

to make a great

FIRST IMPRESSION

By Charlyne Varkonyi Schaub

Take a critical look at your foyer. Is it a repository for keys, mail, backpacks? Or is it a stylish space that gives your guests a preview of coming interior attractions?

The foyer, often-overlooked in home design, should be more than just a passageway. Art, wall treatments, a beautiful staircase or well-chosen flooring can make it special. We asked three South Florida designers and a homebuilder to show us how.

Designer Jack Phillips collected vintage mirrors to accent the stairway instead of using art in this oceanfront home on Palm Beach.



DESIGNER
JACK PHILLIPS
PHOTOGRAPHER
ROBERT BRANTLEY

Jack Phillips used what he calls “creative manipulation” when he designed the interiors of an oceanfront spec house on Palm Beach during the economic downturn.

The focal point is an elegant but not foreboding staircase designed in a lattice style inspired by Chinese Chippendale. A dark handrail and treads contrast with the white supports for a classic island look.

Typically designers use wallpaper or artwork on the staircase wall, but Phillips never is typical. His choice? Vintage mirrors painted white to provide uniformity.

“If you cannot use good art, why even bother?” he says. “We could have filled the stairwell with mediocre art or reproductions. The mirrors are real. It is a lot of space to cover and it’s one of my favorite tricks when people don’t have great art.”

Instead of placing the table in the middle of the foyer, Phillips put the Ralph Lauren table next to the staircase.

The large foyer also has room for an elegant curio cabinet that he filled with coral.

“I like the juxtaposition of something quite important with something casual and unexpected,” he says. “It ties into the more casual lifestyle in Florida.”



The classic architecture is complimented with a floor in repurposed French limestone from Paris Ceramics.

Designer Jennifer Knowles says she placed the table next to the wall instead of a center table that would cause people to navigate around an obstacle in this casual home in Ocean Ridge.



DESIGNER
JENNIFER KNOWLES
PHOTOGRAPHER
ROBERT BRANTLEY

Jennifer Knowles knew the foyer should be casual in this Ocean Ridge home she describes as “modern meets Key West.” The owners, transplants from a country home an hour from New York City, told her they wanted to embrace a more beachy casual home with an open feel.

Knowles designed all the millwork, including the tongue and groove wood on the walls. She also used a darker finish on the handrails and steps to match the wood flooring.

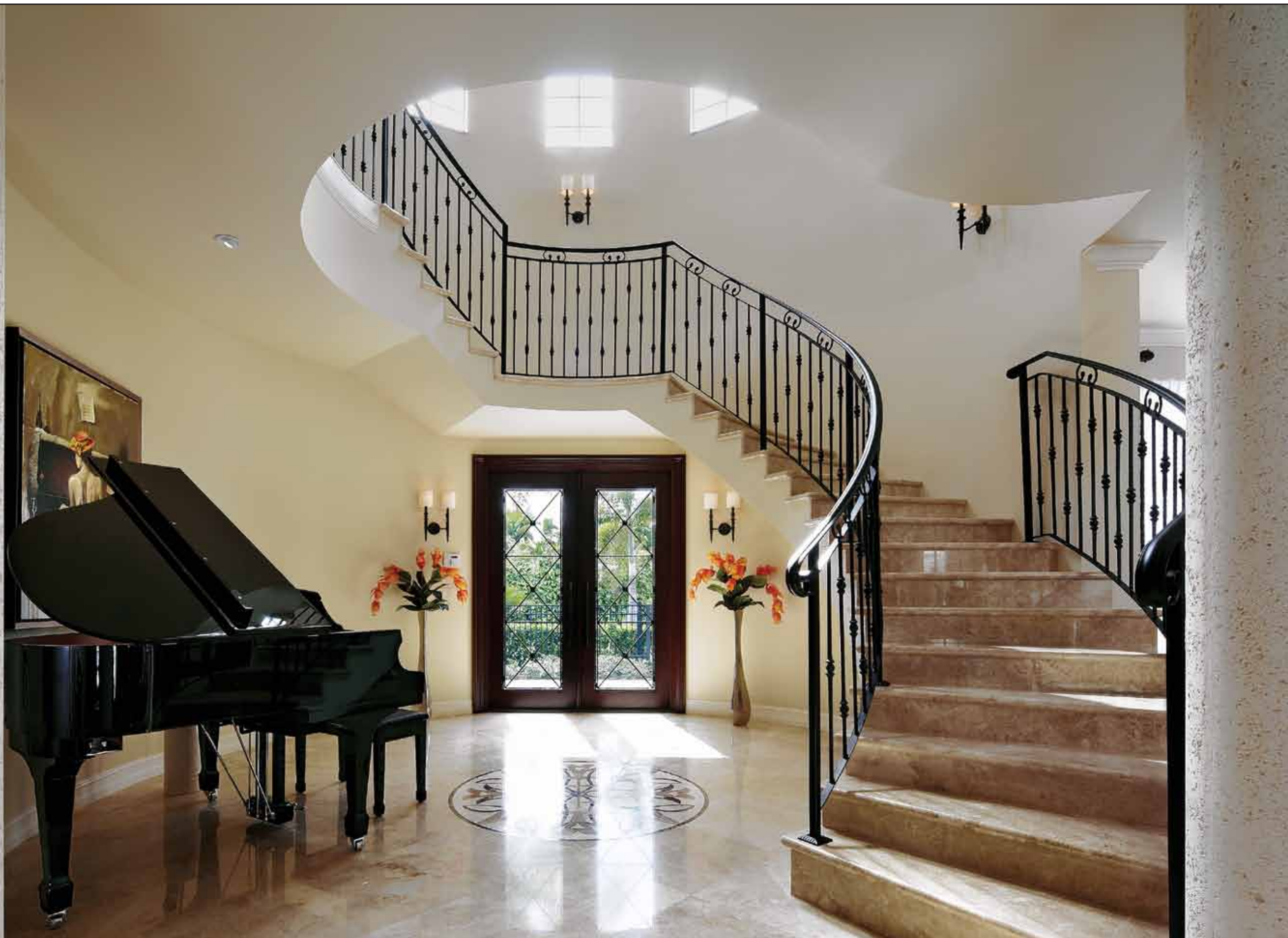
Not a fan of high hats, she used two sconces in the stairwell and a trio of lanterns hung at different heights above the stairwell.

