

DESIGNERS TODAY

style. substance. soul.



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THE PARIS YEARS

“Even though I do not feel any different than I did 30 years ago — other than I can’t run anymore — getting old kinda sucks. And not for any reason other than I have lots I want to do — several lifetimes worth of projects.

—CHERYL KEES CLENDENON

“When you get older, you begin to think in a different way. You have more confidence. There’s not much room for self-doubt — you’ve already made most of the mistakes and hopefully learned from them.

—BETHANNE MATARI

MARY DOUGLAS DRYSDALE had fallen for a young architecture student who studied and worked in France. Between the accent, longish hair and his obvious intellect, combined with his dedication to an aesthetic life, she was interested immediately. He sent her daily postcards; some had sketches. Her affection grew and she dreamt of moving to Paris. Knowing her father would not fund it, Drysdale worked overtime in the hosiery department at Lord & Taylor to buy a student fare on Icelandic Air to Luxembourg. “I can’t imagine how my life would have been had I not bought that ticket. Certainly, those years of travel and exposure to European architectural history and seeing how the French combined old and new had a profound effect on my development as a designer. And taking the Metro in rush hour for years makes dealing with a difficult client seem easy!”



Drysdale during the Paris years on a sojourn to Cairo.

DIGITAL DIVAS



Photo: Marco Ricca

At 77, **LETA AUSTIN FOSTER** launched her online retail business PREtTy FABulous Rooms, a collection of living, dining and bedrooms that she designed using quality trade resources. At the recent Hampton Designer Showhouse, Foster installed a gussied-up version of a PRE-FAB bedroom. A new PRE-FAB collaboration with Billy Baldwin Studio is coming soon.

LESLIE CAROTHERS has been harnessing the power of online since 2008 when she helped the furniture industry recover from the housing crisis by tapping social media. “I worked with many brands, both established and emerging, who were all struggling with reduced marketing budgets,” she says. “They needed new ways to reach buyers, whether retailers, consumers or designers. And I strategized, led and executed many different types of digital and influencer marketing programs that helped them achieve those objectives faster than they were able to do on their own.”

After **VERONIKA MILLER**’s marriage fell apart, she closed her design practice, sold a carwash and built anew. It was 2009. Digital marketing felt like a gold rush and she wanted in. “I spent my own money developing Modenus.com with the vision of creating a place where designers got online visibility, where we’d curate vast collections of brands like a digital trade show and host B2B and B2C discussion forums. We launched in 2010 and crickets.” With three kids to support, this wouldn’t do. She had the idea to host a physical meet-up at the AD Show. Its success prompted BlogTour, the first-ever multi-brand sponsored blogger tour, now called Designhounds. All sites are currently revamping.

In 2015, **LAUREL BERN** quit her design business to focus on her website/blog, Laurel Home. The popular site offers design-savvy guides, one of which is Bern’s Rolodex. “I read somewhere a few years earlier, ‘Who wouldn’t want to have access to an interior designer’s Rolodex?’ and that idea stayed with me. In typical form, I thought this will only take three weeks. By the time one week had passed, I was ready to throw up.” The original Rolodex had over 500 alphabetized sources organized by category with photos and blurbs and codes for designer friendliness. Her first day profit was over \$6,000.00. Today, her blog affords a six-figure salary.

THE AMBASSADORS

DEB BARRETT and **JACKIE VON TOBEL**, creative entrepreneurs with multifaceted careers, are the first official brand ambassadors of High Point Market. Since 2015 Barrett and Von Tobel have partnered to organize VIP Market Tours and brought designers and new buyers to the High Point and Las Vegas markets. What started as a passion project is now a formal appointment. “We complement each other well,” says Barrett. “I work best behind the scenes and Jackie likes to be out front.” Von Tobel adds, “We have a lot of similarities — we are both workaholics, love red wine, European travel and we think before we speak. Our strategy is divide, conquer and always collaborate.”

GROUP LOVE

“When I started out after college, I felt I knew so much, and I look back and realize all I didn’t know. I was working with a firm whose approach to kitchen design was boxes on a wall with appliances — not a lot of creativity! In 1994, however, I met architect Richard Franklin Sammons and my life changed. He introduced me to the Institute of Classical Architecture and Art. I became a member and was totally enthralled, engaging in conversation with this group of highly intelligent designers and architects. I took classes and traveled with the institute. I had a hunger to learn, and this was the place. It shaped my life and my design ability. When I launched my firm, I met Bunny Williams, and she asked if I’d consult on one of her jobs. With my understanding of the classical language now, I found myself approaching design in a way that she and many understood.

—**SARAH BLANK**

A year ago **MICHELLE NUSSBAUMER** and several design friends initiated a once-a-month gathering for dinner and conversation with the purpose of inspiring and empowering one another. Whether a group of three or 10 show up, ideas flow, as does rosé.

If you’re part of any Facebook group, you’ve probably read **CHERYL KEES CLENDENON**’s comments, as she has a lot to say and share. She also runs her own group called Small Business Think Big, where she says she gives a lot away.



