhattan. Even though the project was in Port Royal, Florida, a luxury community at the southern end of Naples, the distance didn't hinder the process. "We worked with the client's existing furniture, we sent her packages with furniture selections and swatches — it was very easy," she says. "We took what we do for a project in Minneapolis and gave it legs."

To ensure the project went smoothly, Skogmo took her own advice and chose a Naples-based builder she had worked with in the past. Then she tapped into the builder's local expertise. "Once you have your contractor on board, you ask them, 'Who do you want me to work with?' It's really important to say, 'I'm on your team, and I want to work with the people you want to work with.'"

After the team was established, they used online conferences to keep the project on track and on time. "The Internet has opened up the opportunity to work from afar with ease," Skogmo says. "So we would be talking, and the builder would say, 'OK, Talla, you have the mouse now.' And I could sit at my computer and discuss the project as if we were all in my conference room looking at the blueprints."

But it wasn't all done from a distance. Skogmo traveled frequently to Florida to oversee the project: "We went there quite a bit because we were our client's eyes."

Early in the project, she concentrated on understanding the parameters of the job. "There were certain things we were used to doing that you couldn't do in Florida. We had to learn about



different materials — and hurricane codes. That's why it's good to work with someone who knows the city and its conditions and building codes."

Skogmo also worked with local vendors to select and secure bigger-ticket items, like the home's marble, stone and tile. "We were ahead of the game before they started building," she recalls. "Every stone, every tile, every slab was already selected, priced and purchased. It was a done deal."

"We always work hard to solidify the plan before we begin," she continues. "So by the time the client walks in the door, they're saying, 'Yes, this is exactly what I thought it would be.'"

Skogmo says working with someone you trust is the first key to ensuring a successful project. Then it's just a matter of proactive planning, constant communication and regular trips to the job. "It's really not that hard to do this from a distance," she notes. "People shouldn't be afraid of it." **A**

global perspective Working with a designer who is based elsewhere is seamless in today's tech-savvy world.