

DYNAMIC DESIGNER DUO

Naples mother-daughter decorating team dreams up perfect palette for success

Two luxury model homes sit side by side in the new Windward Isles community in Naples. One has a traditional tropical feel to it with flowing turquoise material, the other has a more contemporary look. Each home has its interior designed by a McDonald, but you need to know the women behind each look to decipher who is responsible for which design.

Mom Jinx and daughter Minka McDonald work side by side, yet separate, and that might be one of the keys to their success. "We love each other to death, but we would kill each other if we were on the same team," Minka McDonald admits.

In many ways, they are very alike. Both women are gracious, funny and very down-to-earth. They exude a relaxed island feel, but are also extremely professional. In other ways, they are exceedingly different.

Jinx was born and raised in Jamaica and brings a colorful tropical feel to her creations. Minka's style is more contemporary with more subtle splashes of color added to her designs.

"I don't think anything we've ever done has been called boring," Jinx says.

"I think everything we've done has vibrancy to it," adds Minka. "I think it is elegant but comfortable, and I think that is something that you experience in Jamaica. We would never put a material on a sofa that we would be afraid to sit on. You can sit with a wet bathing suit and put your feet up and live in these spaces, but it is still beautiful."

Even when designing multi-million dollar homes, the duo say they keep things down-to-earth. "It just touches on who we are," Minka says. "We are very relaxed and easy to talk to,

and that is reflected in the feel of our homes. I think we are fun to work with, we are very professional, but there is no stuffiness."

"And we hate pretentiousness," adds Jinx.

It's that easy-going feeling that clients love. Michele Harrison worked with Jinx for about 20 years, most recently during her job as regional sales director with WCI. When it came to decorating her personal home, Michele knew exactly who to choose.

"The first person who came to mind was Jinx," Michele says. "I just had wonderful experiences with her as a professional. I really like her style and the way she works with people."

The design Jinx helmed for Michele was so successful that it won a Sand Dollar award for a private residence interior design.

Donna Karwoski says she interviewed several designers before choosing the McDonalds to design her home in the Moorings.

"I had to sweet-talk my husband into getting a designer because it was not something he wanted. When we started looking at people, [Jinx and Minka] were just warm and fuzzy and they are there for you," says Donna. "It was them. It wasn't so much their furniture or their fabric, it was the people. They are just so wonderful to go on this house adventure with."

Going on design adventures together was not part of Jinx and Minka's original plans. Minka got her bachelor's degree from Florida International University in public relations. She worked in Miami doing high profile jobs such as working on the campaigns for Dr. Beach and his work rating area beaches. She also interned for the Miami Fusions soccer team. But she found public relations work was not fulfilling.

"I felt I was more of a mouth piece and I didn't have control over the product," Minka explains. "And I decided that whatever I did in life, I wanted it to be my product."

After five years in public relations, she made a change. "I would visit mom and I would spend half the weekend touring her model homes and looking at her design magazines," Minka describes. "I would see her homes and help her out and get my nose in what she was doing."

Jinx wasn't luring her daughter into the business. "She said 'Mom, I am feeling unfulfilled,' and I said 'You are making a lot of money stay where you are,'" remembers Jinx.

"I didn't listen to her," Minka says. "The truth is I love the decision. I absolutely love what I do so much more than in my other career."



From right, Jinx McDonald, interior designer and president of Jinx McDonald Interior Designs Inc, and her daughter Minka McDonald, communications director, pose for a portrait at their showroom in Naples.

Minka got her master's degree in interior design from Florida State University and then worked as her mother's assistant. "It nearly killed me," Minka admits. "She was so tough. She was so hard."

The mother-daughter team split up with Minka heading out to California to work in commercial design. Picking out ceiling tiles and working on just a small part of the project wasn't what she wanted. "That is what sealed the idea that I wanted to do residential," she says.

Minka returned to Naples and worked for Collins and DuPont, before returning to her mother's side; This time not as an assistant, but as her own designer. That was when Minka realized she had found her dream job, doing what she loved and doing it with her mother.

Their designs reflect their island roots. Jinx moved to the United States in 1976 and to Naples in 1990. Minka was just a year old when she moved to the US.

"We are not extravagant," Jinx explains. "Coming from an island, everything is very expensive. So we learned to recycle things."

They are also very conscious of the environment. Minka is LEED certified and hopes to use that knowledge when designing homes in the future.

"Living in California was so different," Minka says. "It was so progressive. If you want to be taken seriously there you needed to be certified. I wanted to make sure I was achieving as much as I could in my career."

Jinx stresses the money side of the business. During the recession she downsized and rents office space instead of owning it. "Something I am very proud of is I have never borrowed a dollar for this business," Jinx says. "I think that is very important. I think that is why we survived because we were debt free. We don't owe a penny to anybody."

Now the women are very busy with design work in Port Royal, The Colony, Talis Park, Grey Oaks, Quail West, Naples Reserve, the Moorings and Windward Isles. They recently won five Sand Dollar awards for their work. Their side-by-side designs at Windward Isles are a new experience for the mother-daughter duo, and they enjoy working together, yet apart.

"The best thing about working together is having a comfortable welcoming environment to walk into," Minka says. "It's just a very happy, safe place. It has been an amazing roller coaster, but it has been fun. We are really happy with where we are right now."

"There is no competition, no jealousy and no back biting," Jinx adds. "I think it is a wonderful relief to know there is somebody on the same wavelength who comes from the same background with the same goals – someone who is younger and a little more current. I don't love contemporary. She can do it, and I can do the things that speak to me more." **G**