

Florida designer shares her secrets and skills

by CHARLYNE VARKONYI SCHAUB. SOUTH FLORIDA SUN-SENTINEL



home interior

Interior designer Lorrie Browne, of Wellington, Florida, pictured May 7, 2008, has created a website called Mydesignsecrets.com to help people decorate their homes themselves. (Mark Randall/South Florida Sun-Sentinel/MCT)

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FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. _ Lorrie Browne calls it "the HGTV effect."

Whenever she goes to a party, people can't wait to tell her about their remodeling and redecorating projects.

"I feel like a doctor," the Wellington, Fla.-based licensed interior designer said. "People are always asking me for advice and reassurance."

Besides asking for advice, folks are becoming more comfortable with Internet shopping and spending more time at home because of the double whammy of high gas and food prices.

Browne and her husband, Tim Chance, saw these three factors as inspiration for mydesignsecrets.com, a new Web site that includes helpful how-to decorating articles and a searchable database of retail vendors.

Q. You are giving away your secret sources for free. Isn't this contrary to what designers usually do?

A. These are not trade-only sources. These are sources that are already out there. I was using them for extras and short-term projects. I see myself not as someone who sells furniture. I'm a professional consultant. I can only work with 10 people a year. With something like this, I can help thousands gain the confidence to do it themselves and have a beautiful, comfortable home.

Q. How do you think consumers get confidence?

A. One of the important things is giving them more educational articles like how to choose paint colors. Being a successful interior designer or being successful in designing a room is not magic. While a lot of successful designers and decorators have a natural eye, that's not all there is. It's a process you follow consistently.

Q. Doesn't HGTV make it look like magic?

A. On HGTV, it happens so fast. What people don't see is the process. I am very process oriented and have checklists. I can help people outline five steps to get the work done. I think a lot of people, especially women, feel they should naturally have this talent. Not everyone can do it instinctively. They need help _ whether they hire an interior designer or use a Web site.

Q. How should people use it?

A. If they wind up there because a friend recommended us or they Googled us, they should dive right into the secret databases or look at the area to determine their style. I know a lot of people want to get to the end result, but I am finding a lot of people also spend a lot of time reading the articles. If you read about the process, you will be better able to recognize what will and will not work in the house.

Q. How did you come up with your product recommendations?

A. I had over 500 resources cataloged by style and category. I like what they carry. I like how their Web site works and I look into their customer service. I try to keep on top of what's happening and what trends people might be seeing. Each week I go in and update the list.

Q. You give descriptions of different styles, such as Beach House, Classic, Exotic and Modern. What's your personal style?

A. I prefer to mix it up a bit. The basis of my style is pretty Classic, but I do like injecting modern art. The end table in my living room is an antique from my grandmother. The coffee table is Indonesian. I just go by how things feel and things that really speak to me. If you are pretty honest about the things you are drawn to, they will complement each other.

Q. What is your best budget advice?

A. Take a look at the clearance areas. Almost every Web site has them. They are usually at the bottom of the list. They are not there because no one wanted them. In many cases, they had to be discontinued for some reason. Or you can find a use for existing things in a different room or use them in a different way. The third thing you can do is paint. Have some courage and pick out a color. You can transform a room.

Q. The site doesn't have advertising. Does it make money?

A. It will. Since we wanted to maintain consumer advocacy, we didn't want to make money off the purchases people make. There will be sponsorship of categories.

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