“Ambient lighting is so important,” she says. “I delete 90 percent of the high hats an architect or builder puts into the plans. High hats are harsh and unwelcoming. You can achieve much more pleasing lighting with beautiful sconces, chandeliers and table lamps.”

Knowles placed a table near the staircase because she didn’t want to force people to walk around a center table. She added the casual basket because she thought the vignette needed some texture and a sense of informality.

“I always try to keep a foyer simple,” she says. “You want some great architectural detail that anchors the room. It should be well edited. You don’t need a lot of things competing. It should be a precursor to the taste of the home and the occupants’ lifestyle. It sets the stage.”





BUILDER
JOSH KHOURY
PHOTOGRAPHER
ROBERT BRANTLEY

It takes a large house to have the room for a staircase with risers that aren't too steep. This home on the Intracoastal Waterway in Fort Lauderdale features one of the most elegant staircases we have seen in South Florida and serves as an architectural focal point of the foyer.

"What I find attractive about the entry is the two-story radius feature," says builder Josh Khoury. "The landing helps break up the line. The three windows in the front elevation provide natural light."

Although the house's style is Mediterranean, the simple design of the railing allows the shape and contour of the design to shine without overwhelming it.

The flooring is 24-by-24-inch polished marble. A custom medallion was created in marble, granite and onyx.

Although this is a traditional foyer, Khoury says tastes are changing.

"It depends on the person," he says. "Some people are more formal. They like more traditional things and entertain a lot. Some want everyone to see the water so they want an open plan. A more casual house can do without a traditional foyer. It is more open and the public areas are a gathering space. It all depends on the person."

Builder Josh Khoury says a trio of windows in the front of this home in Fort Lauderdale provides needed light on the elegant stairway.



DESIGNER
PATTY GILBERT
PHOTOGRAPHER
ED BUTERA

Designing a foyer in a high-end condo like this one in Boca Raton's Mizner Grand presents a double challenge with a main foyer off the elevator and another foyer to enter the living space.

"The client and I wanted the foyer to reflect what is going to be seen when people come into the rest of the condo," says Patty Gilbert. "When you come off the elevator it should be a 'wow' just like when you come through the doors and walk into the residence."

The first foyer features a cream wall covering of large embossed leaves from Romo. The console table with an iron base and marble top appears to float because it is attached to the wall and has no back legs. The elegant mirror is surrounded with crystal. Marble flooring in the foyer continues into the living room.

Walnut double doors with beveled glass provide entry into the second foyer, which features a console table with an art deco vibe, a painting the owner selected and a faux painted tray ceiling to highlight the crystal chandelier.

