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Design Doctor

HGTV star Corey Damen Jenkins shares his journey to success

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Corey Damen Jenkins, a guest at this year's IFDA Day of Design in Richmond, won HGTV's "Showhouse Showdown" in 2012. (Photo courtesy Corey Damen Jenkins & Associates)

Detroit-based interior designer Corey Damen Jenkins was a scheduled guest April 30 for the International Furnishings and Design Association's Day of Design in

Richmond. We caught up with Jenkins, winner of HGTV's "Showhouse Showdown" in 2012, to talk about his career.

Jenkins previously worked for a construction design company in New York, then as an office designer in the automotive industry in Detroit, before he was laid off in 2007. He opened his own firm in 2009, going door to door to drum up business. He had his first solo job professionally photographed, posted the pictures to his new website, and within two weeks received a phone call from an HGTV scout.

After he appeared on television, his business "really blew up," he says. In 2015, he was named as one of the Top 20 African-American designers in the United States, and his work is featured in the current issue of Traditional Home magazine.

INTERVIEW

R•Home: What is the difference between designing for television and real life?

Corey Damen Jenkins: TV is a lot of smoke and mirrors. It is designed to get ratings ... The budgets are not realistic and never factor in the labor and tradespeople. It's a bit more fast-paced. You don't get a chance to think as much. They want to see you under pressure and make a mistake. That's good TV.

R•Home: So would you ever do another television show?

Jenkins: Yes! (laughs) I am in talks to develop a new TV series now.

R•Home: People think of design as being centered on the coasts, New York and Los Angeles. What does it mean to be a designer in the Midwest?

Jenkins: I think design in the Midwest is a bit different. The interiors here tend to be a bit more safe and conservative. The people who live here are the most humble, friendly people you will ever come across. ... In the Midwest we are indoors a lot because we have these harsh winters.

R•Home: How do you describe your aesthetic?

Jenkins: A fresh, continental mix of elegance and modernity. I like the mix of things, I very rarely ever do a period room — only if the client asks me to. Most clients want a mix of stuff.

Expand



Traditional forms combine with a fresh color palette in Jenkins' masculine design. (Photo courtesy Corey Damen Jenkins & Associates)

R•Home: You have been quoted as saying, “I have no problem mixing Henredon with Home Goods together and I refuse to apologize for that.” How do you successfully mix high and low?

Jenkins: My clients ... aren't always about spending money to show it off. It goes back to their humble nature. I have learned it is OK to mix high-end things with modestly priced items. The one thing I never give on is furniture. ... A cheap sofa you will be rebuying again in a year. But when it comes to accessories, you really can bring in other things. I like Restoration Hardware ... and Home Goods has great stuff. It's just how you do it.



Bold blue walls bring energy to this bedroom designed by Jenkins. (Photo courtesy of Corey Damen Jenkins & Associates)

R•Home: What do you like best about your career in interior design?

Jenkins: My favorite thing is my clients ... It's like I'm [taking] them to a beautiful destination somewhere and I am the driver and they are the GPS. They get to tell me where to turn, [but] don't grab the wheel! I know how to get you there. I know what the pitfalls are on the road to avoid.

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