

The “It” Girl

With a stunning new range of furniture, Jane Lockhart is sitting comfortably.

Words by Kristy Elik



Designer, spokesperson, author and television personality Jane Lockhart is fast earning a reputation as Canada's go-to furniture designer. After six successful seasons as creative director and host of W Network's top-ranked *Colour Confidential*, which also airs on HGTV US, Lockhart continues to grow her sense of design and colour through a range of exciting new projects.

In early 2011, she launched the Jane Lockhart Platinum Series, a Canadian-built, eco-conscious luxury furniture collection for the design and architectural trades. Her next Canadian-built collection, Jane by Jane Lockhart (by Statum Designs), launched in spring 2012, and she is about to unveil 16 new sofa and chair designs to this well-received line of high-quality furniture.

Lockhart has been practicing interior design in Toronto since 1997 as principal designer at her firm, Jane Lockhart Interior Design (janelockhart.com). She is a frequent contributor to national publications including *Canadian Living* and *This Old House*, and you'll see her on CTV's *The Marilyn Denis Show* and CBC's *Steven and Chris* show, to name a few.

Spirit of the City managed to connect with Lockhart for a heartfelt chat about her latest projects, tips on choosing the proper furniture for your home and how her journey to success meandered at first.

Kristy Elik: With a busy schedule of travel and television appearances plus your thriving furniture collection, these are exciting times for you and your company. Tell us about your inspiration for the original line and why you felt there was room for more selection for your clients.

Jane Lockhart: For the original line, I was excited to do something with a really Canadian sensibility, taking into consideration size, shape and comfort. My inspiration for that collection and this most recent debut was making sure customers had lots of choice depending on what purpose the furniture serves for them. Do they have lots of friends and family coming over to hang out in the family room? Do they all like to hang out in a great room and watch television together? If so, I would recommend less formal chairs or sofas with shorter arms and softer cushions. More formal settings require chairs with a higher back and firmer seat, so that rising up and out of the furniture is more graceful.

KE: You've said that when you were young, you were always playing with dollhouses, moving tiny furniture around and redesigning little rooms. Did you know, then, that interior design was your future profession? Who were your earliest influences? And who is influencing you today?

JL: I always knew I was going to do something creative: architecture, advertising... anything to do with right-brain innovation paired with a left-brain sensibility. My biggest influence growing up would have to be Charles Rennie Mackintosh, a graduate of the Glasgow School of Art, which was also my grandfather's alma mater. I admired his execution of simple forms and use of natural materials, rather than elaboration and artifice. I try to emulate his clean lines in my furniture design.

As for where I find inspiration today, I look to the world of fashion! For example, I just love what H&M does with their throwaway, impermanent seasonal collections. I watch their use of colour, texture, pattern and ruching. It's a fun way to stay on trend and choose décor pieces that will help accessorize with panache.





KE: All of the pieces in your furniture collection are Canadian-made. What challenges are there with sticking to manufacturing here at home rather than abroad?

JL: There's a misconception out there at the moment that anything to do with manufacturing can be built for less money abroad. That is simply not true when it comes to the world of furniture. In fact, because of the availability of durable Canadian wood and other materials, it's often cheaper to produce high-quality furniture right here. It's better to choose a piece built in Canada because the wood will stand up to our climate—it won't squeak or crack. It's durable and affordable, and a great choice for a high-quality, long-lasting item that may be a focal point of your home for years to come.

KE: You recently returned from the Shanghai Furniture Expo. What emerging trends did you notice? Are you incorporating any of them into your design style? Is it a whole different world of décor or are there style staples that resonate across the globe?

JL: A trend I've noticed is a return to comfort; sofas and chairs have higher backs and sleeker lines. There's also a trend towards '80s style, with bold fabrics, patterns and colours. And while most of the couture furniture design comes out of Europe and not the East, the same style staples apply globally. For the past several years, design seems to be lightening up, and that's reflected even in the very wood the pieces are crafted from. Furniture is softer, more linear and more rounded.

KE: Mississauga is home to a rapidly growing number of condo-dwellers. What advice would you give those individuals working with limited space?

JL: One word: built-ins! When you live in a small space, you've got to take advantage of every tiny bit of storage you can get. Built-ins may seem expensive, but they're worth it. You've also got to declutter! When you're deciding if an accessory should stay or go, ask yourself if it is necessary. There should be a place for everything. It's not just about aesthetics, but about function. The pretty things can come later.

KE: Who is the Jane Lockhart customer? Where is your brand positioned in the competitive world of home design?

JL: I like to think of my client as an Eaton's fan, if you remember that iconic brand. They're solid, not pretentious or frivolous. They care about spending money on quality products and services that are well-made and beautiful, not just what looks impressive.

KE: Tell us about your particular design process, from the moment a client contacts you to the finished result. What is your definition of a successful renovation, redesign or build? What part of the process delights you the most?

JL: My design team and I pride ourselves on being very open and honest with our clients. I want to know, first and foremost, who they are and what their needs are. I promise my customers that the more transparent they are with me, the better the result will be.

As far as costs, my team makes sure that the client's expectations match their budget—after all, if you want a Maserati, you have to pay for it! Success to me is, of course, when people are happy, but mostly when a friend or neighbour says "I love what you've done," instead of "Who's your designer?" The space has to reflect the client, not me.

My favourite part of the planning process is the building and renovation. I love to see the bare bones of a project and visualize how it's going to come together. It's the architect in me!

KE: Where and when will you launch the new lineup of chairs and sofas? And can you tell us what to look for when shopping? Style or comfort?

JL: The new Jane by Jane Lockhart line for Statum Designs is making its debut at the Canadian Home Furnishings Market, happening at the International Centre from January 11 to 14. When you're looking for a chair or a sofa, don't just sit in it and assume that because it's comfortable, it's right for your home. Take the time to consider your needs and your space. If the furniture is for your dining room, it might need a higher back and arms. If it's for a family room, a sectional might be best. It's an investment for your home, so do your research. Our frames, for example, are all guaranteed for life; it's the foundation you're investing in, not the colour or the pattern. Don't worry so much about the upholstery—you can always change that!

KE: Do you have any sage advice for budding designers?

JL: Go to school, if you can! Learn as much as you can online and read a ton of books. Try to develop your own personal sensibility and philosophy about design and then brand yourself.

KE: And finally: the first line of your life story would be...

JL: "It didn't look promising!"

Kristy Elik is an award-winning freelance writer and editor whose passions for authenticity and laughter drive her every day. She is thrilled to have the opportunity to interview some of Canada's top designers.

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