



Photo by Kit Latham / courtesy of William Caligari Interiors Architecture

This mosaic, designed by William Caligari, is made of ceramic, leather and pebbles. It is installed in the women's whirlpool area at Canyon Ranch Health Resort in Lenox.



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Above, a room in a renovated Victorian cottage designed by William Caligari Interiors/Architecture. The palette of cool and warm neutrals is meant to be reminiscent of the forest in winter.

At right, a detail of the custom ceramic shells created for the mosaic installed in the women's whirlpool area at Canyon Ranch Health Resort in Lenox.



Photo by Kit Latham / courtesy of William Caligari Interiors Architecture

Create a personal oasis

By Lesley Ann Beck
Berkshire Eagle Staff

Imagine a visit to a luxurious spa. Picture the spacious rooms painted in a serene, subtle palette; comfortable furniture of gleaming wood, and lush window treatments of rich fabric, allowing ample natural light into the space.

The Canyon Ranch Health Resort in Lenox is just such a spa, and the man responsible for the interior design is Berkshire native William Caligari, managing principal at William Caligari Interiors/Architecture in Great Barrington. Caligari has been the designer of record for the award-winning Canyon Ranch resorts here and in Tucson for 12 years. His expertise in creating interiors for the hospitality industry carries into his residential designs, part of the trend for creating "personal space" in one's home.

Caligari grew up working in the family paint store, just one of the family businesses started in the 1890s by his grandfather, who brought his skills as a decorative painter from Como, Italy.

Caligari went to New York at age 18 and received his formal training at the New York School of Interior Design. His decision to become an interior designer, Caligari said during a recent interview at his office, "had a lot to do with my grandfather. We were a working-class family, and when I went to New York there was something that kicked in and I began to be interested. I've always been interested in fine art, and I've always painted and drawn." He had success in the city, working with major commercial accounts, but returned to the Berkshires in 1989 to start his own firm — Lenox Design Resources.

Canyon Ranch, owned by Mel and Enid Zuckerman, is Caligari's biggest client, one he says he "was lucky" to get. "When I started my business," Caligari said, "I was the sole

employee. I was doing a residential project for Mrs. Zuckerman's sister. She brought Enid to meet me. For the next three years, Enid had me do little projects, bigger in scale each time. By 1997 we were the designer of record for the Lenox site. I have a fantastic relationship with the owners. Because of the relationship with Canyon Ranch, we've been able to grow this business to a greater degree."

Renamed William Caligari Interiors/Architecture last year, Caligari's team of 12 designers, architects, draftsmen and managers operates out of a set of spacious renovated offices overlooking the river.

The recent renovations of R.W. Wise Goldsmiths and the Love Dog Café, both in Lenox, are also examples of Caligari's expertise, utilizing exquisite custom cabinetry and woodwork. But Caligari and his team do a lot of residential projects, as well, in a wide variety of styles.

"By empathetic listening to the clients, I can design for them," Caligari said. "The look of Canyon Ranch in Lenox and in Tucson is quite different."

Caligari does have a favorite form or motif that appears in much of his work.

"There's an organic form — you can see it in the salon at Gedney Farm or at the Love Dog Café — it's a signature curve."

Caligari works in a series of sketchbooks, filled with drawings of nudes, portraits and sketches of furniture and rooms. Some pages

SPA, continued on D3

Creating a personal oasis

SPA from D1

are covered with tiny swatches or dabs of gouache, explorations of possible palettes and color combinations. That signature curve is evident in a variety of forms. In some sketches, it looks like a ribbon, in others, like a river on a map or the curves from a figure drawing. This design element has been translated to the curved wall at the entrance to the Love Dog Café.

Caligari's wife is Iranian, and he learned to speak and write Farsi, where his signature curve is part of Persian calligraphy.

Creating a personal oasis

Caligari starts with a design concept. "If you start with a tile or a chair, it's all uphill, but once you have a concept, it's easy. It's all of a piece — then every part of the design works."

Choosing a palette for a project, Caligari says, "is completely tied in to who the people are." He bases his choices on the personalities and the location of the space.

"When you start an interior project, there has to be an overriding concept of what the space will be. You get to know the client — that conversation is about who they are. I form a concept in my mind. The primary thing is the exchange, then the space plan and the use of the room."

When asked to design a special room for euphoria treatments at Canyon Ranch, Caligari had the treatment himself. He created an Eastern, restful, non-institutional environment, working with the therapist on choices. Caligari painted the ceiling cobalt blue, echoing a night sky, with tiny mirrors to reflect candlelight. "The colors come from the smell of the oils," he said.

For a casual dining space at Canyon Ranch, he wanted to create a bistro atmosphere, and the design concept came from the children's story "Madeline." The finished space resembles a Parisian street scene.

Caligari says there is no formula to creating a "spa" space or personal oasis. "What we have to do is determine what the space will be used for and what makes each person comfortable."

People have their own ideas of what their "spa spaces" should contain. "One client wanted a shower, a steam room, a massage room and a lounge with a TV, and he wanted it to be masculine," Caligari said. "So the walls are

Design tips:

- If you decide to consult an interior designer, make a list of questions before your meeting.
- Caligari prefers incandescent light; at Canyon Ranch a lot of sconces were used to bring the light sources down.
- Caligari encourages eclectic choices in furniture and accessories.
- Caligari and his staff say no job is too small. WCIA staff is available for consultation, even if you want to reupholster a piece of furniture.
- Divide a large space. Put a fireplace in the center of the room, place furniture away from the walls. The idea is to take big spaces and take them down to a human scale, to what's comfortable.
- Caligari is known for using unusual materials and making unusual use of materials. A mural in the women's aquatherapy area at Canyon Ranch is made of leather tiles, accented with custom ceramic pieces and pebbles.

