

life,” says Gwen, who describes her style as modern, fresh and minimal. For the past eight years, the couple has worked diligently to transform an otherwise ordinary track house and yard into something reflective of their modern and innovative lifestyle. The couple’s free time is mostly spent tending to their house, which they say is an endless source of enjoyment for them. “It has become a test bed for our design ideas where we can both learn and adapt from our design decisions,” says Joe, whose idea of the best day is relaxing by the pool with a glass of wine and talking about their future together. The Kelly home is a perfect reflection of their collective minds, from the landscape to the interior furnishings, right down to the plates in the cupboards.

“Team—that is the way we always think of ourselves. We listen to each other. We both talk about our own point of view and then we focus on the best part of both of our ideas or opinions,” says Joe. “This is the way we tackle everything in life, personally and professionally.”

Story in Design

The Milners admit Lindsay is the right brain and Kevin is the left—and this sharp couple has put their heads together to create successful and budding businesses in Sarasota. Lindsay has made her mark in the mounting bazaar of home and design blogs with *A Design Story*, where she inspires readers and clients to create a new story for their interiors. Alongside her, Kevin leads his clients at Sotheby’s International Realty to their dream homes with his savvy understanding of the market and passion for keeping clients’ best interests at heart.

Lindsay is genetically pre-disposed to having a knack for home design. With a builder for a father and “a family full of tile setters and contractors,” Lindsay grew up on job sites, soaking up all that goes in to making a house a home. “As a little girl, it was a rare day if I didn’t have scissors and markers in my hands,” says Lindsay, a graduate of Ringling College of Art and Design’s interior design program. “It’s been my experience that in this industry, you say ‘Ringling,’ and you always win out.” Lindsay interned for several design firms during her years at Ringling and went on to work for local firm Riley Interior Design after graduating. “Carrie [Riley] was a great boss and was starting her own firm at the time I began working for her. She really showed me how to be a classy business woman,” says Lindsay. She then moved back to Richmond, Virginia, where she spent her childhood, for a brief time designing hotels. “It didn’t help I moved right before winter. The sun was calling my name, so I packed up my stuff and headed back to Sarasota—it’s my paradise, it’s home.”

It was soon after her move back that she met Kevin at a Bible study that turned into design talk over dinner. “He said he needed help with his house and that his friends would be there for dinner too. I got to his house and it was just me!” Kevin, who swears he invited over several people who just didn’t show, says, “It was like a divine appointment for us to get to know one another.” It wasn’t long after that they were planning their wedding and dreaming about starting their own business, something Lindsay had been dreaming up for years. It was Kevin that gave her the boost she needed to take that leap, with her being the imagination and him as the brains. *A Design Story* was born in 2009, a time we know as being unforgiving to business startups. “I was watching 30-year-old design firms close, so it was hard, but the blog was what pulled me through.” And did it pull

her through! She tapped into something that would turn into an enormous industry. After a mere eight months of blogging, HGTV and Nate Berkus invited Lindsay, along with a group of other design bloggers, to attend a taping of *The Nate Berkus Show* and a lunch in New York City. “HGTV and Nate Berkus realized the big voice that bloggers had in consumers’ lives,” says Lindsay. “Brands are aware of the voice we have as bloggers and want to put their products in front of us.” It also did not hurt *A Design Story*’s success that it had a premier Realtor in its back pocket.

Kevin Milner has been a professional real estate consultant since 2003. Prior to becoming a Realtor, Kevin graduated from the University of Florida with a finance degree and worked as a full-time real estate investor. Currently a consultant for Sotheby’s International Realty, he says he and his wife Lindsay are the perfect combination. “I get the awesome role of helping someone purchase a home and she makes my recommendations shine,” says Kevin, a resident of Sarasota since the age of 6. “I am not a salesperson. I’m a consultant. I know what people think of when they think of realty and I wanted to have a different approach—one with integrity and honesty.”

Kevin previously worked in commercial banking as an underwriter and portfolio manager, then as a financial analyst for a tech company, but an interest in realty was sparked by a real estate course during college. “Real estate actually chose me when I started investing,” he says. “I believe in the benefits real estate offers and love working with people, so this field was a perfect fit.

“When a friend and I downsized at the same time during Christmas, we joined together and learned how to invest in the market and became successful,” says Kevin, who with that friend went on to turn a \$20,000 loan in a multi-million-dollar portfolio in just a few years. Kevin started his career in short sales, coupling that flair for real estate with his desire to help others. “So many people I knew around 2007 were going through [foreclosures] and being laid off in Sarasota.” The market today is improving and he’s excited for that. “This area sells itself,” he says. “From grand waterfront estates and stately gated, golf course residences to midcentury modern homes and quintessential beach bungalows along the barrier islands—there is something for everyone.”

The best example of Kevin and Lindsay’s talents coming together was their rehab of a condo on Longboat Key. Kevin’s clients, a couple from Ohio, were looking to be close to the beach and boating. He found them a condo in the perfect location, but the outdated space needed a serious face-lift and he knew exactly what it would take to make it their dream home. The clients received the full HGTV experience, knowing little about the space until they turned the key after Lindsay, Kevin and their team completed the project.

“We stayed until 3am the night before [the reveal],” says Lindsay, who wanted it to be the perfect experience for the clients, all the way down to sheets on the bed and towels in the bathroom. There were tears, and all in a good way. “It took [the client] an hour to get from the mudroom into the entryway,” says Lindsay.

The Milners are living out a design story all their own. “When we’re not working, we’re working,” says Kevin. Any given Saturday, the couple can be found enjoying Siesta Key doing what else but shopping for home décor and scoping out real estate at open houses. 