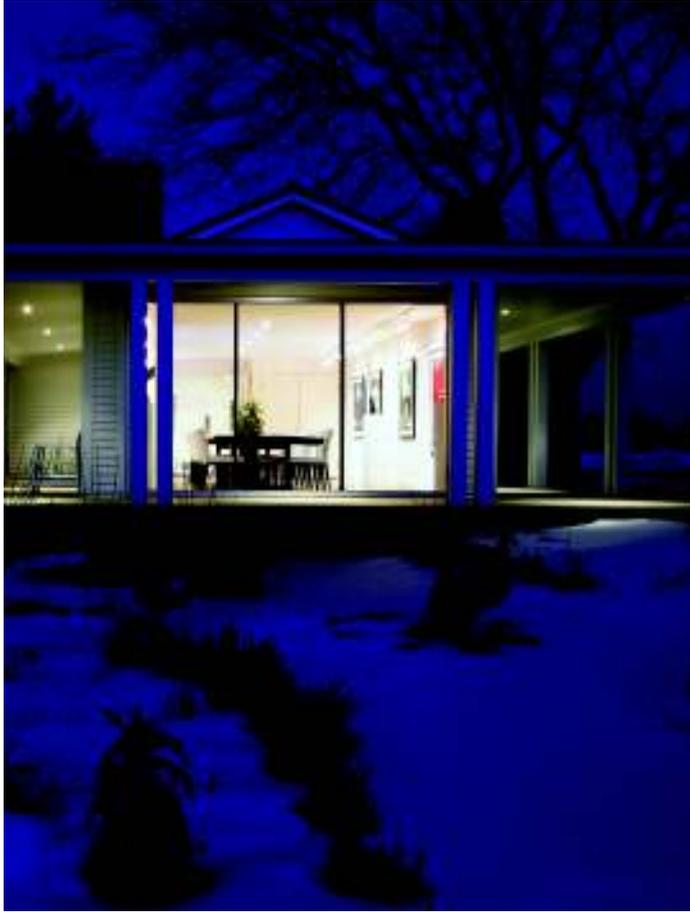




CREATING HIGHLY PERSONALIZED, PURPOSEFUL SPACES HAPPENS INSTINCTIVELY FOR JOHN KAZMIR. FROM CONCEPTUALIZATION TO ACTUALIZATION, THIS NIAGARA-BASED DESIGNER GOES THE “DESIGN DISTANCE” WITH INCOMPARABLE STYLE AND ENDURING VISION, CAPTIVATING CLIENTS BY PROVIDING TIMELESS, SOPHISTICATED APPEAL.

**WRITTEN BY CHRISTINE DARRAGH**



# STUDIO

# 76

**JOHN KAZMIR IS A DESIGNER** of delightful distinction. Amid a career spanning almost four decades, Kazmir has seen the whims and fancies of various tastes and trends change with the fickle brush of a hand. But instead, he has chosen to stamp his calling with the venerable hallmark of substance, and it's an eternal, timeless approach that is second to none in his profession.

You know when you see a Kazmir design. The look is clean, contemporary class, with a polished perfection of unparalleled sophistication. Kazmir, himself, says his passion is for minimalism, either contemporary or traditional, as he seeks to “combine luxury with simplicity and understatement.” To accomplish this, his starting point is always the architecture, stripping away any unfavourable elements and building from there because “if you get the interior architecture right, you don't need anything else,” he asserts.

And with his many eminent clients including White Oaks Resort and Spa, luxury car showrooms, wineries and high-end restaurants, he has grown laudable connections of referred and preferred clientele from the Toronto and Hamilton areas down through Niagara, often helping the owners of these establishments with their personal residential projects, as well.

It is a highly successful calling he heard fairly young in life. Staying true to early intuition, Kazmir wisely acquiesced out of an incompatible accounting career path and enrolled in a then-

mostly residential-focused design program at Niagara College. After mentoring with other designers for a period, he and another design partner opened Studio 76 about 31 years ago, so named after the studio's original address. However, within one year of their union, their vision and affiliation had parted ways, leaving Kazmir to carry on alone.

Since that time, Kazmir has personally steered the helm at Studio 76, while he also finds occasions to collaborate with other design professionals, such as Todd Barber at Forestgreen Creations from Fonthill. The pairing recently teamed up for the new Westcott Vineyards Winery design project, just south of Jordan on the Niagara Escarpment. As Barber relates about their association, “John has an uncanny insight into clients' dreams. He can narrow in on their style and interests better than anyone I know, and maintain a focus on the origin of the theme throughout the process of design and decorating.”

Kazmir agrees he has an instinctive knack for helping clients realize what they want. His primary goal is to always have it be an enjoyable process and to impart the necessary knowledge for his clients to make the right decisions about design. “If they don't make the right decision, it means I haven't done my job and expressed it correctly to them, so I'll try again,” he affirms. “You enter people's lives at a very stressful time for them and they know



it will all be worth it in the end, but you can't make an omelet unless you break an egg."