"You should feel good the minute you walk in the door," she says. "It's important to be a very special area. You can overdo accessories. It is more elegant to look at a special piece as an accessory rather than having too much and making your eye wander all over the place."



This contemporary front foyer sets the stage for the second foyer and the Boca Raton condo's interior design.

Sources

Jack Phillips

Jack Phillips Design, 2611 Mercer Ave., West Palm Beach, 561-659-4459, jfillipsdesign.com.

Patty Gilbert

Brown's Interior Design, 4501 N. Federal Highway, Boca Raton, 561-368-2703, brownsinteriors.com.

Josh Khoury

Ocean Blue Custom Homes, 107 NE Second Ave., Delray Beach, 561-445-1258, oceanbluecustomhomes.com.

Jennifer Knowles

Knowles Design Studio, 3100 NW Boca Raton Blvd., Suite 309, Boca Raton, 561-395-9898, knowlesdesignstudio.com.

TILE IT ON

Whether your home is formal or casual, the tile you select for the foyer should be selected with care to make the best first impression.

Options include a variety of styles and finishes, from those with accents in 24-kt. gold glass to a more rustic tile that resembles barn wood.

By Charlyne Varkonyi Schaub

1. Glittering in gold

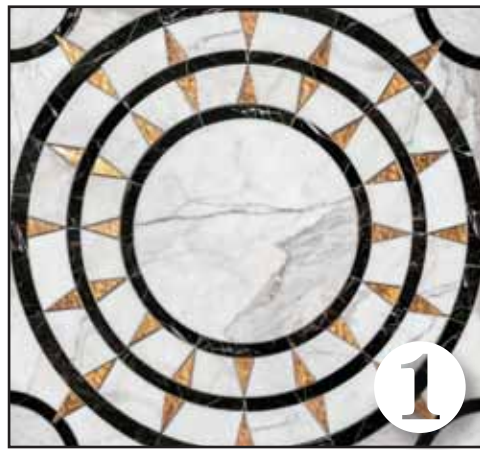
Istanbul's Hagia Sofia, a sixth-century basilica that became a mosque and then a museum, inspired Sara Baldwin's Aurora Collection for New Ravenna. Gold is the theme of the collection. As shown, Mireille, a water-jet cut mosaic tile honed in 24-kt. gold glass with Calacatta Tia and Saint Laurent stone. Suggested retail is \$285 a square foot. Available at Ceramic Matrix in West Palm Beach, Delray Beach and Miami, ceramicmatrix.com/showrooms.cfm.

2. Rustic solution

Crossville's SpeakEasy, a porcelain tile collection that evokes the appearance of rugged barn wood without the high maintenance, is a good solution for a beach retreat or a cottage-style home. It comes in five colors and in plank-like sizes of 6 by 36 inches, 8 by 36 inches and 12 by 36 inches. Suggested retail is \$5.69 a square foot. Available at D&B Tile Distributors in Delray Beach, Pompano Beach, Hialeah and Doral, dbtile.com.

3. White magic

Soho White, an exclusive rare white marble with a cloudy appearance from Opustone, is available in mosaics and tile sizes ranging 12 by 12 inches to 36 by 36 inches. Suggested retail, depending on size, finishes and variation, ranges from \$7.20 to \$12.70 per square foot. Available at Opustone, Fort Lauderdale, Miami and the Miami Design District, opustone.com.



4. Modern magic

Marc Thee, an *Architectural Digest* Top 100 designer with offices in Winter Park and Boca Raton, introduced his first tile collection during the Coverings 2014 convention in Las Vegas. His Essence Tile Collection for Barbie Kennedy Designs is inspired by elements found in nature. Modern Overlay, as shown, is available in 18-by-18 inch and 6-by-6 inch tiles in honed vein-cut limestone, polished white Thassos and textured Jerusalem pearl limestone. It can be used for interior floors and walls, though not in wet areas. Suggested retail is \$284.20 a square foot. Available at Ceramic Matrix in West Palm Beach, Delray Beach and Miami, ceramicmatrix.com/showrooms.cfm.

5. Modern Marvel

Many of us love the look of marble but don't love the maintenance and sealing it requires. One answer is the Mirage Jewels Line, a collection of porcelain tile that has the high-end appearance of natural stone's veining, hues and natural characteristics. It is available in 36-by-36 inch tiles and 36-by-70 inch slab cladding. Prices upon request. Available at Marble of the World, 4185 NW 77th Ave., Miami, 305-592-8850; and 6001 Powerline Road, Fort Lauderdale, 954-745-9700, marbleoftheworld.com.

