

HOME & DESIGN

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*Liliana Korn Custy, architect and interior designer, says
'For me, the word impossible does not exist.'*



CHARLES TRAINOR JR./MIAMI HERALD STAFF

MODERN LIVING: Liliana Korn Custy in the living room she designed for Clive and Terry Lewis. The room is ultra contemporary with clean lines and sleek surfaces.

Design on a grand scale

BY CHARLYNE VARKONYI SCHAUB
Special to The Miami Herald

One in a series of occasional articles on South Florida designers.

Liliana Korn Custy was only 16 when her act of independent thinking became a harbinger of her future career.

Her family was moving to a larger condo in the Recoleta area of Buenos Aires when she insisted on radically changing the look of her bedroom from her parents'

French style taste to the clean contemporary style she saw in the Italian magazine, *La Mia Casa*.

"I told our designer I wanted white furniture with the only color coming from a big Eames chair and stool in burgundy leather," the North Miami Beach architect and interior designer said. "I found a Pucci rug in burgundy, blue and light green. It cost \$30,000 then, but my father agreed." Custy, whose expertly cut blond hair

• TURN TO CUSTY, 4H



COURTESY OF LILIANA KORN CUSTY

WEATHERPROOFING: Custy's clients wanted to be able to swim indoors in their Georgian-style home in Pilar, outside Buenos Aires.

FAIRCHILD'S TROPICAL GARDEN COLUMN

How to prune a tree

■ Trim a tree to keep its shape, get rid of dead or unhealthy wood, or open up air flow.

JEFF WASIELEWSKI
Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden

True pruning is an art that takes time and thought. Trimming a tree too heavily or cutting it poorly will endanger its overall health. Here in the subtropics, the threat of tropical storms and hurricanes make proper pruning even more critical. Here are some pointers.

Pruning is done to control size or shape, to promote flower and fruit production, to remove unhealthy portions of a plant and to open trees up to make them less likely to fall or break apart during a storm.

Before you make your first cut, study the plant's natural shape and try to picture this plant in three to four years. Try to maintain that shape in your mind as you prune. This will help you to make the sometimes difficult decisions associated with pruning.

Pruning large trees to bring them down to size is not an acceptable reason to prune, except in the case of some fruit trees. The better remedy is to put the right tree in the right location — choose a tree that will grow to the height you want, don't try to maintain the height by heavy pruning.

Before you start pruning, select the proper tools. Three tools will be invaluable: a hand pruner, a lopper and a handsaw. Each tool should be of high quality and compatible with the user. Making sure your tools are properly sharpened and in good condition will greatly ease your work.

Chainsaws are not neces-

• TURN TO TREES, 6H

DECOR

A twin-twin situation in decorating

BY KRISTIN TAVEIRA
Newsday

MELVILLE, N.Y. — It's said that parents of twins are twice blessed: Twins bring double the joy, double the love and double the fun. Much less exciting but no less true is that they also bring double the bills — and often have to make do with half the bedroom space.

If you've got the room and the budget, designing a nursery for twins can be great fun — infants don't get a say, so you're free to adorn the space however you like. But the nursery is only the

beginning — and it's also not a necessity, says Farmingville, N.Y., designer Isabel Melo, who has twin boys. "When they were first born, I had to give them my bedroom," she recalls.

But eventually, babies become children with belongings — and opinions. "As they grow, things change and get expensive," Melo says. "When the different personalities come out and you know who's who, you don't want to smother that. You want each to be his own individual person."

Newsday asked parents

of twins and interior designers to share their best money-saving, space-saving and sanity-saving tips for decorating for two at every age and stage.

