



September 23, 2020

# Diana Viera of ITALKRAFT: 5 Things You Can Do To Help Your Living Space Spark More Joy



**Select the right materials** — When creating a space that sparks joy, it's important to select decor and materials that are warm and comforting, and to avoid creating a space where everything is the same color. Monotone is very “in” right now, but even in monotone spaces, it's important to have a tonal contrast. Natural materials like stone and wood are also great to incorporate and this can easily be done with wooden frames or decorative surface objects.

*As part of my series on the “5 Things You Can Do To Help Your Living Space Spark More Joy”, I had the pleasure of interviewing Diana Viera.*

*A native of Cuba, Diana Viera moved to the United States with her parents at age seven and quickly fell in love with architecture through a very close relationship with her mother, a talented architect. Their shared love of the craft inspired Diana to pursue a career in architecture and led her to become managing partner of ITALKRAFT at just 29 years old. Diana attended Florida International University and received her Master of Architecture*



*degree in 2014. While at FIU, she had the opportunity to study abroad in multiple different countries like Italy, Brazil and the Netherlands and hone in on her expertise.*

*In 2012, Diana joined ITALKRAFT as a design intern when the company had been established for just one year. She was mentored closely by Founder Alex Xakoustis and accompanied him to all meetings in order to gain first-hand experience of how business was conducted, projects were presented and problems were solved. Being mentored by Alex left a lasting impression on Diana and inspired her to carry on the legacy of his hands-on training and commitment to developing young talent. Throughout the last eight years, Diana has been an integral part of ITALKRAFT's growth as the company expanded to operate four showrooms in South Florida and 10 locations worldwide.*

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**Thank you so much for joining us in this series! Before we dive in, our readers would love to learn a bit more about you. Can you tell us a story about what brought you to this specific career path?**

I had the privilege of being exposed to the design and architecture industry at a very young age. It's almost like I was never "brought" to this career path, but that I was here all along and destined to study the craft. I was born in Cuba and came to the United States with my parents when I was seven years old after they won a lottery and were awarded tickets to the United States. My mother is a very talented architect so I grew up watching her work and immediately fell in love with architecture and design. I knew that I wanted to pursue a career in the industry and went on to graduate from Florida International University with a Master of Architecture degree in 2014. I started interning for ITALKRAFT in 2012 and returned to the firm after graduating to continue my work there. Since then, I have been an intern, sales coordinator, designer, sales manager and now, managing partner. It's been an incredible journey and being able to grow alongside and within the company has been an invaluable learning experience.

**Can you share the most interesting story that happened to you since you started this career?**

The most interesting experiences I've had in this industry were while I was still in school working to obtain my master's degree. My college has wonderful study abroad programs and during my time in school I had the opportunities to study in Brazil, Italy and the Netherlands. I studied abroad in Italy for six months and it completely changed my perspective on architecture and redefined what skills I believed were important. Everything was very focused on sketching and being able to capture depth and measurements through sketches. Sketching isn't as common in architecture and design today because so much of our tools have become digital but in my



opinion, it's still one of the most important skills to have. Sometimes a client can't visually grasp what I'm explaining during a conversation about their design and, due to my training in Italy, I'm able to draft a three-point perspective of their kitchen right in front of them and make any alterations they'd like. My experiences studying abroad taught me the importance of being able to create a model of what you want to design using only a pencil and paper. It's a skill that I know I will continue to use throughout my career and one I believe all architects and designers should master.

**Can you share a story about the funniest mistake you made when you were first starting? Can you tell us what lesson you learned from that?**

Ironically, when I began my education in architecture, I brushed off interior design and didn't think it was important. Even when it came to selecting classes at FIU, I never wanted to take interior design and always chose architecture and structure-based classes instead because I didn't understand how important and difficult interior design really is. It wasn't until I began working alongside trained interior designers that I learned how essential it is. It's impossible to even fathom how much attention to detail goes into designing the interiors of a space and how to make the space function well. Most architects fail to realize the importance of interior design and automatically believe architecture is more important because it relates to the physical structure. Now I look back and laugh at how oblivious I was. Looking back at all of the challenges we face in designing so many different spaces, I can't believe I once thought interior design wasn't as important as architecture!

**What are some of the most interesting or exciting projects you are working on now? How do you think that might help people?**

As our company has grown, we've continued to get more challenging projects that allow us to test new designs and conceptualize completely new ideas. We recently finished a few stunning residences in Miami — 580 Sabal Palm Road and a private residence on Star Island that were incredibly unique and exciting to be involved in. We're also designing the kitchens, bathrooms and closets at Natiivo Miami in Downtown Miami. It's a project unlike anything we've ever created so I'm looking forward to seeing it come to life. At ITALKRAFT, each kitchen, bathroom and closet that we create is completely custom made so we're able to deliver a space that meets the exact expectations of each client. No design is the same and our team consists of some of the most creative and determined designers I know. We make it our mission to create a design that fulfills our clients needs, no matter how wild or impossible the design may seem, because we understand how important the home is. We want our clients to love their design and love being in their homes.



