

Selling a Lifestyle

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Portfolio Kitchen & Home is helping urbanites design and remodel to get the most from the urban-living experience.



Soft light filters above the sink and at the edges of ornate cabinetry leave a shadow in the shape of windowpane on the kitchen island. Fresh fruit has been laid on a ceramic saucer at a table's center. The scene appears so natural and lovely, it's as though a painter was going to set up an easel and capture the finest details in the subtlest brush strokes. But the magic has already been done here in more ways than just the beauty to behold.

The kitchen is actually one of five complete models on display at Portfolio Kitchen & Home. The view from the window seems as if it could open up onto a rolling Italian countryside, but instead, it looks out on the quadruple-lane thoroughfare of State Line Road.

Portfolio Kitchen & Home has been lauded nationally in *Dwell* and *Architectural Digest* for its kitchen, bath, and home-interior renovation capabilities. Locally, it's considered an unmatched treasure with design teams that would make HGTV envious. The company's incredible access to European-made products bring customers as close to shopping in Italy, France, or any other romantic country as they could without traveling there themselves.

While the company has thrived for more than four years, Kansas City's current urban renaissance has opened up a whole new realm of possibilities for its founder, Geri Higgins. Cosmopolitan downtown life and the influx of lofts, condos, and flats have created thousands of new urbanites who are

looking for the best in elegance, functionality, or perhaps both in their urban living arrangements.

"Our design projects are not about what we want, it's about what our clients want," says Higgins, owner and president of Portfolio Kitchen & Home. "This is a wonderful opportunity for personal expression about who they are and the lifestyle they want to live. We offer products and design that help them embrace the urban experience."

The Connecticut-born Higgins is a former head of a healthcare-facilities management company and upscale lodge. She says the company's success revolves around "outrageous" customer service, which chiefly involves providing clients a unique design experience. That much is evidenced by Portfolio's extravagant showroom. Customers who pull open the doors to Higgins' establishment are greeted by an extravagant fireplace setting decorated with contemporary furnishings and original artwork.

In all, Portfolio's showroom features the kitchens—three of which are live—two functional bathroom displays, and a full library of design resources. On the showroom floor, every aspect of an upscale renovation can be addressed from design services including cabinetry layout and design, drawings and renderings, to selection of appliances, countertops, plumbing fixtures, decorative hardware, flooring, and lighting.

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Just as her clients' living spaces are extensions of themselves, Higgins has assembled a team around her that believes in the same focus on customer service. Portfolio's Director of Design, David Zebley, is a master craftsman with more than 30 years experience in the industry and is recognized as one of the top designers in Kansas City. All of Portfolio's designers are Council of Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA) accredited and members of the National Kitchen & Bath Association (NKBA).

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"I knew I wanted something more modern and industrial with less color and more texture, but I didn't know how to get there," says Meggan Newland, who moved into the 4110 condos in Westport last September. "The issue I was having wasn't so much about design as it was about space. They had a better architectural sense than I did."

Newland—who lived for six years on Miami's South Beach before leaving for a position at St. Luke's Hospital on the Plaza—worked with Portfolio Design Specialist Lindsay DeViney on extensive kitchen and bathroom remodeling projects. She says the company helped her choose appliances and paint, and locate local welders to build steel shelving.

"They've kind of become my personal go-to design team," Newland says. "I still call Lindsay and tell her about art I want to put on my wall to see if she thinks it's crazy."

Together, Portfolios designers have won countless local awards, including *KC Magazine's* "Best Of" for best kitchen/design remodel showroom in 2005 and 2006. Higgins says her European contacts are often surprised to learn that her business is based in Kansas City, so are some clients on the East and West coasts. They might also be surprised that the company's real gift is a genuineness that influences these designers and the extent to which they take care in their work, only as true artists would. [http://](#)