

Living In Texas

People

Kendyl Kearly

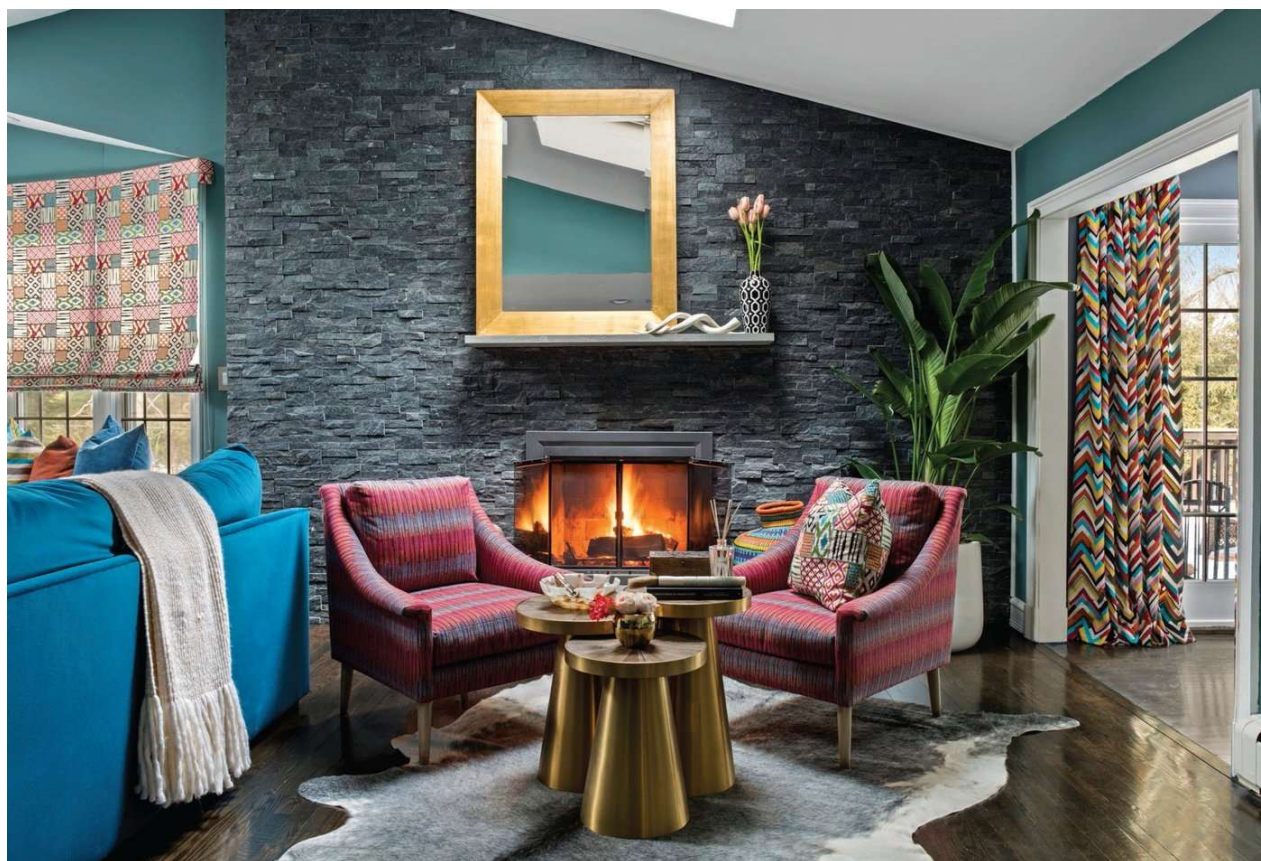
BRING IT HOME



NeKeia "Keia" McSwain PHOTO BY RAYON RICHARDS »

Interior designer and Black Interior Designers Network President NeKeia McSwain proves that turmoil can foster true leadership.

As a junior designer helping with administrative work and trying to soak up as much as she could about the interiors industry, NeKeia "Keia" McSwain didn't know her mentor was dying. But the late Kimberly Ward, principal designer of Kimberly + Cameron Interiors (kimberlyandcameron.com) and founder of the Black Interior Designers Network (blackinteriordesignersnetwork.com), was planning for a future that wouldn't include herself. "She was a visionary," McSwain remembers. "She saw me leading this before I even thought I'd still be around."