**Can you please give us your favorite “Life Lesson Quote”? Can you share how that was relevant to you in your life?**

Aside from dedication and working hard, I think the biggest life lesson I’ve learned is the importance of communication. Communicating with the client is the best thing any designer can do. I make a point to have an in depth discussion with the client before I begin to design the project. By forming a relationship and aligning goals and expectations before beginning, I can avoid miscommunications and unsatisfied clients. I also enjoy entering the design process having already established a relationship with the client because then I’m able to involve them in the design process and get to know their taste and style. It seems like such a simple piece of advice, but I look back on my experiences and realize that so many obstacles could’ve been easily solved by transparency and communication. This is a lesson that can be applied to any career or part of life and is such an easy thing to do. When I have a project idea or concern, I make sure to share it with my team or with the client immediately, and its made the process much smoother for everyone involved.

**None of us are able to achieve success without some help along the way. Is there a particular person who you are grateful towards who helped get you to where you are? Can you share a story about that?**

Two people instantly come to mind. The first is my mother and from the beginning, she has always encouraged my love for architecture and shared her passion for her work with me. She entertained my childhood interest in the industry and then, as I grew older, supported and nurtured my journey to pursue a master’s in architecture and build a career in interior design. I owe everything to my mother and am constantly grateful for her guidance and encouragement. I’ve even had the opportunity to design several kitchens alongside my mother, and collaborating with her professionally has been one of my favorite experiences and cherished memories.

The second person that comes to mind is Alex Xakoustis, president of ITALKRAFT and my personal mentor. Alex has also been incredibly instrumental to my success. From the first day I began at the company in 2012, Alex has taught me everything about industry, the company and ins and outs of interior design. He took a very hands-on approach to my learning and brought me with him to all meetings to show me how proper business was conducted, projects were presented and problems were solved. If there was ever an obstacle or something that needed to be done, Alex would let me problem solve first and then provide feedback and correct any mistakes. He continued to mentor me as I advanced through different roles at the company and continues to be an important figure in my career today.



**Thank you for that. Here is the main question of our discussion. What are your “5 Things You Can Do To Help Your Living Space Spark More Joy” and why. Please share a story or example for each.**

**Select the right materials** — When creating a space that sparks joy, it's important to select decor and materials that are warm and comforting, and to avoid creating a space where everything is the same color. Monotone is very “in” right now, but even in monotone spaces, it's important to have a tonal contrast. Natural materials like stone and wood are also great to incorporate and this can easily be done with wooden frames or decorative surface objects.

**Bring in your favorite scents** — I love elevating a space with something simple like a candle or diffuser. Filling a room with your favorite scent is an easy way to automatically feel happy when you enter the room. There are so many studies that prove our bodies react to certain smells and how these scents can affect our emotions. Find whatever scent works for you or what smell reminds you of “joy!”

**Keep your space tidy and organized** — Simply put, an organized, minimal living space brings people joy. This tip actually involves getting rid of things as opposed to bringing them into a space. Clutter creates stress and negative energy so everything in your living space should have a designated place where it can be stored. Each day, spending a few minutes tidying up and putting everything in its place can make all of the difference in how that space feels.

**Use natural light** — Natural light is something that can be incorporated so easily but is something that is so often overlooked. The sun is naturally good for us and promotes positive energy so an easy way to transform your space is to open your windows and let in the natural light and fresh air when possible. It fills the space with a softer light that cannot be achieved by artificial light and gives you a portal to the outside world. I open doors and windows whenever I can and it immediately makes me feel happier.

**Decorate with plants and greenery** — In addition to natural light, plants are another trick to spark joy in your living space. This is especially useful in rooms or spaces that don't have windows or access to a lot of natural light. When designing a home I always factor in creating a connection with nature. Bringing plants into your space forms this connection instantly and is a great trick for decorating bathrooms or other rooms that feel small.

**You are a person of great influence. If you could start a movement that would bring the most amount of good to the most amount of people, what would that be? You never know what your idea can trigger.**



If I could achieve anything and have unlimited resources, I would build houses for low income individuals or those living in impoverished countries. That has always been a passion of mine and I've been involved with several charitable organizations to try and give back to these communities. I've worked with Habitat for Humanity multiple times to build homes in the U.S. and it's one of my favorite organizations. In high school I was also involved with UP LAB and developed a pilot program focused on the land tenure in Latin America. The goal was to enhance the role of architects in the process by combining strategies with micro financing best practices. I'd love to be able to start a huge movement similar to that around the world.

**We are very blessed that some of the biggest names in Business, VC funding, Sports, and Entertainment read this column. Is there a person in the world, or in the US whom you would love to have a private breakfast or lunch with, and why? He or she might see this, especially if we tag them.**

My dream breakfast partner is actually from the 19th century! I would love to share a meal with Le Corbusier, the pioneer of modern architecture. He lived so long ago but created such meaningful work that still has a strong impact on the design world today. He created the open floor plan model we see in so many homes today among other great achievements. I'd love to be able to have a conversation with him and ask him what he was thinking when he was designing some of the structures. After I completed my study abroad program in Italy, I went on a two week backpacking trip all over Europe to visit different buildings that he designed. We traveled to Switzerland, Germany and multiple cities in Southern France including Ronchamp and Leon just to experience his work. So many architects have a spark inside of them that motivates their creativity, and I think my spark is from learning about and admiring Le Corbusier.

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