

Designer's Practical Approach Makes Her Candidate For TV Show Host

Designer Debbie Wiener was in Los Angeles recently on a mission.

The owner of Designing Solutions in Silver Spring, Md., she had been summoned to the opposite coast to audition to host an as yet unnamed show for HGTV.

"Maybe it will be called 'Debbie Does Design,' she joked about the pilot and 17-episode opportunity.

While Wiener has formal design training, she really learned the trade she says, redecorating her home for two active sons and a "slob" husband.

And she's ready to dispense advice, opinions, preferences and tips, like using correction fluid to touch up chipped banisters and markers to cover scratches, touch up a front door and create chair rails.

She operates, she says, on four design principles.

1) "Like in the movies, lighting is everything," Wiener said. "Good lighting can make modest pieces look impressive and vice versa. The first thing I do when I decorate a room is evaluate the lighting."

2) "If you have a family, use institutional quality paint and industrial-strength fabric," Wiener says. "You don't want to spend all your time cleaning or worrying. I say decorate, and then live your life."

3) "Spend the bulk of your budget on things you sit or stand on," Wiener advises. "This is a good investment and you want things that will last and look good over time. Everything else, accessories, end tables, you can cheat on."

4) "Never ever walk barefoot in a boys' bathroom." Wiener's combination of useful tips, especially the budget-conscious and common sense have made her a popular design source with a monthly "Designing Dilemmas" column in the Maryland Gazette and appearances on her local TV station.

She receives from 25-45 dilemmas a



Debbie Wiener

month, from as far away as Thailand and Australia, both in the mail and at her Web site, www.MyDesigningSolutions.com.

Most, she says, are about color — "most people are stumped," — and mothers and mothers-in-law. "They say, I would like to do this, but my mother-in-law thinks..." so I end up giving marriage advice too," Wiener said.

She has done segments on "How a Foyer Is Like a First Date," "Decorating For Slobs," and seasonal design tips like changing light bulb colors and adding plants.

One of the things that sets Wiener apart from other designers she says, "is that I'm comfort-driven. Whatever furniture you have has to fit the way you live and decorate around your needs."

"I'm not about rooms no one uses that are just there to impress the neighbors. In some homes, people act like guards to protect their rooms. I say, 'if you can't sit on it, it's not worth it.'

"And I stand behind choices because I've tried all my recommendations," Wiener said. Her years of experimentation began in her own "laboratory" with her family.

She tested carpet samples in her hall. Those that couldn't stand up to dirt, cleats and a husband who didn't wipe his feet were out, along with the kitchen chair upholstery that couldn't fight ketchup.

"I found that it's better to choose the right colors and camouflage, rather than go with pastels."

After making her own home family-friendly, Wiener conducted focus groups with friends and would-be clients, asking about their design needs. Through her research, she found that interior designers could sometimes be perceived as "expensive" and "fancy."

Like herself, average people needed durable, functional furnishings for real-life use, but had nowhere to turn for help. Wiener decided to start Designing Solutions to fill the void "and provided stylish design solutions that clients and their families could really live with."

Growing up the youngest of three daughters in a suburb of Boston, Wiener spent the majority of her childhood scouting furniture stores with her father and accompanying him in his Sealy Mattress business. Through her father's influence, Wiener learned the characteristics of good furniture and upholstery. Wiener credits her father, along with her husband and sons, for teaching her everything she has learned about interiors.

Wiener is a member of the International Furnishing and Design Association (IFDA), an organization that supports consumer outreach and education of the design and home-furnishings industries. She studied art at the University of New Hampshire and archaeology in Israel.

And now she knows that if she's not on TV just yet, another chance, just like another way to child- and pet-proof a stylish home, is still out there. And there are still lots of questions to answer.