

IN HARMONY

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Dunelands

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as an artful shelter amid junipers and dune grass

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The Kenwood transitional

Text: R.J. Weick

For Lakesha Rose, principal interior designer and founder of L Rose Interior Design in Chicago, Illinois, there is magic in the details. In the weight of fabrics, the depth of light, the softness of texture, and the dialogue found in the liminal spaces of a home. It is in the emotion and the artifacts that imbue place with comfort and narrative, and in the architectural structure where things like memory and wonder are embedded into the very walls, where the real magic resides in residential interior design—and for this project in the Hyde Park-Kenwood Historic District, it was the ultimate labor of love to bring this home to fruition for clients who knew exactly how they wanted to feel: at home.

“It was a real honor to work with them,” Rose said. “When you have clients who are in touch with how they want to feel in the house when it is done, they always make the right decision, and these clients made the right decision every single time. They relied on the team to have answers that they didn’t have, but the best thing they did was they went off their feelings and their gut of how they wanted to live in this home, which is why this home turned out the way it did. It turned out so beautifully and it is going to be so timeless, because these clients listened to their gut.”

L Rose Interior Design is a full-service residential interior design firm dedicated to enriching the spaces its clients navigate each and every day, strengthening the foundation for how they feel, connect, and thrive in their world. It is, at times, an alchemical pursuit that requires a careful transformation of the emotive into the physical objects one surrounds themselves with, and a keen eye for how the more ephemeral and temporal magic of things like light and time and memory can resonate or transport those who inhabit it. L Rose Interior Design, an allied ASID and IIDA member, has worked on local and national projects for a decade, and to this day it is still the trust and care bestowed by clients that inspires its founder day in and day out.

“Design is emotion. It is the one thing you can’t buy,” Rose said. “And my passion just continues to grow for what I do to the point that sometimes I think about what I do, that I love it so much, I could shed tears over it, because





you are so connected to doing what you love. I think the biggest honor that I take away, no matter how my career has grown, is that there is nothing more humbling to me than being chosen as the person to design the most private space that you have, and that is your home. I will never get over that feeling.”

In this case, Rose and the clients crossed paths in a rather serendipitous and literal sense shortly after the States began implementing shutdowns during the pandemic in 2020. It would be some time later that the client would reach out to invite Rose to participate in an interview process to serve as interior designer for a home build still in its architectural drawings phase in the Hyde Park-Kenwood Historic District on a site located adjacent to the Obamas’ Kenwood home.

“I was walking down the street with my dog, and she was walking down the street with her son and, you know, two people crossed

each other’s path and we decided to greet each other. At the time, we lived in the same neighborhood, so she lived across the street from me and that is how we met, just a random chat,” Rose said. “Later that year she reached out, because she knew I was an interior designer. I went through a pretty in-depth process; I had to give them referrals and they called my other clients to get some background on who I was and if I was the interior designer that they wanted to partner with on this beautiful home. I was very excited to win the job.”

The site itself, located on the corner of S. Greenwood Ave. and E. Hyde Park Blvd., is considered within the boundaries of the traditional neighborhoods of Hyde Park and Kenwood, which was listed to the National Register of Historic Places in 1979. It is a residential area and streetscape of a “surprisingly uniform character, particularly in respect of building height,” according to the 1979 Na-

tional Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form, in which mostly masonry but myriad uses—attached, semi-attached, and detached single family residences—are represented. It is a district that since expanded its boundaries in 1984 and 1986, respectively, and is home to architectural styles like Italianate, Queen Anne, Romanesque Revival, and Prairie School. Though, it is its represented styles of Tudor, Gothic, Classical, Renaissance, Georgian, and Baroque Revivals that have historically dominated the district.

“This home is what they call a historic district in Kenwood, and it is next door to Former President Barack Obama and Michelle Obama’s house,” Rose said. “There were a lot of rules that had to be approved mainly on the outside of the house from the brick, and the style of the home had to really maintain, and keep with, the integrity of the houses in this historical district.”

Rose also noted the neighborhood is peaceful and a beautiful place to live with large yards and located in close proximity to downtown. For her, it was a real pleasure to visit the neighborhood and witness this historic home come to life in modern times that will last 100 years and look like it has always been there. The build, which lasted roughly four years between permit challenges and halts to construction dictated by Secret Service when the former First Family were in residence, was realized by the team of SPACE Architects + Planners—Jean Dufresne, AIA, RAIC, NCARB, who served as Architect of Record, has since launched Moth Architects—L Rose Interior Design; X Design Collective; Bigane Construction; Geo Solar Energy Farm; SP Engineers Ltd.; Bono Consulting; and Himsben Design Studio.

