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# DESIGNING WITH DISCERNMENT

ARCHITECTS, INTERIOR DESIGNERS, AND KITCHEN DESIGN LEADERS  
ON CREATING WORK THAT ENDURES

*written by* **SHELBY SINCLAIR**

“Some ideas age with  
meaning, others fade.  
The work is learning  
which is which.”

—TANNER WHITE, Tanner White Architects





Tanner White

**Téa Canna:** Over the years, we've learned that great design begins with truly listening. While clients may come to us with specific requests, our in-depth interview process allows us to uncover what truly matters to them. We ask thoughtful, intuitive questions about lifestyle, priorities, and how they move through and use their space day to day. This deeper understanding helps us read between the lines and design environments that not only meet the brief but genuinely support the way our clients live.

**D+D:** How do you guide clients toward decisions that authentically reflect their lifestyle and values, even when it means gently challenging their assumptions?

**Téa:** We guide clients by consistently bringing the conversation back to lifestyle and function. When an assumption doesn't fully align with how they live, we thoughtfully present alternatives and walk them through how each choice will feel in everyday use. We rely heavily on visuals and textiles, bringing samples directly to the project so clients can experience materials in the space itself. This hands-on process helps clarify decisions and ensures the final design is not only beautiful, but genuinely aligned with how our clients live and what they value.



**D+D:** When you look back at your body of work, what decisions or philosophies do you believe have allowed it to feel enduring rather than tied to a moment in time?

**Tanner White:** Looking back, I'm not sure I always did. Timeless architecture is something I'm deeply interested in, but I'm also a creative person who likes to explore styles, mix them, and find the edges that define one from the next. Sometimes that exploration creates a sense of permanence—sometimes it doesn't. It's a learning process. I'm not satisfied staying in a safe zone or mimicking what's been done before. I want to draw outside the lines. The goal is timeless architecture—drawn outside those lines.

**D+D:** Where do you turn for creative fuel, and how do you convert inspiration into meaningful design?

**Tanner:** Music is a big one for me. I'm a huge metal fan at heart, but I listen to everything. Like architecture, some music still resonates decades later, while some becomes stale. That contrast is inspiring—it makes you think about what lasts and why.

**D+D:** How do you translate inspiration into something personal and intentional rather than a direct reference or fleeting idea?

**Tanner:** It's impossible for me not to look at architecture through my own lens—that's something I've realized over time. I enjoy exploring traditional styles through a contemporary perspective. So when inspiration comes in, there's an automatic translation into something new—something that reflects how I see the world today.

### Listening as a Design Discipline

#### Karen Berkemeyer Home | Karen Berkemeyer

**D+D:** With years of experience behind you, how have you learned to read between the lines and understand what clients truly need beyond what they initially ask for?

**Karen Berkemeyer:** Understanding a client's true needs begins with active listening and strategic, open-ended questioning. By listening carefully, we uncover their underlying thought process rather than reacting only to surface requests. We make it a priority to rephrase their ideas back to them so they feel fully understood, and we closely observe their reactions to ensure clarity and alignment throughout the process.

**D+D:** How do you guide clients toward decisions that authentically reflect their lifestyle and values, even when it means gently challenging their assumptions?

**Karen:** It starts with gaining a deep understanding of their personal style—often through a

