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HOME HAVEN

Finding the fun in furnishings, a new age of health and wellness, and how a whole-house “Tuscan-ectomy” can lighten and brighten a dated design.

OCEAN ALLURE

Free divers lead the way toward a pristine Emerald Bay, OC’s coastal Cousteau paddles to save the sea, and all the latest luxury listings along the incredible Orange County coast.



FOSTERING SUCCESS BY DESIGN AT SAMUELI ACADEMY

Two SoCal interior designers earn high marks for the Santa Ana school's new student dorm.

By Carrie Freitas

If you build it, they will come—and they will thrive.

This is true of the Samueli Academy, an award-winning 7th–12th grade charter school for local students, including foster care teens served by Orangewood Foundation in Santa Ana. Almost 20 years ago, the Academy was the idea of Susan Samueli and Sandi Jackson, two local philanthropists and Orangewood Foundation board members. Now, their vision has come to fruition, with the recent completion of a new dormitory where foster youth students at the Samueli Academy will live during the school week, providing them with the support and stability they need to succeed.

“Sandi and I are both mothers and grandmothers. We know that it’s so important for children to do well in high school and to go on to college,” says Samueli. “We felt that Orange County needed an academy with a dormitory that would give students the kind of care, attention, and education they need to succeed in life.”

The dormitory is part of Orangewood Foundation’s new Youth Connected Program, which provides a world-class education at Samueli Academy as well as stable living arrangements for high-school-age foster youth in an on-campus dorm in a “family-style” setting. It also offers parents the opportunity to live and connect with the teens on weekends, holidays, and any time in between.

Students on the Samueli Academy campus in Santa Ana.





Top: The Samueli dorm's Great Room was created with an inclusive open floor plan and large tables that comfortably seat up to 14 people—the youth, staff, and guests.

Above: Cassill used a black high-top table and fun chairs to create an inviting and fun corner aesthetic.

And, just as the Samueli Academy campus features state-of-the-art facilities, programs, and curriculum to best serve its students, the new dorm showcases innovative, intentional design to create a collaborative, inviting, and warm setting to ensure that its foster youth residents feel at home so they can excel in school as well as in building relationships and life skills.

Two leading local interior designers—Tania Cassill of Laguna Beach-based Huit Design Group and Anna-Marie Claassen of Anthology Interiors in Newport Beach—joined forces with the Samueli Academy to give back, design-style, on the dorm project. These acclaimed designers and their teams generously donated their time, expertise, and decor items to create the welcoming and nurturing spaces that the foster youth living in the Samueli Academy dorm starting this fall will need to succeed.

“When we met with Tania, Anna-Marie, and their teams, we asked them for durable, youth-friendly spaces that would invite everyone to gather and build a sense of community—not just for the teens who live there, but for their friends and families to enjoy as well,” says Jami DeChaney Sheridan, director of the school’s Youth Connected Program. “They did an amazing job designing each space to be inclusive so that, no matter where you are in the room, you are not separated from others. Whether working in the homework space or cooking in the kitchen, the layout allows everyone in the space to take part in conversations happening around them. The bright colors, functional furniture, and fun décor make the space feel modern yet fun—similar to what teens would pick out themselves.”



Tania Cassill and the Huit Design Group designed the East Suite main living area of the new Samueli Academy dormitory.



Anna-Marie Claassen and her Anthology Interiors team designed the West Suite great room in the new dormitory.



Above: LoveSac sectionals were used so they could be rearranged in different ways and adapt to any situation.

Tania Cassill and the Huit Design Group team focused on the dorm's main living area and quiet room for small meetings. They created a cohesive and inviting vibe with products they repurposed from previous projects in addition to a few purchased pieces. Their goal was to make the space very comfortable and home-like, perfect for spending time together while also allowing for personal time. "Just knowing that what my team and I were creating was going to be a part of the students' success, preparing them to age out of foster care in a positive way, was incredibly rewarding," says Cassill.

Claassen and her Anthology Interiors team took the dorm great room's clean and modern neutral base and amplified its functionality and feeling of home, adding a bit of fun factor with a study area, ottoman coffee table, rug, pillows, artwork, and accessories. "I chose the blues for their universal appeal and the graphic patterns plus punches of yellow to make it feel youthful,"

says Claassen. "It is a little bit modern, with the white leather swivel counter stools (so important for breakfast before school) and the fun pattern on the rug, and then a little bit bohemian with the fringe hanging from the mirror and the soft artwork."

Claassen partnered with local furniture showroom Designers Resource Collection, who generously donated counter stools, a large rug, and a large piece of artwork, and then she personally donated the rest of the pieces to finish out the room.

"I hope the teens living in the space can feel a real sense of community and a comfort of home while they are there," says Claassen. "The furniture is meant to be used, lounged on, and interacted with. I hope they get a good sense of responsibility and independence as the space will be theirs to use and take care of; I hope they have pride in it. And, I hope that their Samueli Academy experience will be all the better for having a warm and welcoming place to live." 

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