



MODERN CLASSICS

SUSSAN LARI

Creates Modern Classics By CARA S. TRAGER



Architectural Vision:

Architect Sussan Lari's portfolio spans new construction, gut renovations and immense additions. She mainly focuses on single-family homes, some as large as 17,000 square feet, many in Old Westbury, Brookville, Kings Point and the city. Projects run anywhere from \$350 to \$500 per square foot, not including landscaping.

For Sussan, success is all in the details. Along her shelf-lined conference room in Roslyn, Sussan assembled an extensive library of samples, including roof, façade and interior tiles and stones, moldings and trims, as well as large fabric swatches and home furnishing catalogs. Beyond welcoming representatives of furniture, carpet and lighting companies into her office every Wednesday to learn about their products, she visits window factories and cabinetmakers, some as far away as Europe.

"I know the different types of bulbs and I go with clients to the stone yard," Sussan says. "I'm a control freak."

Since she launched her eponymous architecture firm 23 years ago, Sussan's detail-centric approach serves her well. Her drawings pass muster with building departments, she says, while satisfied clients fuel her firm's growth with their recommendations. Meanwhile, she credits her go-to contractors, subcontractors, craftsmen and artisans with translating her drawings into beautiful living spaces.

Although clients frequently come to Sussan's firm "already married" to a specific style, she makes it a priority

to expose them to ideas and concepts beyond their frame of reference. And when they want something that just won't work materially or aesthetically, she doesn't hesitate to tell them so.

"Saying 'yes' to anything the client says leads to an outcome close to disaster, with the architect eventually saying, 'This is what you wanted,'" Sussan notes. She also has her own preferences. She steers clients to natural materials, radiant heat and spray-foam insulation and away from vinyl and other non-biodegradable elements. It's about achieving a well-designed healthy, green home.

In tackling new projects, Sussan assesses each site – what it offers, its size and shape, as well as the look and feel of the surrounding neighborhood -- to help her plot everything from the residence's dimensions to the way it will be situated on the property. By the same token, her carefully crafted interior layouts are designed to accommodate the way her clients live, entertain and relax and determine the residence's shape and exterior design.

"A house is sacred to me," says Sussan, a past president of the Long Island Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. "In your daily life, you deal with pressure, but when you go home, that's the one place that you want to totally relax." Creating such a personal sanctuary is "a huge role and a huge responsibility that we have to deliver on."

To ensure her plans are faithfully executed, she prefers to serve not only as the project's architect and designer, but also the project manager. That

additional responsibility, Sussan says, means her blueprints aren't misinterpreted and corners aren't cut.

In the language of design, Sussan defines her signature style as "modern classic," a confluence of classical architecture with the open spaces of contemporary living. In her drawings, rooms enjoy sight lines that extend beyond their entrances and ceiling heights vary. A quasi-monochromatic color scheme with splashes of color reinforces the spacious sensibility, while varied textures add interest.

Sussan also gets involved in the design of the home's façade, specifying such details as cut stone, the grout color and exterior lighting. Many times, in collaboration with a landscape designer, gardens also bear her handprint.

"Years ago, no one asked me to design a garden, but now that's changing," she says. "People want the fresh air; everyone is celebrating outdoor living."

As a result, in any given time, her office works on as many as seven residential projects, each in various stages of development, design and construction. Her in-house team includes her husband, Farhad Mechkat, who serves as her practice's executive director and is a past conductor for the Teheran Symphony Orchestra, and their daughter, Sanam, who handles marketing and project management. In August, Sanam is leaving the fold for an MBA at NYU's Stern School of Business.

Sussan's earliest childhood memories point to a creative bent. Growing up in Teheran, where her father was a tea

importer-exporter and her mother was a stay-at-home mom, Sussan remembers digging into her mother's box of colorful buttons and repurposing them as building toys.

Fact is, she didn't consciously decide to become an architect, but simply answered "an inner voice" and followed her passion. After attending a French Catholic private school, she enrolled in a public high school in order to major in math, a prerequisite for the study of architecture.

From there, it was onto Teheran University's School of Architecture and then to the University of Pennsylvania, where she earned two master's degrees, one in urban planning and the other in architecture.

In the years that followed, Sussan worked at a large architecture firm in Manhattan, focusing mostly on corporate projects, including PepsiCo headquarters in Purchase. But weary of commuting from her Roslyn home and yearning to be near her then-infant daughter, she seized the opportunity to hang out her own shingle when KLM Airlines sought only her services for a project. Her home served as her firm's office up until four years ago when she moved to her current three-floor space in the Village of Roslyn.

For Sussan, designing homes provides the ultimate professional satisfaction.

"If I am going to work another 20 years," she says, "I would like my legacy to be that I positively influenced people's lives rather than just created pretty lobbies and headquarter offices." **SE**