

DESIGNER DEFERENCE

TECHNICAL EXPERTISE

AN INTERIOR DESIGNER'S PRECISE EYE REALIZES AWARD-WINNING DESIGNS ON LAND, BY THE SEA, AND IN THE AIR

BY GAYLENE SALOMONS



COURTESY OF FRANK PONTERIO

Thirty years ago, **Frank Ponterio**, a graduate of Chicago's exclusive Harrington Institute of Design (now shuttered), opened his eponymous design studio in the Midwestern city. After completing his first design project in Naples 15 years ago, he decided he wanted to call the Sunshine State his home. "I have a great team that has grown with me," he remarks, enabling him to finally launch a second office in 2021.

Ponterio's namesake firm mainly focuses on designing high-end interiors for contemporary penthouses, uber-luxurious inns, country clubs, and historic homes. He explains his company is licensed by a state board of architects to pull permits for interior alteration and work. "We provide the architecture from the drywall in," he relates. "We have become known for our technical expertise."

When asked, Ponterio classifies his design aesthetic as "attention to detail." Over the years, his firm has received numerous accolades for its work, including a recent honor for a Chicago-area home on Lake Michigan. The Florida chapter of the Institute of Classical Architecture & Art bestowed an Addison



PONTERIO REDESIGNED THIS CESSNA CITATION XLS (TOP LEFT), ADDING DARK-STAINED WOOD, BLUE CARPET (ABOVE), AND LEATHER SEATS (TOP RIGHT AND LEFT); THE SEATS WERE INSPIRED BY A FAVORITE CAR HE ONCE OWNED—A 1972 ALFA ROMEO GTV.

Mizner Award for residential interior design, lauding the classical and traditional aesthetic of the residence that made the cover of *House Beautiful's* March/April 2024 issue. "It was a huge honor," says Ponterio.

In 2022 Ponterio won a first-place ASID Illinois Design Excellence Award for a project that transcends the traditional. When a long-standing client purchased a private plane, Ponterio toured the interior and had

one word to describe it: "horrible." Ponterio considers his client (and good friend) "a sharp-dressed man with good taste," explaining said client "needed something similar to whom and what he was" reflected in the airplane's interior.

Ponterio was commissioned to redo the interior with the caveat that it had to be done in 30 days. The plane was stripped to its fuselage; its avionics and electronics were

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PONTERIO WAS COMMISSIONED TO REFURBISH THE INTERIOR OF THIS CESSNA CITATION CJ2+ IN ONLY 30 DAYS.

also completely updated. He redesigned the space to be “light and bright” by adding cream-colored leather seating with navy piping, high-gloss mahogany millwork, a custom-dyed wool carpet, ecru fabric side panels, and an off-white leather headliner.

Options for airplane interiors are few. “It’s the paradox of choice,” says Ponterio. “I learned a lot about the many FAA regulations regarding materials you can use—from what microwaves are acceptable to glassware that withstands turbulence to what

leather is the easiest to get ink out of.” Ponterio details that all fabrics and flooring material must be custom-cut and -fitted while meeting stringent composition standards. When it comes to designing the interior of airplanes, he is thankful that the drawings—completed by aerospace engineers—are always perfect. “There are no measurement discrepancies,” he says. “Only minor modifications are possible.”

A second private jet interior remodeling project was inspired by a favorite car

he once owned: a 1972 Alfa Romeo GTV. “It had great seats,” recalls Ponterio, who accurately emulated the car’s horizontally gridded seats in the jet. He is currently at work on a concept for his third jet-interior design project.

These days, Ponterio works with select clients, lending his eye for detail from start to finish on projects ranging from a boutique hotel in Michigan to homes on the island of St. John and the continent of Australia. (frankponterio.com) ◀◀

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