TEEN TWINS

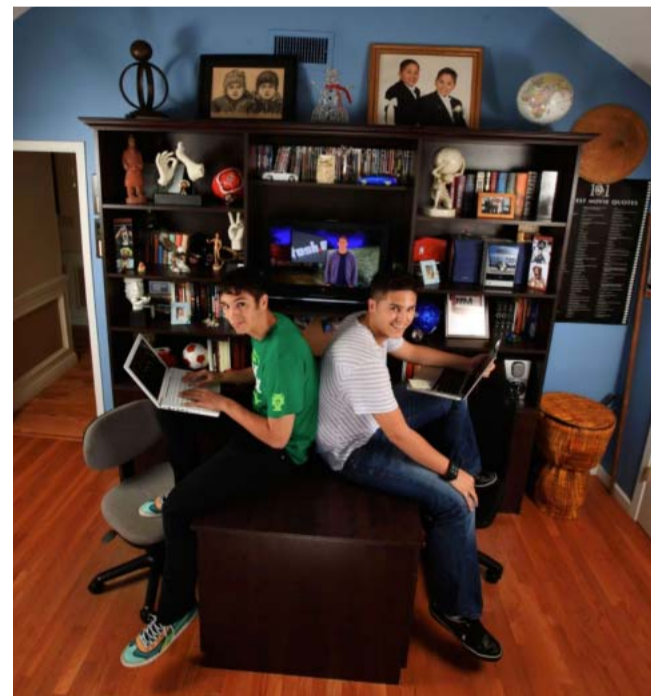
Farmingville designer Isabel Melo says her 17-year-old twin boys were outgrowing their bedroom before her eyes. "They are 6-foot-3, and I had to do something," says Melo. The boys still wanted to share, so her solution was to move both boys to the bigger bedroom that had belonged to

their sister before she graduated and moved out. Their sister gets the smaller room for visits.

Saving space: Invest in the closet, advises Melo. "I wanted them to have space in the room. I put in drawers, shelves and hanging

• TURN TO TWINS, 5H

DOUBLE DOWN: Twins Brandon, left, and Anthony Melo share this bedroom, but each has his own set of shelves and desk space.



JOHN PARASKEVAS/MCT

2H CONDO LINE: LOCKED OUT OF THE LOCKERS

4H HOW DOES YOUR HOME COMPARE?



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HOW DOES YOUR HOME COMPARE?

**\$320,000****Seller:** Ashley Rodriguez.**Buyer:** Angelica Bravo.**Address:** 1905 S. Hibiscus Dr., North Miami. **Yr. built:** 1951.**Bdrms:** 4. **Baths:** 2. **A/C sq. ft.:** 1,792. **Lot sq. ft.:** 9,027.**Date Sold:** 6/15/11. **Previous sale:** \$300,000 in 2007.**Days on market:** 78. **Agents:** Jeff Koebel, Annie Montgomery Realty; Marilina Apfelbaum, Beachfront Realty.**\$716,500****Seller:** John L. Diaz.**Buyers:** Jose Luis and Kimberly Martinez.**Address:** 102 Camilo Ave., Coral Gables. **Yr. built:** 2009.**Bdrms:** 4. **Baths:** 3. **A/C sq. ft.:** 3,461. **Lot sq. ft.:** 8,250.**Date Sold:** 6/6/11. **Previous sale:** \$546,000 in 2006.**Days on market:** 227. **Agents:** Marisela Cisneros, ONE Southeby's International Realty; Michael Martinez, Greater Miami Investments Inc.**\$382,500****Seller:** Owner of record.**Buyer:** Alexander Acquisitions.**Address:** 1402 Capri St., Coral Gables. **Yr. built:** 1939.**Bdrms:** 3. **Baths:** 3. **A/C sq. ft.:** 1,821. **Lot sq. ft.:** 15,000.**Date Sold:** 6/15/11. **Previous sale:** \$446,100 in 2011.**Days on market:** 20. **Agents:** Joel Freis; ReMax Advance Realty II.**\$180,000****Seller:** Janet Lodispoto.**Buyer:** Jason and Michelle Patten.**Address:** 7965 NW Ninth St., Margate. **Yr. built:** 1978.**Bdrms:** 4. **Baths:** 2. **A/C sq. ft.:** 1,985. **Lot sq. ft.:** 10,824.**Date Sold:** 6/24/11. **Previous sale:** \$125,000 in 1989.**Days on market:** 78. **Agents:** Hap Pomerantz, The Keyes Company; Jennifer Nabrasky, Prudential Florida.**\$180,000****Sellers:** Howard Kaye and Gloria Yerman.**Buyer:** Stephen Mills.**Address:** 11142 Chandler Dr., Cooper City. **Yr. built:** 1990.**Bdrms:** 3. **Baths:** 2 1/2. **A/C sq. ft.:** 1,633. **Lot sq. ft.:** Condo.**Date Sold:** 5/27/11. **Previous sale:** \$295,000 in 2006.**Days on market:** 85. **Agents:** Richard Ferris, Coldwell Banker; Lisa Miller and Allison Miller, The Miller Team, Keller Williams Elite Properties.**\$78,500****Seller:** Wells Fargo.**Buyer:** Eugene Joseph Duncan.**Address:** 988 NE 41 Pl., Homestead. **Yr. built:** 2005.**Bdrms:** 3. **Baths:** 2 1/2. **A/C sq. ft.:** 1,450. **Lot sq. ft.:** 2,000.**Date Sold:** 7/8/11. **Previous sale:** \$223,440 in 2005.**Days on market:** 8. **Agents:** Jill Diane Becker and Louis Melara, Keyes Company; Kay Bismarch, Jeanne Baker Realty, Inc.

