

# Home for the Holidays at Rooms with A View

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By Kendra Wingate



The highly esteemed Rooms With a View Event celebrated its 21st annual fundraiser recently, benefitting the ministry and mission of Southport Congregational Church. "Home for the Holidays," a Weekend of Design, featured 12 vignettes of Interior Design, more than 30 vendor shops, a cafe and highlighted many marvelous special events, throughout the weekend, celebrating 21 years of service to the community.

Over the past 20 years, through this unique venue, more than \$1.4 million has been raised, as a team of volunteers hundreds strong, share their creative talents for the benefit of others, transforming countless lives. The Southport Congregational Church, 524 Pequot Avenue, supports more than 20 highly-deserved local organizations in need each year.

Upon the termination of the church's original annual fundraising event in 1994, the Southport Antique Show, Senior Minister Paul Whitmore along with church members Bridget Schulten and Barbara Johnson, brainstormed seeking a new idea. Before long, the

trio enlisted the support of Florence Verrill, who conceived the idea of a decorator's showcase of vignettes where residents could connect with designers and find sources for furnishings. Verrill soon after met with weekend resident and legendary designer Albert Hadley of Albert Hadley, Inc., who not only supported the idea, but added an art component and became a staunch supporter and participant until his death in 2014.

"We are in our 21st year at Rooms With a View and the money raised goes toward the ministries that Southport Congregational Church does in the greater Bridgeport area," explained Reverend Laura Whitmore. "We have 26 charities that we sponsor and support through this program and through the work that we do at the church, with monetary donations, in-kind donations and hands on work, so we help out three ways. This is a big part of how we sustain our financial giving to the community. This year, very exciting, we have a new program called, "Chefs With a Mission." We interviewed and talked with each of the seven chefs that are represented here tonight and we told them about the different charities that we

support and then they each chose one to support tonight. That's our new twist. Basically, we are trying to help the community understand that the whole concept of Rooms With a View is built around not just the beauty of interior design, but the beauty of each of us helping one another."

"I choose 12 top designers in the area each year, from New York City to Fairfield County, to represent high end interior design," explained Parker Rogers of Parker & Company. "This year I had the help of Laura Meyers who works for Connecticut Cottages & Gardens along with friends who have done the show before and we have this amazing design showcase, its super fun. All of the money goes to the Southport Congregational Church and its mission programs."

Participating Designers included Andrea Cross, Keren and Corey Springer of Axel Interiors, Jill Kalman of Bella interiors, **Rena Cohen of Rena Cohen Interiors**, Trudy Dujardin of Dujardin Design Associates, Inc., Lisa Ehrlich of Lisa Ehrlich, Raquel Garcia of Raquel Garcia Interiors, Peter J Sinnot IV, Shawn Diaz and Angela Kosinski of Home Works, Lynn Morgan of

Lynn Morgan Interiors, Patricia Lapierre of New York Architect Designers, Tracy Dwyer and Patrick Briel of Parc Monceau, James D Peterson of J.D. Peterson and John Murphy of Tracker Home.

"An event like this really lends itself to great inspiration," said Mar Jennings, lifestyle expert, television Host and author. "It lends itself as a great opportunity to learn and to see how small intimate spaces create this vibrant illusion of a room. It's all about manipulation of size and scale, but yet you see the details in the finishes that you can apply and you can take them home with you. So I think it's not only a great showcase for designers to show their work but mostly it's great for the public to see how designers visualize, even in a tiny space. You can only imagine what they can do on larger spaces! It's all about thinking outside the box, but in a box. You have to say what can I create in these little tiny cubicles that gives the illusion and the feeling of that 3-D dimension, going beyond the walls, we're creating the illusion of outside and we're bringing it inside which is so much what my brand is all about. Embracing Mother Nature, embracing the outdoors and bringing it inside. That's what these rooms are speaking to me about."

"This event was started by Albert Hadley and it's one of the biggest fundraisers for the Southport Congregational Church," said Raquel Garcia of Raquel Garcia Design, LLC. "I feel it's an honorable opportunity to give back to the community through creative art and design; it's really awesome to be a part of."

Interior Designer Thom Filicia is the founder and principal of New York City based design firm, Thom Filicia, Inc. Interior Design Expert Filicia has a distinguished resume which includes worldwide award winning residential as well as commercial design and an Emmy Winning hit show, "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy," among many more impressive accolades. His company also creates products; furniture, textiles, rugs, bedding, artwork and boasts a showroom design center in NY called Sedgwick & Brattle.

"Everything about this event is fabulous," said Filicia. "The rooms are amazing, people, food, wine, cocktails, vignettes, location, the jewelry, the art work – is incredible. It's a wonderful opportunity for designers to work with other professionals in the community and to be a part of something that is not only creative and fun but it's also about connecting with people and giving back and helping other people. Across the board I think what's great about it is that it's about reinforcing community through creativity and through generosity."

Seven participating chefs who have made food their art form and a local charity their mission include; Norm Bloom & Son who chose Mercy Learning Center of Bridgeport, Chef Bill Kaliff of Festivities who chose the Center for Family Justice, Chef Timothy Scott of Geronimo's Tequila Bar & Southwest Grill who chose the youth of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, Chef Tim Pissarro of Little Pub who chose the Bridgeport Rescue Mission, Chef Robert Patchen and wife Donna of Paci Restaurant who chose Eagle Hill School, Baker Michelle Jaffee of Sweet & Simple who chose Emerge, Inc. and Chef Andrew Tavolacci and brother David, of Tutto Pasta who chose Homes for the Brave/ Female Soldiers: Forgotten Heroes.

"This is our second year with Rooms With a View, it's a pleasure to be back, it's even more beautiful than last year," said Bartender Justin Pasha, Owner of The Cupbearer. "We are proud to be serving our specialty cocktail, created especially for this event, it's called Autumn Mule and is created with apple and cinnamon infused Vodka with fresh lime juice and my homemade ginger beer, shaken and served over a large ice cube and garnished with a cinnamon stick."

"This is our first year of Chefs With a Mission and we are thrilled to be in such good company, representing the bake shop and Merge," said Michelle Jaffee, Owner of Sweet & Simple.

"Rooms With a View is a collaboration of all these different designers," said Marna Ringel of Flowers by Marna. "My design with this year's theme Home for the Holidays is about food and flowers. I have vegetables, radishes, potatoes, pears and chestnuts in large flower vases. This the 3'rd year I have done this, it's really just my vision with the event, it's quite fun."

*Photos by Stacy Bass*

