

# Taking Advantage of Going Virtual

What happens when two interior designers from opposite coasts merge somewhere in the middle? Adriele Graham and Elizabeth Berry, the duo behind interior design firm House Meraki, discuss adapting their practices to weather the pandemic.

BY [EMILY WASHCOVICK](#) • NOV 4, 2021

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House Meraki

**B**ehind the Review host and Yelp's Small Business Expert, Emily Washcovich, shares a look at this week's episode of the podcast.

Dorothy was absolutely right when she said, "There's no place like home." It can be a sanctuary and a place to rest, away from our busy lives. That is, until our busy lives came home with us during the pandemic.

[House Meraki](#), an interior design firm in Denver, made a huge pivot from traditional design appointments and took all of their consultations virtual. It had been something they'd considered before the pandemic, but they accelerated their plans after COVID protocols were put in place.

And that virtual technology actually expanded their business, all the way to Yelp reviewer [Jéssica N.](#)'s apartment in Washington, DC. She needed help with her bedroom layout, and House Meraki co-owner Adriele was able to step in and design a new bedroom.

Jéssica wrote in her review, "After sending the measurements in my bedroom to Adriele, she was able to create a custom model with four different layout options. I was so amazed at the variety of layouts I could work with. And after trying a couple of layouts, I chose one that really maximized my space. My roommates were also so impressed with how my room turned out. Adriele also gave me recommendations on which furniture pieces to purchase within my budget, which made the furnishing process so much easier for me."

Interior design has long been associated with grand homes owned by people with endless amounts of money to spend on tile, furniture, and other design elements. But Adriele and her business partner Elizabeth have always wanted to change those myths about design, and going virtual gave them the perfect business opportunity.

"We've always wanted to have a package that is beneficial to anybody—with smaller budgets, not really sure how much they want to do, or dipping their toes into the water of the interior design world for the first time," said Adriele. "We have a package that's called designer for a day where we come out and spend a day with a client in their home or shopping. Sometimes people are doing renovations themselves and they really just want a final look to make sure they're doing things right."

Most of us don't have the eye for detail that designers do, and that can lead to costly mistakes when taking design elements into amateur hands. Elizabeth and Adriele have extensive foundations in design, engineering, and architecture, which they want to share with clients.

Unlike some interior designers, who have a distinct style of decorating, House Meraki focuses on the client's existing style. This customer-forward value means the homes are designed for the homeowners, not for any kind of recognition or accolades.

Elizabeth said, "We design for our clients and not for ourselves or for any particular awards or anything like that. This is a space that our client is going to live in. It's what they're paying for. It's theirs, so we want to design it for them."

They use many virtual tools now to work with clients, and they've gotten many of their vendors and partners on board with the new way of consulting with customers.

"Our questionnaire is virtual. A lot of our documentation is virtual. We're already working off of drawings on the computer. We actually discovered Zoom right before the pandemic. So we're able to have this face-to-face conversation, so that we don't lose that personal touch. You know, you're on a call with someone, you kind of feel like there's a wall there. You talk differently, you know?" said Elizabeth.

And according to Adriele, "Our vendors have really shown up to the table. So we can have samples sent to us. We have them sent to the client. We're all looking at the same thing in real life because you know, that is another thing that we talk about. In terms of your

interiors, you can't just look at everything online. You have to see it in the space. You have to see the subtleties because the lighting is different."

Like every small business, House Meraki is subject to customer reviews, and even with their incredible client-first customer service and their easy adaptation of virtual technology, they are not immune to the occasional 1-star review. Even though that review might come from a perfect storm of things gone sideways and isn't a reflection of their actual work, Elizabeth and Adriele know it's still worth a response.

The review that stands out to them the most was due to overbooking themselves and poor reception at a job site. By the time they got in touch with the potential client, she had already left a negative review.

Adriele said it taught them both a very valuable lesson. "If there is something that's kind of felt like a hiccup or would have made the experience better, we want to make those changes, and we try to do that by giving exit questionnaires to our clients and giving them an opportunity to give us that feedback so that we can make whatever changes to our process and systems. So it's even more enjoyable for them."

Elizabeth and Adriele's ability to be flexible, affordable, and dependable made a repeat customer out of Jéssica. When she moved to Denver, home of House Meraki, she made sure to use their services again in her new apartment. More importantly, she became an advocate for the firm to her neighbors.

"I actually reached out to Adriele as soon as I got here because the building that I'm in right now is a relatively new building. So everyone who's living here recently moved in, like in the past two months. So I was like, you need to send me information, so I could share with my building. I've already shared her info with the front office, so they can share it with residents."

That's how small businesses grow, and these tactics used by House Meraki can be executed by any new expanding business:

- **Always be thinking of your client first.** House Meraki employs a "client-driven-design" strategy, which allows them to utilize their expertise while making it personalized for each customer.
- **Don't ditch virtual technology completely.** Going virtual has major benefits. For House Meraki, the pandemic accelerated virtual consultations, allowing them to expand their services nationwide and work with clients when allowed around their busy schedules.
- **Use reviews to learn and grow your business.** They provide real insights into your service and can become an opportunity to improve the quality of your product or service.

Listen to the episode below to hear directly from Elizabeth, Adriele, and Jéssica, and [subscribe](#) to *Behind the Review* for more from new business owners and reviewers every Thursday.

