



# THE INNOVATORS 2023

*KBDN* recognizes a new group of innovators who, through their dedication to design and the industry, are forging the path for the future of the kitchen and bath trade.

**THE INNOVATORS CLASS** of 2023, as chosen by *Kitchen & Bath Design News*, includes a range of industry professionals who have not only helped guide the kitchen and bath industry in recent times but have excelled at leading by example. Highly regarded by their peers, the individuals chosen for this seventh class of Innovators are active in educating industry members as well as future design stars, volunteer for worthy causes within the design community and beyond, push the limits of design and lead through their entrepreneurship.

At a time when the design industry is in flux due to labor shortages, excessive lead times for materials and skyrocketing costs, industry professionals are responsible for keeping everything humming and maintaining consumer confidence. While that is no easy feat, leaders in the field are constantly investigating and delivering ways to move the industry forward.

The latest class of innovators includes those who are involved in professional organizations such as the National Kitchen & Bath Association, the American Society of Interior Designers and the National Association of the Remodeling Industry. They are presenters at seminars, mentors of those entering the field and leaders of their local chapters. They educate both professionals and clients about design and what is possible, and drive growth in the industry and their own businesses. They venture outside of their comfort zones to imagine, create and encourage.

*KBDN* honors these industry leaders through the naming of Innovators each year. The 2023 class includes 28 individuals who represent a cross-section of the design industry. *KBDN* invites readers to learn more about these professionals across the next seven pages.

## Lauren Schulte

*Advocating for the design industry and her local area leads to changes for designer*

Lauren Schulte has a Bachelor's degree in both Fine Arts and Psychology, which helps her blend her artistic viewpoint with her understanding of the psychological aspects in every remodeling project.

Schulte started her design career as a kitchen designer at The Home Depot in Buffalo, NY and moved on to working for one of the largest kitchen design firms in western New York. From there, Schulte opened up Monarch Kitchen Design Studio in 2019 in North Tonawanda, NY, now a successful luxury design business. The studio has since applied for and is waiting on the Women-Owned Business Certification (there are only two all-female-owned showrooms in all of western New York).

She has been a guest speaker on podcasts, a panelist at a national conference, and contributed to articles on kitchen design trends for national magazines. Schulte is also an advocate for her local community, writing and winning grants to help small businesses and organizations beautify, develop and improve their businesses and the community. A thought leader, Schulte was one of three young, energetic industry pros on the 2023 KBIS Next Stage in Las Vegas (Young, Edgy and Strong) sharing how they are making the world a different, better place and what they are doing to shape the future of kitchen and bath design.

Schulte also completed her first ever Junior League showhouse in 2023. She is a member of the Central New York NKBA chapter, a member of the Buffalo IDA and a member of the Buffalo chapter of the Junior League.



## Gabriel Sepulveda-Villarini

*Bold design choices mark award-winning career*

Gabriel Sepulveda-Villarini brings over two decades of experience to his role as senior interior designer for Jackson Design and Remodeling in San Diego, CA. His multiple award-winning career encompasses significant experience guiding clients through the design process and managing teams. His work has been honored by the American Society of Interior Designers' Design Excellence Awards, the National Association of Remodeling Industry's CotY Awards and *Qualified Remodeler's* Master Design Awards in 2022.

Born and raised in Puerto Rico, Sepulveda-Villarini was educated at the School of Architecture, University of Puerto Rico and, when later established in New York, he earned a Bachelor's Degree in Interior Design from the Fashion Institute of Technology. He is an Allied Member of the American Society of Interior Designers and an active member of the National Kitchen and Bath Association.

Sepulveda-Villarini is constantly exploring the design field and staying ahead of prevailing practices - setting trends rather than following them. Known for making daring choices, he discovers creative ways to use materials, and his forward-thinking approach considers how every aspect of a design, from layout to lighting, affects the people living in a space. An artist at heart, Sepulveda-Villarini is inspired by the creative process of sketching, drafting and space planning while developing innovative architectural designs.



## Judith Wright Sentz

*Designer is focused on educating peers and leadership*

Judith Wright Sentz, CKBD, CLIPP, earned her Master's Degree in Interior Design at Western Michigan University in 1981 while working in retail furnishings. After moving to the West Coast she became involved in the corporate design world, planning and specifying offices in the newly emerging tech industry and banking. In the 1990s, she helped design many bank branches west of the Rockies. After a corporate downsizing in 2011 (somewhat due to the popularity of ATMs), she established her own design business, Judith Wright Design in Seattle, WA, where she is CEO.

Wright Sentz served as president of the Western Michigan Chapter of the Interior Design Society for three years. In 2016, she earned her AKBD certification and began focusing on residential kitchens and baths. She became involved in the NKBA serving on committees and on the board of the Puget Sound Chapter. She was v.p. of Government Relations in 2017, elected v.p. of Membership from 2018-2021, earned her CKBD in 2020, and currently is serving as Chapter President for the 2022-2023 term.

Among her numerous regional awards for her kitchen designs, and a first place National Winner, HGTV recognized Wright Sentz as a People's Choice Award Winner. As a role model and mentor, she has been generous with her time in helping newer designers grow their skills. When she is not designing interiors, she loves to entertain.



## Megan Siason

*Childhood musings lead to design career success*

As a little girl, Megan Siason sketched floor plans of her future dream home, modeled closet systems out of cardboard boxes, and spent hours buried in IKEA catalogues. But not realizing where her creativity could take her, she began working in property management and earned her real estate license. Although it wasn't her dream job, Siason says the experience provided a valuable business background for managing clients' design investments and meeting project deadlines.

Years later, Siason enrolled in an interior design program and she finally found her true passion - working in the interior design industry, which she has been doing since 2009. She has interned for a hospitality design company, worked in various furniture and fabric showrooms, and was an interior designer for Marrokal Design & Remodeling. In 2015, she launched m studio Interior Design in San Diego, CA, later moving Costa Mesa, where she is principal designer. She serves clients in all of Southern California, and is now doing what she loves best.

Siason is an Allied Member of The American Society of Interior Designers and a Certified Kitchen & Bath Designer through the National Kitchen & Bath Association. In addition to being a national award-winning interior designer, she was inducted into NKBA's Thirty Under 30 in 2015 and was honored as a winner of the NKBA Design Competition in 2019. She has since won several regional awards across NKBA and ASID SoCal.

