

INTERIOR DESIGN PERFORMANCE OF A LIFETIME

Suzan Decker Ross Tapped for Ruth Eckerd Hall Expansion

By Shawn Tanney Richards
Photography courtesy of Ruth Eckerd Hall



Interior Designer Suzan Decker Ross of the American Society of Interior Designers sits in front of Stephen Palladino's Paparazzi Mural, which has already become quite the conversation piece for theater patrons.

For over thirty years, Suzan Decker Ross of the American Society of Interior Designers has been preparing for the design performance of her life: being selected as the interior designer for the massive renovation and expansion of a regional cultural gem, Ruth Eckerd Hall in Clearwater. As the owner of award-winning Decker Ross Interiors, she and her team have skillfully undertaken a variety of projects in every style imaginable. From the historical landmark Capitol Theatre renovation to a contemporary, sleek high-end med-spa, Decker Ross and her team of talented designers possess the creative knowledge and attention to detail necessary to tackle a project of this magnitude and importance.



Comfortable bench seating was custom made to fit the L-shaped half wall in the upstairs Dress Circle Lounge. Notice the accent tables reflect the circular motif of the architecture.

Decker Ross decided to feature the work of Safety Harbor artist Holly Apperson of GinHol Mosaics, who married vivid stained glass and shiny metal to defunct instruments to give them new life as wall jewelry. Apperson's colorful upcycled creations become beautifully intricate mosaic musical instruments and can be seen in various locations throughout Ruth Eckerd Hall's newly renovated Grand Lobby and Dress Circle Lounge.

Decker Ross and senior designer Marci Tempesta worked closely with the Ruth Eckerd Hall board of directors and Susan Crockett, its president and CEO, to re-envision the overall design concept, color palette, flooring and surface finishes, and to add new upscale furnishings and artistic custom pieces featuring the work of local artisans.

"My creative vision incorporates a sophisticated, elegant, timeless design aesthetic, which includes an art deco inspired colorful glass art suspended donor wall," Decker Ross said. "Following many sleepless nights of 3 a.m. inspirations, I knew I had to find just the right person to bring my creative vision to life." I collaborated with Kathleen Bromley and Kara Ramdas of Katglass Studio because of their forty-year professional reputation as a premier studio specializing in custom stained, leaded, Tiffany and fused glass creations as well as their historical repair and restoration throughout the Southeast." ▶

