

# — AT HOME WITH —

# MELANIE CALDER RUSSO

| BY HELÉNE RAMACKERS

Principal Designer and Owner of Calder Design Group, Melanie Calder Russo gives us a sneak peek into her Long Island home, which she shares with her husband, their two children, and a Shih Tzu named Coco Chanel.

**Melanie, please tell us a bit about yourself.**

I am a married mother of two, currently living on Long Island, but deeply connected to New York City, where I was born, raised, and where my design office remains. I studied journalism at NYU with the dream of one day joining the editorial world of Vogue. After graduation, however, my path led me in a different but natural direction—into my family's interior design business, following in my father's footsteps. I quickly discovered that the creativity and inspiration I once envisioned for fashion translated seamlessly into interiors. For more than twenty years, I have been fortunate to pursue my true passion: creating spaces that are as stylish as they are livable, and that reflect the individuality and spirit of those who inhabit them.

**Did you have an influence in your youth that shaped your career path?**

My father was without question the biggest influence on my career path. He started his interior design business in the early 1970s, and as a little girl I loved tagging along with him to job sites. I was fascinated watching spaces evolve under his care, but one project at UN Plaza is etched in my memory. He had hired a painter to faux-finish the doors so they looked upholstered and tufted, and the effect was so realistic it felt like magic. I couldn't believe how something so ordinary could be transformed into something so special. I returned to that apartment with him many times, and I'll never forget the day of the final installation—seeing my father personally hand-deliver and fluff the pillows, making sure every detail was perfect. Watching that apartment come to life from raw space to a beautifully finished home made me so proud of him, and it was the first time I truly understood the impact of his work—and why it was so meaningful.

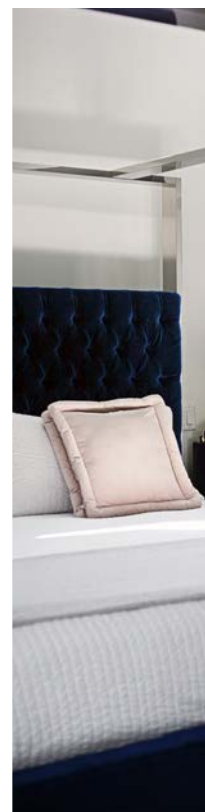
**Please tell us more about your home.**

I live on the South Shore of Long Island, just a few minutes from Robert Moses Beach, which has become such a natural

extension of our lifestyle. We purchased our home ten years ago after moving from Brooklyn, and it's a four-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bath, two-story house that we've slowly shaped into a reflection of how we live. The first transformation we took on was the backyard. Summer and outdoor living are at the heart of our family life, so we created a retreat complete with a pool, a wraparound Ipe deck, and a spacious cabana outfitted with a full kitchen and wood-burning pizza oven—the perfect spot for gathering with friends and family. More recently, we added a pool house with a lounge for the kids and a gym, giving the space even more versatility. Next on my list is a full kitchen renovation, which I'm both excited and a little indecisive about—there are so many directions I could take it!

**You are the Principal/Owner of Calder Design Group. Did you opt to do your home's own interior design?**

Yes, I absolutely design my own home. My husband is a contractor by trade, which makes for the perfect partnership—I dream it up, and he brings it to life. For the most part, he's wonderfully open to my ideas, and if there's ever something he's not completely sold on, we work through









it together until we find a solution that makes us both happy. It's a true collaboration, and I think that balance is what makes our home feel so personal and loved.

### How would you best describe your design style?

I'd say my style is a thoughtful mix of classic and contemporary, with plenty of room for personality. I'm drawn to interesting lines, layered textures, and, of course, a good dose of color. At home, I like to keep my walls crisp white—it's the perfect backdrop and gives me the freedom to play. If I decide to reupholster a chair in a bold fabric or swap in vibrant pillows, I know everything will still feel cohesive. I also have a soft spot for mid-century pieces; they add that touch of character and timeless cool that keeps a space from ever feeling too serious. For me, design should always feel stylish, but never predictable.