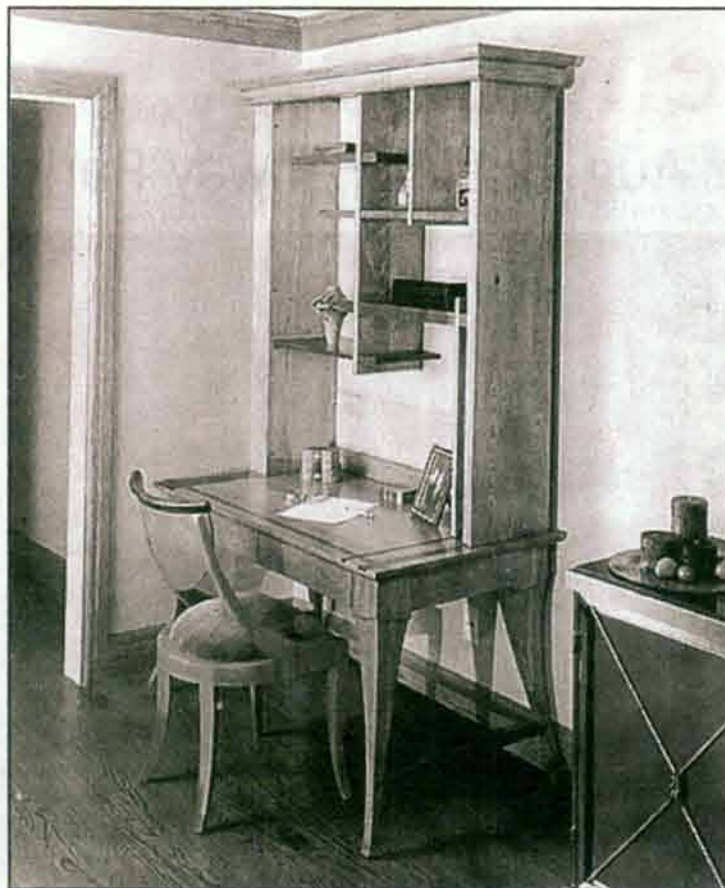


Photo by Kit Latham / courtesy of William Caligari Interiors Architecture
This elegant desk was designed by William Caligari and custom built for a client, incorporating a number of different types of wood.

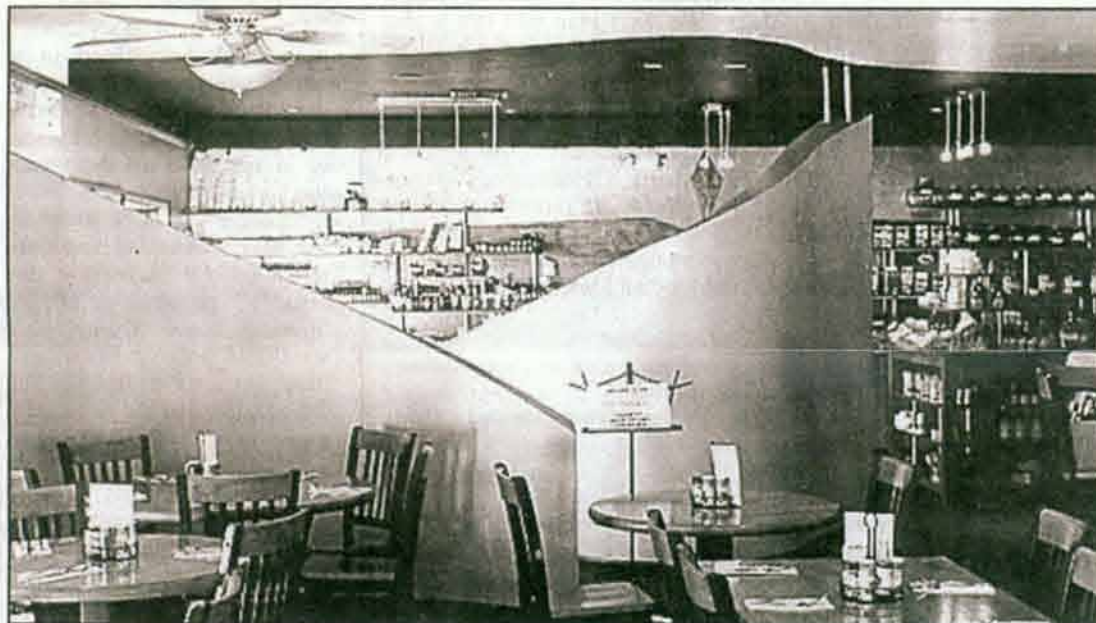


Photo by William Caligari / courtesy of William Caligari Interiors Architecture
The swooping curved walls at the Love Dog Café in Lenox are one of William Caligari's signature motifs.

paneled in cherry, with upholstered chaises off the steam room, and there's eucalyptus aromatherapy — the client's concept — and a lot of natural materials."

Another client, Caligari added, "wanted a relaxation space in the attic of her Victorian home — painted white with carpet, a com-

fortable chair with her books and magazines, with candles for lighting. That's a spa for her."

And in Williamstown, Caligari continued, "we just took a former horse stable and put in a steam shower and an in-ground whirlpool tub. That's now an organic green space with slate and green

river stones on the walls. There's exercise equipment in the main section — it's all about wellness."

And his clients know what they want. "People that are doing a wellness space are knowledgeable about psychology, nutrition, fitness and relaxation. They are becoming aware."

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