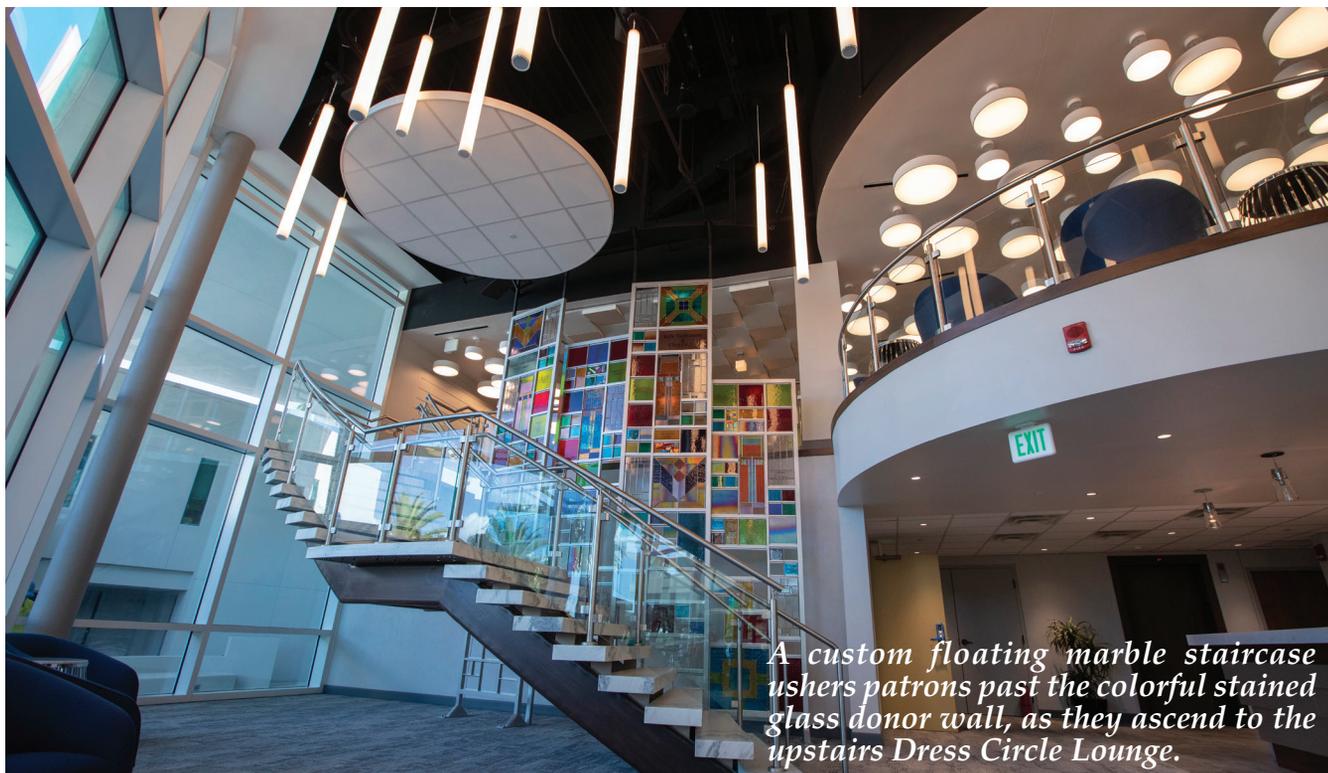


PHOTO: COURTESY GINHOL MOSAICS

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This unique donor wall was designed by Suzan Decker Ross. She commissioned local artists Kathleen Bromley and Kara Ramdas of Katglass Stained Glass Studio of Clearwater to source and create the fused glass panels with hand-painted donor names. Waylon Smith of All Metals Custom fabricated and installed the welded aluminum powder coated frames in this two-story artistic focal point.



A custom floating marble staircase ushers patrons past the colorful stained glass donor wall, as they ascend to the upstairs Dress Circle Lounge.



The Grand Lobby is home to the Kate Tiedemann and Ellen Cotton Cabaret Theatre, which features Ruth Eckerd Hall students performing on the Holt Family Stage. Decker Ross' design touches can be found throughout, from the attractive new furnishings and Paparazzi Paintings of Stephen Palladino to the circular patterned installation of the tile and carpet.

Located in the Dress Circle Lounge, the Glass Donor Wall features traditional stained and leaded glass panels, along with 180 fused glass panels that incorporate painted donor names. While Katglass Stained Glass Studio of Clearwater was completing the glass art production, Waylon Smith of All Metals Custom was fabricating the welded aluminum framework to hold the glass pieces in place. "The biggest challenge was to be sure that all of the glass fit in the correct location," Smith said, "along with the tremendous amount of time required for welding and installing this project."

Katglass Stained Glass Studio encouraged Suzan Decker Ross, Marci Tempesta and Susan Crockett to create a custom glass piece to be included in the donor wall, and a framed quad set of dichroic fused glass art compositions that were created by Suzan hangs in the upstairs Dress Circle Lounge.

"Whenever possible, we strive to include the work of local artisans in our designs," Suzan said. "Because the mission of a performing arts center is to enrich the cultural lives of the community it serves, I particularly wanted to bring in the work of as many artists as possible."

Decker Ross was inspired to bring in artist Stephen Palladino to paint two murals from his series known simply

as Paparazzi Paintings. "I am beyond honored that I was asked to add my work to the walls of Ruth Eckerd Hall. It was surreal to paint these pieces in a place I visited many times in my life," Palladino said. Decker Ross also playfully added the colorful, upcycled mosaic musical instruments made by Safety Harbor artist Holly Apperson of GinHol Mosaics to several locations in the Dress Circle Lounge and Grand Lobby.

"We asked Suzan to bring a breath of fresh air that would leave guests breathless from the personal touches," said Crockett, Ruth Eckerd Hall's CEO. "Ruth Eckerd Hall is renowned for consistent quality with joyful moments woven into the experience. We wanted the interior to reflect that. I knew we were in good hands with Suzan and Marci."

Suzan Decker Ross is thrilled to have played the lead in the design of a lifetime. ■■■

EDITOR'S NOTE: Decker Ross Interiors, an award-winning design firm led by Suzan Decker Ross of the American Society of Interior Designers, is located at 1445 Court St. in Clearwater, (727) 442-9996, or visit DeckerRoss.com.