

‘The New Guard’

Corey Damen Jenkins of Design With Vision

December 9, 2012 CJDellatore 22 Comments



.....
“We live in a world where people want everything right now... they speed through the design process and ‘microwave’ rather than ‘bake’ the perfect solution”
.....

Several months ago I was introduced to Corey Damen Jenkins, winner of this years ‘[Showhouse Showdown](#)’ on HGTV. He’s come a long way in his relatively short time in interior design. I had the chance to chat with him about his personal style, his business model, and his list of go-to vendors and products.

Tell me about yourself, and your background in design.

I’m a Michigan native, but I spent my early 20’s living in New York City where I worked in historical hotel restoration and interior design. However, my father felt that I should develop a career in something “more stable”, so after moving back to Michigan in 1997 I took a job crunching numbers and designing corporate offices in the automotive business. Ironically, my great-paying job wasn’t stable enough to shield me from the economic collapse in 2007. I was laid off. Desiring to get back into interior design full-time, I started working for Robert Allen – Beacon Hill. Unfortunately, in 2008 I was caught in yet another wave of lay-offs there and couldn’t find a decent job for 11 months.

At that point, I fell into a really deep depression. After much reflection, I decided to get out of my own way and take control of my destiny. I launched my company, Design With Vision as a one-man-show in December 2009. It was hard offering a luxury service to clients who were also worried about the economy. I remember hustling – sometimes working 18 hours a day on proposals and offering a silent prayer before mailing each one

off. Eventually the word of mouth caught on and the opportunities started coming. By early 2011, the folks at Home & Garden Television had taken notice of my work and cast me to star on one of their national reality competition series, where viewers voted me the overall winner. Now, I have a staff of five plus interns, and the firm is growing. So these last 3 years have been a whirlwind for me. My friends call it “the perfect rags-to-riches story”, but I’m honestly just grateful to be here.

Do you have a design philosophy?

Instead of creating a myriad of signature “Corey Damen Rooms” I allow my clients to shape my philosophy. Their dreams are like bricks stacked on a palette just sitting there waiting to become something special. I’m honored to become the “mortar” needed to build those dreams into reality. Interestingly, when you look at a brick building from a distance you don’t really see the mortar at all, just the bricks. Likewise, my body of work is very diverse because when you step back you’re really seeing my clients’ visions in their spaces. I’m just privileged to build something tangible with them.

.....

[VIDEO]

CDJ on fashion, style, and making carefully considered choices;

.....

What’s your business model?

I’m a big proponent of transparency. That approach translates to everything my firm does — from managing contractors and guiding clients, to dealing with pricing and placing orders. Due to my business background, I’m also keen on layering technology and marketing with design. Show-and-tell is everything for me. That’s why I put a ton of effort into my hand-drawn renderings, color boards, etc. It’s their house, their hard-earned money, and I tell my staff our clients need to know what they’re getting before they spend any of it with us.

What have been some of the challenges for DWV in the current economic environment? And how have you met them?

Well, the automotive industry had a pretty robust come-back, so we’ve really rebounded here in Michigan. We’re dealing with optimistic clients who want to spend more on their homes – but cautiously. We’ve addressed this by creating a number of affordable pricing structures that can be customized to suit their budgets. I tell clients they don’t have to spend a million dollars to achieve “the look”. I have no problem mixing [Henredon](#) and [Home Goods](#) together, and I refuse to apologize for that.

.....



.....
Are there unique issues for you as a Michigan designer working at your level of sophistication, or has the internet removed them?

I admit sometimes my New York City-influenced approach to design may seem “out of the box” for Michigan, which is traditionally very “safe” and conservative. But I feel that if I gently nudge my clients out of their comfort zone just 10 percent to embrace something fresh I’ve done my job. Also, Michigan has become more culturally diverse due to the huge influx of people moving here for job opportunities. I have folks asking me to turn the interiors of their rural country farm houses inside-out with edgy, luxe furnishings and funky, electrified color combos. Detroit’s downtown sector is undergoing a major rebirth too. Change is definitely in the air here, and I think DWV’s in the right place at the right time for this “new normal.”

Who are the 10 ‘go-to’ vendors/products at DWV?

1. Judy Frankel Antiques: Ornate Gilt & Crested French Mirror
2. Kravet: Medley Sofa
3. Stark Carpet: Beatrice Black
4. Caracole: Oui-Oui Sofa
5. Century Furniture: Gold Twig Torchere
6. Global Views: French Electrified Sconce
7. Lexington: Rochelle Sofa Table
8. Robert Allen ~Beacon Hill: Fenway Chair
9. Henredon: Dining Table
10. Currey & Company: Laureate Chandelier

If you could pick your dream client, who would it be?

My dream client is one who really respects the value of my profession. Some people mistakenly believe interior designers are dispensable compared to painters, electricians, carpenters, etc. In reality, those contractors are members of an orchestra. Designers are the conductors that bring harmony to what the subs are doing. Subtract us from the equation and you might end up with a noisy, confused mess. Sadly, many homeowners come to that realization too late and after precious dollars are wasted. A great client is one who embraces the ‘buddy system’ designers provide.

.....