Endless drywall dust and an imposed lack of privacy are very nerve-racking propositions for most homeowners, so knowledge is power in these situations, seeing what is both good and bad about the space, and assessing the "best approach" to take by way of some helpful guidance. This is where Kazmir shines. He's a firm believer in making a renovation "fun and easy" and he will not rush the process, always advising clients to get out of their houses while changes are being made to help minimize the potential for "transformation trauma."

On a design project, he likens his personal involvement as a "bridge" between conceptualization and actualization, assisting in coaxing out the finer points by virtue of a discerning, aesthetic eye. He is also well-known in design circles for being architecturally confident, a rare value in any designer, with a self-assurance he has gained through both his extensive expertise and the skills he's engaged over many years during diverse projects.

Having an advantage of being "fed by a lot of sources" enables a much broader perspective for any good design. Kazmir feels, "I don't have to be creative; I just have to know who is creative." As such, he draws immense inspiration from the famed designs of Washington D.C.-based architect Hugh Newell Jacobsen, whose iconic white deconstructed saltbox structures often inform Kazmir's own projects in a respectful homage. "I constantly go back to his published works and enjoy them and try to incorporate the feeling and details, infusing that spirit into a design," he explains.

He also believes defining a space without complicated details helps showcase other aspects, like the simplicity of a surrounding wine collection, excellent architecture, or impressive artwork. For his own personal spaces, he always chooses to integrate the grounding, natural elements and organic materials he has a strong affinity for: twisty, dark, slender branches in clear, statuesque vases, smooth stones and chunky driftwood, beautifully washed



**PREVIOUS PAGE** 13th Street Winery in St. Catharines boasts a dazzling room for wine tastings and private dinners. Crisp, white walls and exquisite, scrubbed French oak floors mimic wine barrels and present a notable art collection on the winery grounds. **TOP LEFT** An eclectic mix of objects merge in a serene bedroom retreat, where a Chinese antique chair sits beside a limestone-topped table on the striped bamboo wood floor. **RIGHT** Buff-coloured, delustered travertine limestone graces the kitchen counters in an Ikea-sourced kitchen that was customized by Kazmir's contractor to accommodate the space. Their mellowed, suede-like surfaces proved to be a functional, suitable match for the affordable cabinetry beneath.







by the patience of time and advantageous conditions.

Emphasizing his contemporary ethos and sense of style, several years ago, *Woman's Day* magazine included one of Kazmir's designs in their annual finalists for fabulous kitchens of 2003. The feature highlights sleek, grey lacquered cabinetry against a stunning accent wall of floor-to-ceiling glass blocks that he still gets calls about to this day, with people incorrectly mistaking it for a current project instead of something he completed almost 13 years earlier. It's a resilient testament to the enduring nature of his work — a fusion of freshness and classic refinement, surviving even the harsh test of time.

But what design philosophies have altered over the course of his extensive career? Kazmir thinks clients, today, are more willing to renovate drastically and make the architectural changes necessary to really improve their spaces, and this is probably owing to the recent popularity of design shows on TV. In earlier days, people were more inclined to just do small cosmetic fixes like covering over major problems which were not going to be appropriately solved by simply choosing another hue of paint or hanging draperies, so this societal swing toward doing the proper changes upfront has only benefited Kazmir's steadfast ideals.

With a thriving career keeping him constantly active, he finds tranquility in gardening and revitalization in travelling great distances, where he's invigorated by the excitement induced when you take yourself out of a comfort zone and change scenery. And at 60 years of age, he has recently purchased a condo in a historic mansion in Savannah, Georgia with the intention of someday relocating to the area full-time. The remarkable setting is perfect for his creative sensibilities, describing its hanging Spanish moss and lush greenery as "otherworldly," while a youthful vibe and vibrant culture complement the traditional, time-honoured ambiance.

It's a welcome leaning toward quality and longevity, which continues to enthuse and encourage John Kazmir every day, as he still marvels at his own valuable insight gleaned from years spent in the world of design. "I have a finer hand and much more discriminating eye than when I first started out," he offers. "I used to say, 'at least I left it better than I found it.' Now I know I do!" ■



**John Kazmir** *Kazmir's Studio 76 has a solid reputation, delivering full interior and design/build services dictated by extensive client-generated wish lists, rather than preconceived notions. The result is a varied portfolio, where the only element consistently staying the same is a commitment to a clean, fresh luxurious look. johnkazmir.com*

**LEFT** Kazmir's own former California-inspired beach house on the shores of Lake Erie is a relaxing take on simplified living. **TOP** An adjoining pergola supports billowing awnings for outdoor entertaining. **TOP RIGHT** In a St. Catharines kitchen, a dark cherry cooktop island anchors the space under a period light fixture. **BOTTOM RIGHT** Toning down the paint colour on a stairway's encircling foyer walls helps to effectively harmonize with the bold statement made by a classic checkerboard English floor in a Niagara residence.

JOHN KAZMIR PHOTO BY ROBERT NOWELL