### Where / what / who inspires your design style?

As a designer, I'm always on the lookout for inspiration—it's everywhere if you know how to see it. I love popping into hotels, whether in New York City or abroad, just to take in the lobbies, bars, and restaurants—they're like runways for interiors. Fashion is a huge influence, too. I approach a room much like I would an outfit: layering textures, mixing patterns, playing with color, and sometimes taking a bold risk that makes the space pop. It's all about creating a look that feels effortlessly pulled together, yet full of personality.

### How do you keep things fresh and new in terms of decorating?

I love keeping my spaces feeling fresh and lively with little updates that make a big impact. Switching out pillows, vases, or decorative accents is an easy way to give a room a whole new vibe. In the bedroom, I often refresh the bedding—sometimes it's a pop of color, sometimes a new pattern—and suddenly the whole space feels renewed. It's a fun way to experiment, mix things up, and keep your home feeling dynamic without doing a full renovation.

### Is there a specific color you are drawn to in interior design?

I'm drawn to color in all its forms—I love a bold, dramatic statement or just a little pop against a crisp black-and-white backdrop. That said, I always like to balance it with something natural, like wood or a warm neutral tone. It's

that touch of realism that grounds a room and keeps it feeling livable. When you're experimenting with color, it's easy for a space to feel too whimsical, so adding a natural element keeps it stylish yet comfortable—perfect for real life.

### Do you believe in repurposing?

Absolutely—I'm a big believer in repurposing! Many of the pieces in my home have stories to tell, whether they're family heirlooms I've given a new life, vintage treasures I've scored along the way, or items from earlier chapters of my life. I love how these pieces add character and personality, often sparking conversation with guests. With a little creativity and care, even the oldest finds can feel fresh, modern, and totally your own—bringing a sense of history and heart to every room.

### Do you have any special heirloom pieces?

Some of my favorite heirloom and vintage pieces have incredible stories. There's a vintage Art Deco cocktail table from my parents' first pre-war apartment on Fifth Avenue, and a pair of vintage mid-century lounge chairs that bring timeless charm to my home. I also found a stainless steel bar cart at a flea market and updated it with black-and-white veined marble shelves for a modern twist. One of my absolute favorites is a vintage wood dining table with brass inlay that my husband rescued from a job site—it was slated for the trash! Years later, we were thrilled to see it featured on the cover of Architectural Digest in a photoshoot. These pieces are not just functional—they carry history, character, and a little bit of magic.

### Which part of your home is your favorite?

In the warmer months, my backyard is truly heaven on earth. If I'm not lounging by the pool, you'll find me in the cabana, laptop in hand, catching up on work while feeling like I'm on a perpetual vacation. On those dreary East Coast winter days, my favorite spot shifts indoors to the living room. It's filled with warmth, color, and cozy corners—perfect for curling up with a book or snuggling with family.

### In which part of your home do you spend the most time?

Being Italian and an avid cook, I spend most of my time in the kitchen! I absolutely love cooking, and in the summer, you'll usually find me whipping up meals outside in the cabana. It's also one of the reasons my kitchen renova-



tion has been delayed for so long—I honestly don't know how I'd survive without a functional kitchen while it's being remodeled!

### May I please ask who you share your home with? As an expert in your field, were / are you open to design suggestions from them, especially your child(ren)?

I share my home with my husband of 18 years and our two children, Sophia (14) and Anthony (11), along with our spirited five-year-old Shih Tzu, Coco Chanel. My kids love being part of the design process. For her thirteenth birthday, Sophia completely redesigned her room, creating her own floor plans and mood boards. Now Anthony is eager for his own bedroom revamp, and I recently took him shopping to start bringing his vision to life. It's such a joy to see them express their creativity and put their own personal stamp on their spaces.

### Do you have any designers that inspire you?

I draw inspiration from both personal and professional influences. Naturally, my father, Nicholas Calder, has always been my biggest design hero. Beyond that, I'm inspired by the bold creativity of Kelly Wearstler, the timeless elegance of William Haines, the theatrical flair of Tony Duquette, and the sophisticated use of color and pattern by David Hicks. Their work reminds me to take risks, mix textures, and always let personality shine through in a space.

### Parting thoughts?

"Design is like creating the perfect outfit for a home—layering textures, mixing patterns, adding bold pops of color, and sprinkling in personality so every space feels stylish, lively, and completely your own." ❖

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