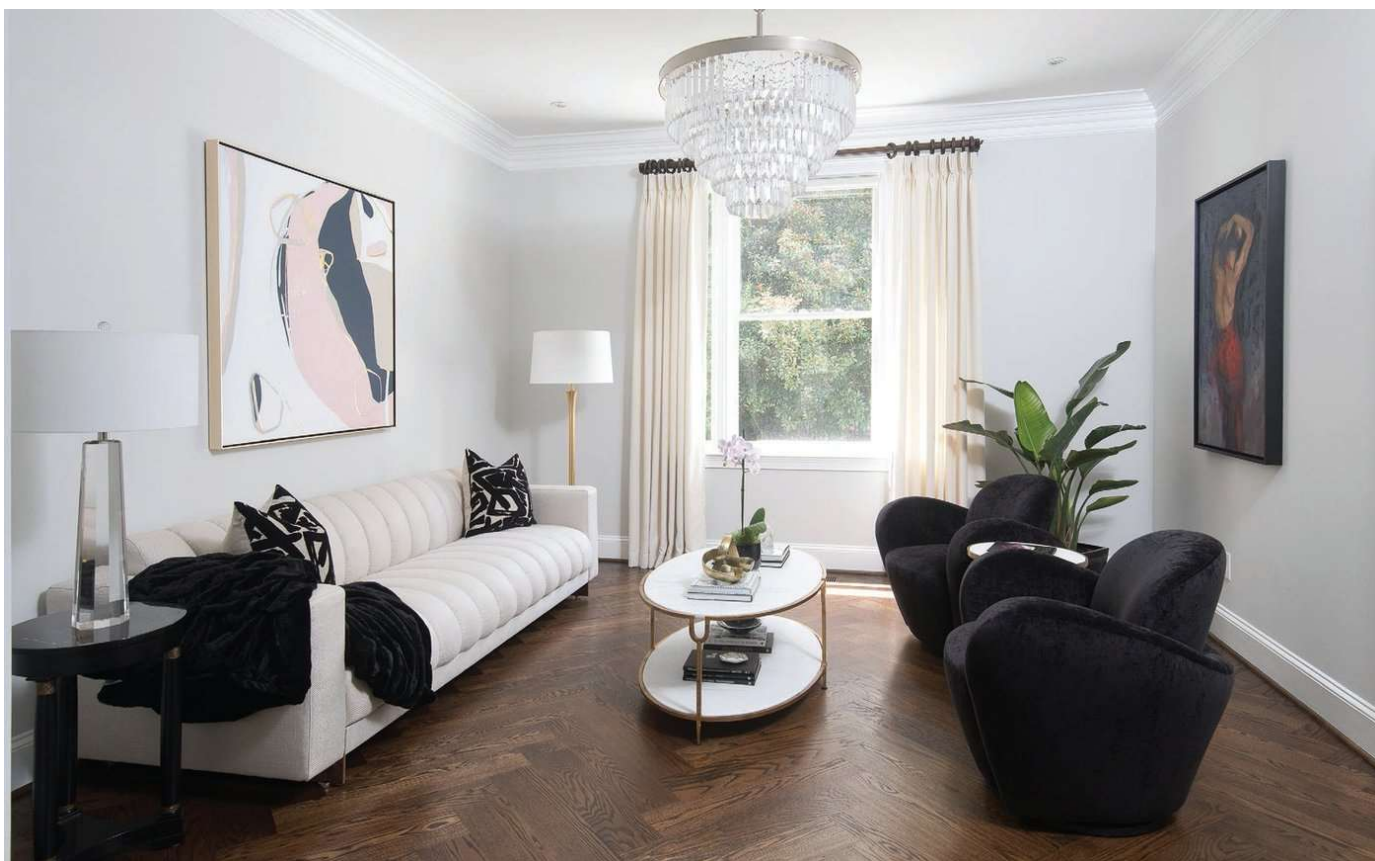


A project by Kimberly + Cameron Interiors. PHOTO BY RAYON RICHARDS »

When Ward could no longer travel, McSwain took her place on trips. She learned Ward's style through FaceTime and picked up on her own eclectic aesthetic. She would ask her boss why she didn't speak up when McSwain's work was wrong. Ward's reply: "I need to see what you know. Who's to say it's wrong? I'm learning from you too." That completely changed McSwain's worldview.

Their big project together was the 2017 Black Interior Designers Network Conference. They worked from Ward's hospital bed to connect Black designers and highlight their projects. Although Ward was unable to attend, the two talked afterward. "Hi," Ward said, and McSwain could hear the weakness in her voice, "I saw the photos. Everyone said it was great."

A few days later, McSwain called again. But Ward had passed.



Imani James designed this luxurious Atlanta project PHOTO BY: JASON SMITH/SMITH PORTRAIT DESIGN »

“I did not want the network to be something I focused on,” McSwain says. “I just wanted to live a life—a 29-year-old life.”

Yet BIDN, along with Kimberly + Cameron Interiors, was now hers. There was no one else. Fortunately, her feelings today aren’t the same as when Ward lay in the hospital.

“I walk it, I breathe it, I live it every day,” McSwain says. “Not just designing, but serving. My people have been at the bottom of the totem pole for as long as I can remember.”

Filled with passion and gusto, McSwain talks of her many projects: a 1930s Boston home with amazing bones; a Myrtle Beach, S.C., house with owners who live abroad; an e-design creative services package to cater to her clients during the coronavirus; and, most importantly, an allyship campaign to stop racial gaslighting and offer diversity and inclusion training. This is McSwain’s way of moving BIDN forward when its conference—and her mentor’s legacy—is not possible during a pandemic. Because, as she advises: “No one can learn if no one is willing to teach.”

Members of the Black Interior Designers Network to Watch

Glasshouse Interior

Sumptuous hues and materials color the portfolio of Chicago’s Glasshouse Interior (glasshouseinterior.com). Principal Marissa Nelums offers a variety of consultation services, including virtual, in-home, e-design, home staging and more to help bring her Hollywood-modern

aesthetic to life.



A Long Island, N.Y., home by Kimberly + Cameron Interiors. PHOTO... »

Imani James Interiors

Atlanta-based designer Imani James (imanijamesinteriors.com) takes European cues from her education studying at the British Academy of Interior Design in London and Milan's Marangoni Design School. She's a fixture of the design trade show and exhibition circuit, and was one of the 2017 AA Top 20 Interior Designer Award winners.

Nicole White Designs Interiors

Hailing from Jamaica, Nicole White (nwdinteriors.com) brings a Caribbean aesthetic to her projects and excels at the renovation process. Her work tends to possess popping artworks, bold colors and luxe touches that make a true Miami home.

Nikki Klugh Design Group

Founder and principal designer Nikki Klugh (nikkiklughdesign.com) is a believer in the power of sanctuary. The San Diego interiors expert makes sure that every home is a retreat that can transform a client's day with its peaceful energy.