These are homes that recently have been sold. Realty agents and brokers: To have your recent sales appear in this column, go to www.MiamiHerald.com, click on Real Estate, scroll down and click on the link How does your home compare fill out the form and follow instructions. There is no charge. Incomplete forms will NOT be processed for publication.

SOUTH FLORIDA DESIGNERS

Custy: Design on a grand scale

• CUSTY, FROM 1H

resembles the perfect bob of Vogue's Anna Wintour, was confused at first about what career path to follow because she loved writing, art and architecture. Growing up in Argentina, she had a broad education that included all her loves.

"My father told me: 'Writing is a hobby. Art is a hobby. Architecture is a profession.'"

And what a rewarding profession it has been. Custy, 56, can expertly oversee everything from construction and design of a 16,000-square-foot Georgian-style house near Buenos Aires, to designing a 7,000-square-foot penthouse triplex in Oceania Tower V in Sunny Isles Beach. Last year she was awarded the American Society of Interior Designers' Joel Polsky Academic Achievement Award for her outstanding master's research project, "Transdisciplinary Teams and Aging-in-Place Design: The Interior Designer's Role." When former Architectural Digest editor Paige Rense and her staff came to South Florida in 2008, Custy's work was lauded as one of the top five in an open audition.

Custy is far more than just a designer. She became an architect, general contractor and general project manager with expertise in everything from plumbing to electrical work at age 23.

"I really enjoy going to job sites; places tell you what they want to be," she said.

A young, attractive woman in a man's world, she often was whistled at and taunted by male construction workers. She has always loved fashion and remembers the mistake of wearing a knit, pleated mini skirt at a job site. A gust of wind picked up the skirt a la Marilyn Monroe's famed scene in *The Seven Year Itch*. The men reacted with whistles and cat calls, but she kept walking.

"Nothing was going to stop me," she said.

Nothing has. One of her most memorable jobs was the 15,000-square-foot penthouse on two floors plus rooftop that she designed for former tennis star Gabriella Sabatini in the center of Buenos Aires. The job, her first big project on her own, remains one of her favorites.

Sabatini wanted to live in a house, but she selected a condo because someone of her fame needed a more secure residence. Custy's answer was to create a winter garden and a solarium on the top floor. To do so, she had to cover an open area with a slab.

The elaborate project took two years. No dry wall was used; everything was done in plaster. In the winter garden, she invented arches and covered them with two tones of marble to make it look like they were arches in a veranda. The windows were designed to



CHARLES TRAINOR JR./MIAMI HERALD STAFF

UP ON THE ROOF: A wall between the master bedroom and bath was removed in the penthouse home of Clive and Terry Lewis.



CHARLES TRAINOR JR./HERALD STAFF

HAPPY THREESOME: Clive and Terry Lewis with their dog Fritz at their penthouse in Oceania Tower V.



COURTESY OF LILIANA KORN CUSTY

JUST LIKE HOME: In this home outside Buenos Aires, a custom-made wrought iron railing was designed to resemble the client's condo in France.

open and close electronically.

Although her idols are architects, such as modernist Mies van der Rohe who believed "less is more," she can work in any style.

"I have no signature look," she said. "I can work with whatever the client wants. I like doing research. I am creative and like going beyond."

She did the architectural plans, interior design, landscape design and construction supervision for a Georgian-style home in a country club community in Pilar, a province of Buenos Aires. The client was Adolfo Smolarz, a major donor to Jewish causes and Tel Aviv University, where he funded the Smolarz Family Graduate School of Life Sciences.

Plans for the 16,000-square-foot winter residence were so large that Custy had to construct two buildings — a main residence and a facility for an indoor swimming pool, hot tub sauna, game room, kitchen and large barbecue area.

She used skilled craftsmen to do the details, including a custom-made wrought iron staircase with gold accents to remind Smolarz's wife of her condo in France. Smolarz wanted white marble in the pool like he had in another residence, but Custy recommended using mosaic tiles like the English discovered in Pompeii. She said she would redo the project if he didn't like the design, but once it was installed he agreed she was right.

