

where the branch grows

INTERIOR DESIGNER / DECORATOR

Anita Wiklém

"My mother always said I would be an actor or an interior designer," Anita Wiklém states. She recalls being young and receiving a new leather suitcase, which she creatively spray painted yellow to match her bicycle. "I was always arranging colours. Design is something that has always been there for me."

Originally from Norway, Wiklém did indeed fulfill her mother's predictions. Amidst relocating several times around the world, Wiklém worked for a top design firm for seven and a half years, during which she won numerous awards. Realizing that there were no more challenges to be met through her employment there, she created the challenge of employing herself in her own firm, Wiklém Design. "I had a certain image that I wanted to portray, which I couldn't fully do there - I was limited. I now have created my own image, which is that of being well rounded and having a well rounded business. For the past three years, business at the firm has been fast moving. Her partner Holly helps to run the business by keeping care of the books and financial aspects of Wiklém Design.

So how does an openly gay woman like Wiklém keep her design firm successful and profitable? According to her, the main reason is networking. She has belonged to such groups as B.N.I., Women in Networking, and the Ontario Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce. She is a strong believer that getting the word out is as important as building trust and satisfaction with her clients. It allows her to promote herself as well as her business. Wiklém Design does have a specific image that is tailored around Anita.

Part of that image is of course Wiklém as a lesbian. She is open about her sexuality to anyone who cares to ask. She views Toronto as one of the best gay communities, due to the fact that it is

prominent. Sports groups such as Pink Turf and Rainbow Hoops contain an aspect of socializing that Wiklém is drawn to. She believes that being able to be open about one's sexuality makes one stronger as a person. She emphasizes this point when she states "I am out to anyone who asks me. I am kind of fearless in the way in that I dive into something and deal with the consequences later. I think that being able to be out makes you stronger as a person. I always think positive. I assume that if someone is asking me if I'm gay, then they must be OK with it. I have come out to my family because I want them to know who I am and what I am going through. If you show strength and pride in yourself, people will see that and respect you."

It is apparent that there is a certain amount of strength in both Wiklém and her design firm. While the firm keeps her very busy, she enjoys it on a level that prevents it from feeling like work. "The thing I enjoy the most about my work is the design and creative aspect. I love breaking the rules, although you have to know the rules to break them. My general rule is to break at least one rule per client, and to make something work that shouldn't. I try to bring something new to each client." Through it all she keeps in mind that business is a constant evolving form, and for this she reflects that sometimes one just needs to go with the flow. "People want to be proud of their place. You just end up following wherever the business takes you - wherever the branch grows."

