

REAL-LIFE RENO

TV producer and designer collaborate on dramatic home

BY DEE GIBNEY
PHOTOGRAPHY: BRANDON BARRÉ



WHEN TELEVISION PRODUCER Angela Jennings hired Jane Lockhart – host of one of her own interior design shows, well-known designer and Angela's long-time friend – to revamp the interior of her newly purchased home, she thought she was prepared for, well, the reality of real-life interior design.

On tv, rooms wondrously morph from dull to dazzling in 30 minutes. The home audience, shielded from endless details, dust

and chaos, can easily be lulled into magical thinking. But Angela has no such illusions – or so she thought.

“No one was more surprised than me by how much work it took,” Angela admitted. “I had worked on a million renovations on our shows over the years. I understand how it works.”

Angela and her then fiancé, financial advisor Rodney Farrell, bought a two-storey Georgian home in April 2012 just as it was

nearing completion and were planning to move in the following month. It was built on the foundations of a demolished, post-war bungalow on a cul-de-sac in Old East York, facing a ravine. The home's unassuming exterior belied a grand interior. Angela fell for the cavernous 120-square-foot master bath with a treetop view, and for dramatic high ceilings both upstairs and downstairs. But there were no finishing details. ☞

(Opposite) Artwork by Joshua Jensen-Nagle on the dining room's dark wall contributes to the restrained drama of the décor. The one-of-a-kind hand-blown pendant lighting is from Niche Modern in New York. Homeowner Angela, who had always wanted an original Mid-century Modern piece, refers to the living room's classic Saarinen Womb chair in purple bouclé as the home's superstar. Special-ordered from New York, it was one of her biggest splurges. (This page) Above the sofa, Angela's own photo and its mirror image depict golden classical figures from the side wall of the King's palace in Bangkok.



“We were living on the 36th floor of a downtown condo and had a sofa, a bed, and a chair,” said Angela. “I thought, ‘How hard can this be? We don’t need that much.’ We were leaving for California, so we called Jane the night before we left and asked if she could squeeze us in. ‘We’re moving in 26 days,’ I told her.” All she needed, she thought, were a few sofas. Lockhart visited the house after they left and then offered them a much different time-frame: It would take until Christmas.

“It will not take that long,” Angela argued. But Lockhart was right. Designing for a client, she pointed out to her friend, was very different from designing for a viewer. “You’re a TV show doing design, not designers doing TV. It’s a different expectation.”

Real life involves organizing and scheduling tradespeople. There are often delays when it comes to custom work; for example, made-to-order sofas can take up to three months. Everything is dependent on the manufacturers. And there are crucial elements that customers often overlook, such as blinds. ☞

The builder’s busy brown mini-tile kitchen backsplash was replaced with Carrara marble subway tiles, and the brown Caesarstone countertop with white. Lockhart installed additional pot lights, under-counter lighting and new cabinetry hardware. Glass pendant lamps from Union Lighting and an Art Deco clock from Elte add a touch of drama.



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“When we moved in we had a sheet over the window,” Angela recounted with a laugh. “And it becomes a progressive thing. You start thinking, ‘I really don’t like those lights. Let’s change those out.’ The backsplash was busy brown tile. The fireplace was just a firebox. I realized we needed custom drapes. But who’s going to measure them, find the fabric, sew them? We needed carpets, furniture.”

“There’s a lot of detail, and things have to be done in order. We had three floors to do. I really underestimated the amount of work, the detail and the amount of time and trades involved. And that’s where the value of a designer like Jane really shines.”

“They work with great trades they trust and know, and they can say, ‘I can get you an electrician tomorrow who is going to come after the painter who’s going to come before the plumber’—all those things I could never coordinate in a million years. I would be randomly phoning around forever. It’s the kind of organization a regular person cannot do. They think of things you would never think of.”

The project quickly became an exercise in digital efficiency. “I would look at 10 carpets and send photos to Jane: ‘Um, I like these two. What do you think?’” Angela said. Jane would say, ‘It’s too big or it won’t work for these reasons.’ And I would think, ‘Oh right.’”

“We were on it constantly,” Lockhart added. “Angela replied very quickly to what I was sending her. This enabled us to get on with the job. The days of swatch books have been replaced by digital. It’s immediate. But I still can’t make sofas arrive immediately.” ☞

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(Opposite) A splash of red and a flamboyant chandelier from Union Lighting add a playful element of surprise to the high-ceilinged powder room. (Above) The framed movie posters in the downstairs family room were Angela’s surprise for her husband. Their wedding song, Falling Softly (its title is engraved in their rings), was the Oscar-winning theme from Once, depicted in the poster at the end. The sectional sofa is from Ethan Allen.

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“Jane and I had aesthetic shorthand,” added Angela. “Jane clearly understood what Rodney and I were looking for, what our vision was, even if we could not articulate it ourselves. I knew I wanted Modern, but not ‘weird Modern.’ I love colour but not in excess. I’m not a big fan of pattern. But neither do I want bland or boring.

“I’m passionate about my style, but I never wanted our home to be a showpiece where people could not walk around or touch anything. I want people to flop on the sofa and put their feet up on the coffee table. That’s how we live.

“I love the result, the black and white drama of the dining room. It’s like a tuxedo. The bedroom has the same drama as the main floor, with the squishy soft silk carpet and those blue silk opera drapes with the wide black band at the bottom. It’s soothing and dark, a perfect marriage of masculine and feminine.”

“My job is to channel the vision of the homeowner,” Lockhart explained. “To avoid the pitfalls and help guide the process, the timing, and to find the pieces that fit the clients’ aesthetic so that it doesn’t go off on a tangent. I feel this place is now one hundred per cent Angela and Rodney.”

Angela agreed: “It feels exactly like us, and it couldn’t have been us without Jane Lockhart’s help.”

In the end, Angela is grateful to Lockhart for knowing that realizing the dreams she had for this house is not to be done on a reality TV schedule. ➤



The small passage between the master bedroom and large master bathroom offers a perfect nook for Angela’s built-in vanity. The bedroom is her favourite room, a “perfect marriage of masculine and feminine.” The black band at the base of the rich blue silk opera drapes is the same height as the night tables, a simple yet dramatic feature that ties the room together.

