

Sitting down with Jane Lockhart

Veteran television host and long-time designer, Jane Lockhart, takes time out from exploring the High Point Market Show with the team from SoFA to chat with *Homefront*. We talk designer math and second wives, and about “Jane,” her new furniture line.

Q When you graduated from Ryerson, interior design wasn't a well-known profession. How did you manage to make a living in the early years?

Jane: I studied economics at the University of Toronto because I needed an undergraduate degree to get into architecture. Along the way I discovered interior design, a little-known specialty back then. It really suited me because

I liked clean, industrial design as much as I liked architecture.

When I finished school in the recessionary '80s I found myself pleading for a job with a company I knew nothing about, called Benjamin Moore. I thought they made shoes, or maybe paper, when I applied. For the first few weeks they let me sweep their floors and organize samples, but thankfully I was quickly moved upstairs to the two-person design office where we did all the planning for Canada's retail spaces.

It was a huge learning curve. I was by far the youngest person out there, and the only female at a time when paint was still considered part of hardware. Benjamin Moore was the first to recognize a woman's role and the concept of designing around colour. I also spent time in the laboratory and with the engineers, learning a lot about coating, industrial design and the mechanics of paint.

Q And then you went into showbiz?

Jane: At first I said, “No, I'm a real designer, not a television person. Not my thing.” Finally, when the right opportunity came along, I joined HGTV Canada and started over.

I had no savings so I opened my own design



business at the same time. I had to learn the business side of things and become a good judge of character very quickly.

Now it's been 15 years. In that time, I worked under contract with HGTV and did seven seasons of *One House, Two Looks*. W Network also hired me to do 156 episodes of *Colour Confidential*. When the shows ended I was left with time on my hands so I pursued another dream—launching my own furniture line. To ensure I won't forget the name, it's called “Jane by Jane Lockhart.”

Q Is that rather difficult these days, with so much off-shore competition?

Jane: It's not easy, but when I was shopping I still couldn't find what I wanted, or what my clients wanted. Or I felt items were overpriced and







that my clients were getting ripped off.

By pure chance I found Angelo Gallo and Statum Designs. They were fast and understood how to make things, but they didn't have great designs. Angelo's team let us pick our fabrics and used our designs to build furniture that was wonderful the first time. We introduced 16 pieces last year and another 16 are coming this year. The idea is that Jane is made in Canada, by Canadians.

Q Are your clients' tastes changing?

Jane: The older population tends to like what they've always liked. The younger ones—influenced by design magazines, websites and their travels—want furnishings that aren't their parents' aesthetic. Even as they start out they're more interested in interior design and are willing to spend more of their disposable income on their homes.

Q What's "designer math"?

Jane: So much of our work depends on the clients' timeline and budget. I ask what they want to get done and how much they have to spend. I also ask them what they value. Some people have trouble understanding that you really do get what you pay for.

For instance, take an area rug. It can be as much as \$10,000, and it's hand-woven and beautiful, and



that's okay because the clients value that as an investment. And they'll happily have white walls and no art. For someone else with kids and pets, that carpet might not be such a good value. I would say hardwood floors and great countertops would be better for them.

That's where you need a professional to step in, look at the whole space and prioritize the budget. I call that designer math.

Q Toronto is often called New York North. How does that affect your logistics?

Jane: The weather can be a hindrance. And city folks are busy. We'll be in the middle of a project when the client disappears on business. Moving things in is often a nightmare—condos have restricted working hours, very little storage space and often no service elevators.

Q Is it really a “no-no” to work for second wives?

Jane: We do have a secret rule that we joke about: We won't work for the second wife if we've worked for the first one. It's a combination of things: No matter what we say, we'll always be wrong. Also, the fact that we're a recommendation from the husband is never a good thing if he's used us before in his past life. The



new wife says, "Is that what she had before? Did she want that?"

We try not to be involved our clients' personal lives—but our work is very personal, so inevitably we end up being in the thick of it somehow.

Q What strikes you as odd when it comes to the business?

Jane: We have wonderful clients, but they're always apologizing for

the state of their houses. They forget that it's my job to see their home in the way they use it every day.

In addition most people aren't good at simple math, but they are quite good at wasting time until we give them the bill. They'll be chatting away about their kids and the trip to Monaco while we're on the clock. We don't mind listening, but they often don't remember they're paying for that time.

Q Do you have a favourite room?

Jane: I get excited about doing closet design. I love organization. It makes such a difference to the way your life functions. Sorry, that's not a very sexy answer, but it's the truth! I also enjoy the technical detail of designing a kitchen. On the other side, living and family rooms have a lot happening, whether it's eating, entertaining or playing with the kids. I don't think



people spend as much time in the bedroom as they imagine they will.

Q Where do you hang your hat?

Jane: I have downsized to a very nice, west-facing condo near High

Park that's less than 1,000 square feet because I don't want stress in my life that I see others dealing with. The more you have, the more you have to worry about. I'm in no way judging others—I work in very large and very small spaces all day

long, but I know now that my own ability to deal with the responsibility that comes with a big home is very low.



Q We've heard you like to keep things simple and quiet for yourself. Is that true?

Jane: You're right. I don't want a house that talks. I don't really watch television and I'm a vegan who loves to connect with the small things that make me happy. Having lots of light matters, and so does my dog. My walls are steel grey and the floors are walnut. I don't have carpets because I can't maintain them and the space is clean and clutter free. The things I have, I love, and everything has a place.

Q Let's talk tech. It seems to be all-important these days.

Jane: Technology fascinates me. I think we're in the midst of a revolution



when it comes to our interiors and the way we will incorporate easy-to-use wireless communication, home management and entertainment devices. In the future, we'll likely think that having to move to another room to watch television or play a

game was a cute idea.

Unfortunately, tech toys sometimes take away from the design budget. People will give me a number and then suddenly mention that it has to cover not just one but multiple televisions. I've yet to have iPads in the design budget, but I'm sure it will happen sooner rather than later.

Q If you're not at home on a nice winter evening, where would we find you?

Jane: I'm rather a boring person who likes to stay at home. I'm a tech head, and an avid reader of historical fiction and anything to do with the history of buildings. If I'm out, I'm likely in High Park with my dog. In the summer, everyone is there. In the winter it's mine. ■