





A CHAT WITH... **INTERIOR DESIGNER COLLEEN BASHAW**

What is your background? I studied art history in college. After graduation, I moved to New York City and worked for the Parish Hadley design firm. I was there for six years and then, in 1997, I started my own design company. I have designed all of the Cape Resorts properties in Atlantic City and Cape May.

And where does the inspiration for the individual properties come from? It really is individual. I try to stay true to the building. For example, Congress Hall is such a stately old building, but at the same time, it has a good sense of humor to it, which is a combination that's difficult to find.

What do you mean by sense of humor? Well, it isn't a very serious building. The floors are crooked... it's quirky. It's been rebuilt three times, and it's been through a lot, so you could say it has its own sense of humor. People really feel it when they come here; I think that's why families and kids love it so much. It's stately, but comfortable and accessible with just a little bit of whimsy.

Do your three kids ever influence your design choices? My kids are 16, 14, and five. Of course, the five-year-old doesn't care much, and the middle child is a boy, so he doesn't care either, but my oldest girl loves it. She comes to the fabric shows with me in Manhattan. And she has plenty to say... she'll give her honest opinion, just like she does with my clothes or hair. And I always take it into account... it's a pair of young, fresh eyes.

Do you always stick with the plan? Or will you throw something in that strays a bit from your original vision simply because you love it so much?

A good example of this would be paint color for me. I'll go into a house or hotel or whatever I'm working on at the time

Opposite page: Interior designer Colleen Bashaw has introduced a vibrant, playful palette to the Cape Resorts Group properties. Of America's Original Seaside Resort, she says, "Cape May is so beautiful and clean, and I try to pick colors that will be complementary to the outside."

and I'll think: This room has to be bright green. But once I get to know it a little bit more, I could completely go the opposite way, and say, "No, this has to be yellow." The color dictates a lot.

You speak of "getting to know" the properties. Is this how you think of them... as characters with personalities? I don't think of them as people or as being alive or anything like that... but these old buildings, because of their history, definitely have more personality.

What has been the reaction since you had the Congress Hall lobby painted green? So far, so good. It's funny, I'll be down there changing a lampshade or just sitting in the lobby, and I overhear comments from people who have no idea I did any of the design work. That's always interesting.

Do you find that people struggle with change? What's fascinating is to see how most people get very possessive of the properties. They begin to feel a personal connection to them, and it's amazing how they notice the changes, even the little ones! I think most people are definitely happy, but there is always the shock of the new. No matter how I prepare my clients — telling them that we're going to order a certain sofa, for instance, or showing it to them in the showroom — once it's in their own house, they don't like it. Until they sit with it for three days; then they love it. It's like anything that comes into your house — a new child or a new dog — it takes some getting used to.

How do you walk the line between your own personal taste and what you think the guests will like? I definitely keep the guests in mind... you don't want them to freak out, you want them to like it. But I also feel a sense of freedom when I do these hotels. My brother is the owner, and he trusts me so

completely. I don't have to go through a dog and pony show to convince anyone that this is the right paint color or furniture or fabric.

Have you ever backed away from a design because you were afraid of how others would react? No, I don't work like that. Once I make a decision, I roll with it and hope for the best. You'd never get anything done in design otherwise.

Do you have trouble leaving a job once it's finished? You're never done working with these properties, especially because we do try to keep them really fresh. I have to redo the carpets every five years... you're constantly redoing everything. I shop and I antique a lot. I just found a great old umbrella stand for Congress Hall. I should have found it six years ago, but I just couldn't find the right one. I finally have, thank goodness.

Does proximity to the beach influence your decisions? Definitely. The sun, the light, the air... everything in Cape May is so beautiful and clean, and I try to pick colors that will be complementary to the outside. I love the beach.

What's a good tip for amateur designers working on their own homes? I always try to ask myself: Am I going to like this in two to three years? Then again, I'm not a trendy designer. I'd rather things be classic.

What's something you'd like people to know about you? I feel extremely fortunate to do what I do. Cape May is a really special place; it harkens back to a time before life was so rushed and crazy. Every time I drive over the bridge, I'm grateful for the opportunity to express myself creatively and, hopefully through that, I can contribute to the pleasurable experience of others.