

DESIGNER LOOK BOOK

The Business of Design

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Who has been instrumental in your design approach and personal style?

Those designers who have developed and defined a style and consistently communicate a look, but still keep it fresh and new. Designers that come to mind are Phoebe Howard, Barclay Butera and McAplene, Booth & Ferrier. All have different "styles", but I love the lifestyle their looks evoke and I never get tired of looking at their work.

What does a typical day of work look like for you?

Every day is different, but most days start with my husband and I taking a four- or five-mile jog on a trail in a local park. After that, I get ready for work, spend some time on my Bible study while I eat breakfast, and then

Photo: Ryan Ford Photography



off to the office or client appointments. I often schedule my in-home appointments between 9:30 and 11:30 so I may not get to the office until lunchtime. I usually spend from about 12 to 2 p.m. following up with vendors, placing orders and learning about new products. From 2 to 6 p.m., I focus on my current clients' design plans and creative ideas. I head home about 6 p.m.

After dinner, I usually spend a couple of hours reading current design magazines, books and blogs.

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If you had to name one lesson you've learned in your business the hard way, what would it be?

You may not want to be (or think you don't need to be) involved in every aspect of your business; however, you can't simply trust your hired professionals, employees or business partners to do what is right for you in every instance. You need to be informed about all the financial and reporting expectations of the government—the IRS, the state franchise board, etc. You should have a hand in everything that touches your business from the marketing to the ac-

counting. Don't blindly turn any aspect of your business over to someone else.

What is the best way you've found to build your clientele?

Initially I would say our retail store. The bulk of my clientele are exposed to our retail store, say they liked the style and ask if I would come into the home to help them get that look for themselves. In the past year I would say that has changed, and our Web site with portfolio pictures has been the biggest client builder. Clients call saying they have looked at the Web site, seen rooms they like and ask if I will work with them on a

project. I think it is easier for a prospective client to see your style without having to make any personal commitment (such as an in-person meeting to look at a portfolio of work).

They can do this research in their own home, at any time and with other household members. It also helps me, as the clients calling are a better fit for the style I typically offer.

What online tools do you use that you can't live without?

Home décor blogs, home magazine Web sites/photo galleries, vendor product Web sites (pulling pictures off to show to clients in pre-

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sentations), my iPhone (for immediate and easy access to company e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, etc).

How do you determine and understand a client's needs when taking on a new project?

The use of photos and pictures really helps me. I ask many questions, but have learned that what people think they want and how they articulate that does not always match what they have in mind. Images are the quickest route for me to identify what feeling they

want to achieve in a room.

Do you have any further suggestions that could help designers and retailers to better work together in today's competitive environment?

Being both a designer and a retailer, I can understand the challenges for both.

One area both parties could improve on is setting and managing expectations for clients. Clients have a hard time envisioning a finished product and have to see large samples of wood or fabric, which may not

be available. The retailers need to go out of their way to try and get these items from vendors, and vendors should be prepared to handle those requests. Clients expect a piece of furniture to come in perfectly (no dents, scratches, nicks) because it is "brand new" and they've paid "so much" for it. We know this is almost never the case, especially for products mass-produced overseas. Retailers need to do their best when they receive items to make sure they will meet the expectations of demanding customers, and not accept these damages as just part of the business. Vendors should also raise their expectations on the quality of product they ship to retailers. Finally, the designer can do a better job of easing the client into understanding the lead times for items (8-12 weeks) and the unforeseen delays that often occur, especially with new products. Explaining up front that delays sometimes occur would ease the client's frustration when a product they've been waiting to receive for two months is suddenly going to take an additional two weeks. ▀