

PROFILE | BRADY-ANNE CUSHING
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Team Player

NIMBLE AND SENSITIVE, BRADY-ANNE CUSHING SEEKS TO TRANSLATE HER CLIENTS' HOPES AND DREAMS INTO DESIGN NIRVANA

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When Brady-Anne Cushing was in sixth grade, her elementary school class was given an assignment. They were to design a house together, and each child was given a role, assigned one of the jobs written on slips of paper and pulled from a hat. "I drew the architect slip," she remembers. "The house ended up having to be square and simplistic on the outside due to the parameters of the project, but inside I had more freedom to play around and be creative with the spaces." From then on, she knew exactly what she wanted to do with her life. She wanted to lay out rooms, choose tile and arrange furniture, lay down flooring, and configure built-ins. She wanted to design interiors.

Cushing is now the interior design manager at Knickerbocker Group, splitting her time between the Boothbay and Portland offices. She joined the architecture, design, and construction management firm in 2013, following positions at Old Port Specialty Tile in Portland and Birchwood Interiors in Carrabassett Valley. When Cushing was first hired at Knickerbocker, "We weren't sure how far we were going to take our interiors department," she says. "But it just took off. Our clients were thrilled with the newly added services." The interiors team now includes eight interior designers, with certifications ranging from a licensed architect to a certified master kitchen and bath designer and an aging-in-place specialist. They're currently hiring their ninth addition to the department. "It's such an exciting time," Cushing gushes. "We started four-and-a-half years ago with an idea, and grew to have nine incredibly talented people working on projects from Northeast Harbor to York and occasionally in other states along the East Coast."

As manager, Cushing spends time overseeing department projects and building on the company's process-driven design approach. But with a team that has over 50 years of collective experience, she finds she still has time to work directly with residential, commercial, and resort clients to design individual rooms, spaces, or entire facilities. "A passion for design still sits close to my heart," she admits over coffee at Knickerbocker Group's Boothbay headquarters. We're seated at a gorgeous walnut table, surrounded by sage green walls



Brady-Anne Cushing is the interior design manager at Knickerbocker Group. Since joining the firm in 2013, she has grown the interiors department dramatically. "One of the most gratifying things is being able to walk away from a jobsite knowing our team has it well in hand," she says.

Cushing's house in Bath is bathed in soft blues, greens, and peachy pinks.



and shelves stocked floor-to-ceiling with books of fabric samples. While some creative types would feel frustrated moving from a more hands-on role to a managerial position, Cushing is excited at the opportunity she has had to grow the firm and her own professional experience. "We are very proud of how we work, and how well integrated our interiors team is within the overall design and construction process. Whether we are working with our in-house architects or an independent firm, we understand our role and the importance of collaboration and communication. One of the most gratifying things is being able to walk away from a jobsite knowing our team has it well in hand," she says.

It's been years since Cushing realized her childhood dream of becoming a designer, and in that time she's learned a lot about how the spaces we inhabit alter our lives. She views herself as a facilitator for other people's desires: she listens hard to clients to understand their needs, their preferences, and their dreams, and she works in tandem with her colleagues at Knickerbocker Group to turn these intangible ideas into solid wood, iron, granite, and marble. "I've always been so interested in how people interact with the environment, and how a place can affect your sense of well-being, your mood,

and your health," she says. "We exist out in the world, being bombarded by information all day long, so when you come home to your fixed environment, something shifts." Home isn't just where the heart is; it's where the mind finds peace. "You know what to expect from your own space, and no matter what the style is, that consistency gives you calm. Our minds acclimate to it. It feels right."

While some of Cushing's favorite professional projects are contemporary, high-minded, and minimalist, she prefers a slightly softer look at home. She lives in Bath in an 1830s Greek Revival farmhouse, which she's decorated with objects culled from years of designing for others. "It's very eclectic," she confesses. "I never want to see a beautiful object and think, 'I can't put that in my home because it wouldn't fit with the decor.' Having a wide mix means you don't get bored, and you're not limited." She appreciates all different styles, from rustic barnwood furniture (made by her grandfather) to plush contemporary rugs. She has an Asian cabinet, a vintage sewing table topped with a mercury glass lamp, and old portraits of her ancestors hanging throughout the home. The palette is dominated by soft blues and greens, but Cushing has recently added some peachy pink to lighten things up. While she



doesn't have a favorite space, she does like to spend her mornings waking up slowly in the living room, lounging on her white-slipcovered sofa and sipping coffee next to her dog, Annabella. "She's my dog soul mate," Cushing says with a smile. "She gets me, and certainly appreciates a comfy place to rest."

Like many of her clients who come to Knickerbocker Group looking to build or renovate a camp or beach cottage, Cushing has a second home; hers is at Sugarloaf. She grew up in Farmington and remains deeply connected to the mountainous regions of Maine. "I was the first baby born in the town of Carrabassett Valley," she says. "My parents were hippie ski bums, and my home there is filled with Sugarloaf memorabilia, including treasures from my dad's old bands with Uncle Al and other colorful Sugarloaf-area musicians." In the winter, Cushing tries to spend every weekend at her charmingly retro A-frame, skiing during the day and relaxing with friends during the evening. "Stylistically, I played to what you might expect in an A-frame in the mountains," she says. "It's very different from my home in Bath—I brought in lots of primary colors and bold tones. It feels like a fun '70s ski camp, which it is!"

She describes the decor of the 1830's Greek revival farmhouse as "eclectic." This makes it easy for the designer to mix-and-match objects from different regions and eras. "Throughout the house you will see a juxtaposition of formal and casual, traditional and contemporary, old and new," she says.

While Cushing loves antiques, she says she enjoys working with clients who have contemporary, minimalist tastes. The most gratifying phrase for the designer to hear? "That's so me."

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Cushing and her team bring this type of responsive, attentive design to their daily work, and she finds the most successful projects are the ones where clients say their tastes were captured perfectly. “It’s not about a designer’s personal style or taste. It all comes down to our client’s aesthetic,” she says. “And there are no big egos here at Knickerbocker Group in general, which is awesome. We all work as a team, and our clients are important partners in that team.” However, Cushing does occasionally get emotionally attached to a project. After working for months on a single design scheme, she likes to take a quiet moment to say goodbye to the space. “My favorite part of a design job is at the very end of installation when the home is empty and I’m the only one there,” she says. The final touches to the project are the floral arrangements she installs as a welcome for the

new owners. Each house has its own look and feel, and she matches the blossoms to the space: daisies and wildflowers for refurbished, light-drenched farmhouses; spiky orchids for contemporary glass homes; thick-stalked sunflowers for woody camps. “I like to take a minute by myself to arrange flowers and reflect,” she says. “It’s a moment of appreciation for everyone who was involved and who worked so hard on the project, from the client to the architect to the designers to the installers and construction.”

Then, after the blooms are placed in water and Cushing’s job is done, she turns off the lights, locks up the doors, and takes one last look around. Or sometimes, if she’s lucky, she gets to welcome the new clients into the house and see the looks of joy spread across their faces as they take in their new home, flowers and all. **MH+D**

Cushing’s house is decorated with barnwood pieces made by her grandfather, framed photographs of family memories, and artwork that she inherited from family and friends. She says this creates a “comforting sense of family and personal history” with “hints of whimsy.”