

## Designer Previews opens Atlanta office

By *Everett Catts*  
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Barbara Guillaume's venture into a new business started at, of all places, a news stand.

In February the Buckhead resident was at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport and picked up a copy of New York magazine, which had a "pretty ad [that] caught my eye," she said. The ad was for Designer Previews, a New York-based company that matches homeowners with architects and interior designers.

"I don't know what came over me," Ms. Guillaume said, "but when I got home, I picked up the phone and called and, what do you know, the president of the company answered. I said, 'Why aren't you down here in Atlanta? After a long pause, Karen Fisher said, 'And you would be?'"

On the other end of the line was Ms. Fisher, who started the company in 1985. Last month Designer Previews opened an Atlanta office.

"Since Karen came down here she has been so delightful with the quality of design and talent we have here, a wonderful growth and vitality," said Ms. Guillaume, president of Designer Previews' Atlanta office. "It's just the perfect storm, a confluence of all this."

Ms. Guillaume, an agent with Harry Norman, Realtors since 1991 and a collector of fine art, said Atlanta needed Designer Previews, the first business of its kind in the city.

"Even though I had renovated a 19th century home in Paris and built from the ground up a house in south Georgia, when I downsized from [a house on] Peachtree Battle [Avenue], I wanted a new look. It took me far too long to find the perfect designer," said Ms. Guillaume, who now lives in a condo.

So why did Ms. Fisher decide to expand the business to Atlanta?

"Because I think Atlanta is the key to the South," she said. "There are more good designers here than any city south of New York."

Through the company's Web site, Ms. Fisher is able to show clients all over the world examples of designers' work to help them choose the type of décor they want.

"We're using the same system we used in New York with a wide range of design in different price ranges," she said.

Designer Previews charges a \$200 consultation fee and will match clients with designers for projects ranging from \$30,000 to the millions. Designers and architects are interviewed by

Ms. Fisher on an invitation-only basis. The company represents about 35 architects and designers, with a quarter of them architects. Ms. Guillaume said she wants to build the list up to 60.

"Our goal is to bring the best design to the homeowner for any budget. ... We want to be able to find the best designer within their budget," she said. "We don't want anyone to fall through the cracks."

Ms. Fisher said the business has three steps. The first is understanding the job (the budget for renovation and decoration and the time span). The second is showing the work, what Ms. Fisher calls a "decorating Rorschach test, showing pictures of design in every style and looking at design portfolios. The last part is budget, when the client meets the designer and makes final decisions on a contract."

"Choosing a design is a very serious commitment, and we treat it seriously," Ms. Fisher said.

Ms. Guillaume added, "Some clients, they may not be able to articulate design, but when they see a portfolio, they know it and say, 'That's it.'"

William Peace, ASID, is owner of Peace Design, a Buckhead design firm with an office in Bozeman, Mont. Peace, who has been in the business for 26 years, met Ms. Fisher a few years ago through Atlanta architect Peter Block.

"What's great from a designer standpoint is they [Designer Previews] give us an opportunity to meet people we may not be able to meet," he said. "they do some national advertising and do advertising with parts of the country where there are people we normally wouldn't meet as an Atlanta design firm. We're doing fantastic work with people out West and we feel they wouldn't have found us without Designer Previews. They also pre-screen and when we get a call from them, we know people are serious about the work. Karen is very professional and has a lot of experience. Barbara has a lot of experience in the real estate business."

Information: visit [www.designerpreviews.com](http://www.designerpreviews.com)

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