Rose, who was tasked with bridging the exterior and the interior into a cohesive look and feel, began with listening to the outside first.

“I would never design a home that is historical and traditional on the outside and decide to make it ultra-modern on the inside, because what happens in that aspect is there is no communication there. Every time someone walks into a home that is not designed to enhance and sit beautifully with the outside, you will have failed in the long term. You will have failed the integrity of the outside of the home,” Rose said. “So, I let the outside of the home guide me.”

It informed the use of traditional and transitional materials throughout the interior of the home, which Rose noted is a stylistic marriage that plays to her strengths, culminating in the rich tonal landscape found within, where textures and weight of materials and high-performance fabrics come together in seamless cohesion. There is warmth and elegance, livability and playfulness, and a celebration of the liminal spaces, where transitional thresholds recede into the background or carved out as

intentional destinations for toasting to the unforgettable moments in life.

“If I’m the designer chosen to design your home, I will always lead with quality over quantity. I want items to last 10 years or more, and we looked at furniture pieces and materials that will withstand growing children in the home. My clients want to live beautifully, not have to compromise because they have two beautiful growing children at home, so I used indoor-outdoor fabrics. I used fabrics that you could find in hotels for their home so they wouldn’t have to worry about who is sitting on what chair or what sofa and hope that there was no imprint or stain,” Rose said. “I could go back to that home in seven years, and it will still be just as beautiful as the day I left it.”

It is a beauty that at its core is grounded in giving her clients a sense of peace, of comfort, of feeling settled and happy in place. For Rose, the primary bedroom was an opportunity to



carve out something beautiful and peaceful, a respite from their busy work lives, that found inspiration in the solace the weight of fabric can lend to space.

"It reminded me of a Parisian suite, the weight in the fabrics from the carpet to when you would close the drapery at night. It felt like it instantly quieted the room, and I did that in every single fabric that I chose for their room. I wanted the space just to be quiet and solid and peaceful, because that is what they need to wake up and go to bed at night," Rose said.

In the living room, Rose played with the use of different high-performance fabrics that at a glance "looks like everything is total but it's not," and supports the boundless energy and the everyday moments of a family living in their space. But it is the foyer that makes a statement as first impression into the home.

"I love when you walk into the home, because that is your first presentation. It tells you how you are going to feel throughout the rest of the house, and it just says, 'Welcome, and yes we know it's gorgeous.' I mean, the backstory to the wallpaper in the foyer was that we had to buy it about 18 months before we needed it because there were only 20 rolls left in the entire country," Rose said.

"Then, when you look to the right from the entry into the dining room, we paneled

the walls and did wallpaper, and we have these gorgeous lights in the ceiling that look like diamond necklaces. When you walk into that room with the drapery and the wall paneling, it's like you stepped into something that could have been done back in the 1800s or early 1900s designed for today. It's just so classic and gorgeous," Rose added.

The true magic is in the seamless move from one space to the next, the transition from foyer to dining room, and a recognition that the threshold itself has the ability to transport from one place to another. For Rose, it is important that spaces, just like the exterior architectural vernacular and the interior design language, speak to each other. While they don't have to be exactly the same, if foyers and hallways and rooms exist in conversation, there is a connective thread that will always exist from room to room. Or, in the case of the bar that physically links the kitchen and the dining room and envisioned as a touch point in which to gather and to connect, the liminal space itself is celebrated.

"I believe when I design for my clients, that is one of my biggest gifts, by making sure the spaces speak to one another," Rose said. "I designed this gorgeous bar for them that connects the kitchen and the dining room. In my mind, I imagine them meeting there on a Fri-

day for cocktails and going from there to their dining room or into their kitchen or past it to their beautiful outdoor space. This home is ready for their beautiful family but also primed for the biggest party of the year that they want to have, because this home flows in such a way it can only make you feel good being in it."

For Rose, a well-designed home tells a story about more than just looks and size and splendor. It is about creating comfort and capturing how her clients want to feel in their home.

"We all have that internal voice, but now when I'm designing for clients, that internal voice is no longer a whisper. I hear it loud, clear, and precise," Rose said. "I enjoyed the process with [these clients] very much, because they're very intelligent people, they were thoughtful in what they do and why they do it. It is what made working with them very fun and easy, because they remained open throughout the entire process."

"They had very good style, they knew quality, and you can see it throughout their entire home. To me, it is going to be a legacy home, because they chose quality over quantity, every step of the way," Rose added.