"The upscale mansion

took 30 months from designing the project to finalizing the interiors and the works of art," Smolarz wrote in a recommendation letter. "Liliana did her job with great dedication and in complete harmony. Liliana Korn Custy is an easy-going person and very pleasant to deal with. She was able to interpret what I wanted."

Custy interpreted the extreme opposite design for Clive and Terry Lewis in their 7,000-square-foot penthouse with a 1,500-square-foot rooftop at Oceania Tower V in Sunny Isles Beach. The design is ultra contemporary with clean lines, sleek surfaces and lack of clutter.

"We had a synergy," Clive Lewis said. "I knew what I wanted and she knew how to get it done."

Getting it done meant Custy was on site during construction to make sure the kitchen, dining room and living room were open instead of broken into different rooms, building soffits and lining up high hat lighting, creating a large bar with special glass that resists fingerprints and finding the right travertine to install on a long wall.

A special bar cabinet stores the liquor on steps, like in a restaurant, and it can be rolled out from under the counter. Television sets either disappear into the ceiling or into the kitchen countertop.

The rooftop presented another challenge — the view of the city and ocean could not be appreciated because the walls were too

high. She elevated seating with steps, added a fountain and built the furniture out of concrete so only the cushions have to be removed in case of a hurricane. The rooftop also includes a kitchen, hot tub, shower and bathroom.

Despite all of her credentials earned in Argentina, Custy couldn't get her Florida interior design license without going back to school.

In 2009, she graduated with honors from Florida International University with a post professional master's of arts in interior design. She is licensed in Florida as an interior designer and general contractor, and she is a professional member of the American Society of Interior Design and a certified Aging-in-Place specialist.

"I know from her master's project that she is a great thinker and smart person," said Janine King, chair of FIU's Department of Interior Design. "In our mentoring program, she helps evaluate projects and tells students what needs improvement. She is good with students, has a good eye and comes up with important things that can improve their work."

One of the things clients like about Custy is her drive for perfection and creativity to find solutions.

"For me, the word impossible does not exist," she said.

Charlyne Varkonyi Schaub can be reached at charlynedesign@aol.com.

IN THE KITCHEN

Choosing between a toaster and a toaster oven

BY CRIS CARL
www.Network.com

Buying a new toaster is deceptively simple — it seems like a non-issue, right? Who needs to read an entire article about how to buy a toaster?

We don't take you to be simpletons. It happens that the variety of functions and range of prices of toasters and toaster ovens are overwhelming, making buying this workhorse little kitchen appliance a bigger job than it used to be. And while you might not use your vacuum cleaner or stand mixer every day, the toaster is an appliance that can make or break your morning routine. Also, it's flammable, so choose carefully. Here are a few things to consider:

• **Cost:** Toasters will usually be less expensive than toaster ovens. Toasters

can run from \$10 to around \$200. The higher-end models simply add a few more bells and whistles, such as sandwich cages or defrost settings.

Toaster ovens, some of which cook by convection (meaning there is a small fan in the back of the oven that allows food to be cooked more quickly and evenly) can cost from \$20 to over \$11,000. The higher-end models often run on gas, usually have a rotisserie, and should be also be able to tuck you into bed at night.

• **Appearance:** A toaster takes up less space and can be more decorative. Toasters come in a wide variety of styles and colors, as well as chrome and stainless steel. Plus, if you have some type of theme in your kitchen, you can find or easily make a matching

cover for the toaster.

You will need to consider how much space you have for the placement of the toaster or toaster oven. One advantage to a toaster oven is that it can be mounted underneath a cabinet, freeing up counter space. If you choose a mounted toaster oven, please be sure it was constructed for that type of use.

• **Capabilities:** The toaster oven obviously has far more capabilities than a toaster. Some toaster ovens, particularly the convection toaster ovens, compete more accurately with conventional ovens. If you live in a small space, it might make more sense to have an appliance that will toast your bread, as well as cook your chicken and heat up your frozen pizza. Toaster ovens, if used as your pri-

mary appliance for baking, will save you a considerable amount over time in energy and energy expense.

• **Safety:** If you plan on buying a toaster oven, avoid the cheapest models. While technology and manufacturing standards have grown over the years, I don't know a single person (myself included) who has not had a cheap toaster oven catch on fire. You can get a very good product for under \$100. Keep in mind both toasters and toaster ovens have high temperature heating elements. If you have young children in the house, keep the toaster or toaster oven unplugged when not in use. Most toaster ovens come with a timer, but don't necessarily turn themselves off. Look for models that have a self-eject baking rack or automatic shut-off.