THE GENERATION GAP

“I recently came back from a meeting with a group of younger PR colleagues who were talking about all the things they are doing for their clients with Facebook, Pinterest, SEO optimization — I was a lunatic! I asked my 28-year old daughter Sofia, who has a creative agency and works with my clients on their social media brand identities, if these tactics were relevant for my clients. She said, ‘Mom, absolutely not! Your luxury goods clients want exactly what you are giving them — access to your 35-plus year Rolodex and your ability to connect the dots to create meaningful and financially lucrative relationships. All the other stuff is fluff.’ That’s all I needed to hear coming from a Millennial who grew up in the digital landscape. It made me feel a helluva lot better!

—**CHRISTINA JUAREZ**

“The hardest thing to adapt to is the lack of experience and knowledge of so many of the practitioners today. There is a strong trend that just choosing the fabric and wallpaper is the design, and that if something is midcentury modern, it’s great. I love the good stuff from the midcentury, but craftsmanship and design must come first. As for the decorators, if they can’t keep scale and proportion along with the design, they need to get more schooling.

—**LETA AUSTIN FOSTER**

FEMALE POWER

“In the ‘70s, the furniture industry was dominated by men, even in design and merchandising. A female had to be strong-minded and determined to earn the respect of her colleagues and peers in our industry. I was fortunate enough to work for a family* who understood that our target customer was a female. They supported our creation of beautiful product with a feminine approach. Design should evoke emotion. Remember, buying furniture is like a lady buying a dress. If it’s pretty enough, she will spend any amount of money on it!

—**LEE BELMORE**

**Lee was creative director at Century Furniture for 20 years.*

OUTDOORSY TYPES

Bethanne Matari and Drysdale spent much of their childhoods outdoors — Matari on a North Carolina tobacco farm and Mary around her home in Charlottesville, Virginia — which seemed to foster an appreciation for exploration. Matari wandered in the woods with her three brothers. Drysdale wasn't allowed to venture into the forested terrain beyond the property, so instead of heading out, she climbed up into the trees for a fresh perspective (and yes, she built a treehouse of sorts). Matari knew she wanted to be an adventurer. Drysdale did too. Both have since traveled the world extensively.

THE WOMEN

These credits do not begin to express the depth, diversity, and impact of their contributions to the interior design industry

Deb Barrett

Authority/Thought Leader in window coverings & soft furnishings

Laurel Bern

Full-time Blogger, Laurel Home; Author, *Six Figure Income Blogger Guide*

Sarah Blank

Principal, Sarah Blank Design Studio

Lee Belmore

Creative Director, Highland House

Leslie Carothers

CEO/Digital Marketing Expert, Kaleidoscope Partnership and Savour Partnership

Cheryl Kees Clendenon

Owner/Lead Designer, In Detail Interiors; Consultant, Small Business Think Big

Mary Douglas Drysdale, Creative Director,

Drysdale Design Associates

Leta Austin Foster

Founder, Leta Austin Foster & Associates/PREtty FABulous Rooms

Christina Juarez

President, Christina Juarez & Company

Bethanne Matari

PR Maven, Currey & Company

Veronika Miller, Founder, Modenus.com;

BlogTour; Designhounds; Consultant, NKBA Global Connect Consultant

Michelle Nussbaumer

Owner/Interior Designer, Ceylon et Cie

Jackie Von Tobel

Artist/Product Designer/Author

FREE ADVICE

ON BECOMING AN OVERALL SUCCESS...

“Trust your instinct. Do not be afraid to dream. Push yourself to study and learn and be prepared for long hours and hard work. Not all parts of the job are quite as glamorous as some may think.”

—LEE BELMORE

“Don’t be afraid to get your hands dirty. We are frequently filthy!”

—JACKIE VON TOBEL

“Own your niche...That advice was given to me by Jeremiah Owyang.”

—LESLIE CAROTHERS

ON MAJORING IN PR...

“If you want to be a PR professional, you need to have a diverse education — take humanities, creative writing, history, art, psychology and of course a few PR courses to learn best practices. You need to be well-rounded and educated so you can relate to a wide range of people and situations. In PR, no one wants to talk to a dull person.”

—BETHANNE MATARI

ON RUNNING A SUCCESSFUL WEBSITE/BLOG...

“Learn as much as possible about how things work so you don’t get taken for a ride! Find a good developer or get good geek help. And of course, buy my blogging guide LOL... and read it 10 times. Also, be consistent — don’t worry what others are doing, and don’t give up!”

—LAUREL BERN

ON BECOMING A GREAT AND SUCCESSFUL DESIGNER...

“Learn to sell. Anything. Take classes in sales, get a job in hardcore sales, and then focus on selling your final product to your clients — the well-designed and executed results — not the parts and pieces.”

—CHERYL KEES CLENDENON

“Don’t ‘sell ideas,’ problem-solve.”

—MARY DOUGLAS DRYSDALE

“Seek the best of the best and work for someone whom you respect and admire in the field.”

—MICHELLE NUSSBAUMER

“Make sure to grasp a solid knowledge of the classical language and travel!”

—SARAH BLANK

ON SEEKING BRAND COLLABORATIONS...

“If you pitch a collaboration to a brand, ask yourself what’s in it for them. Always get into the head of the people you want to work with and then brand yourself accordingly.”

—VERONIKA MILLER

ON GETTING YOUR NEWS PUBLISHED...

“Have the facts written down in a cohesive manner with accompanying hi-res imagery. Traditional press releases have gone the way of the dodo.”

—CHRISTINA JUAREZ