

# Next Door Neighbors **Home**



## **Redesigning Home and Life**

By Alison Johnson

When Deborah “DJ” Thomas was a teenager, she regularly reorganized the furniture and decorations in her family’s house.

“My mother would come home wondering what her house was going to look like that day,” DJ recalls. “Sometimes, she’d say, ‘Okay, Deborah, you put that sofa back where it was!’ But most of the time, she liked it.”

Given that background, perhaps the only surprise is that DJ, now 60, only became a professional interior designer less than five years ago.

The owner of A New View for You Interiors,

LLC, DJ spent more than 25 years working in the insurance and sales industry before deciding to reinvent herself at age 55. She founded her company in October 2019 after earning a degree in design.

DJ’s business slogan, “Imagine the Possibilities,” reflects her belief that physical spaces can be both beautiful and functional, capture people’s unique tastes and personalities, and even connect to special memories and experiences in their lives.

Her main question before a redesign, renovation, or construction project is: “How do

you want this room to make you feel?”

“I design around feelings,” DJ says. “I have people close their eyes, imagine a place that they love, and tell me all about it, in detail. So, if it’s a beach: Is it a Caribbean beach or a Southern beach, a beach with a rocky shore? What does the sand and sky look like? What do they see around them? Those answers will help me know what colors and textures to use.” Projects can be major or minor. DJ offers color consultations, space planning, and advice on adding furniture, rugs and pillows; replacing flooring, lighting, countertop surfaces and fix-

tures, and planning new builds. She partners with a Class A contractor who handles construction.

“I love to tear a bathroom or kitchen completely apart and put it back together so it looks nothing like it did,” she says. “I want to do something completely different for each person, and I want it to be something that no one has ever seen before. No cookie-cutter work.”

Watching the reactions of happy clients is deeply rewarding, she adds. “When someone walks into a room and gasps and says, ‘Oh my God, I love it!’ that’s my thing. I feed off that.” Born in Bennettsville, South Carolina, DJ was the oldest of three sisters and loved going to clothing and home décor stores with her mother. When she excelled in a Home Economics course in middle school, her mom bought her a secondhand sewing machine.

DJ began making pillows and curtains for the house, pants and dresses for herself, and

clothes for her sisters’ dolls. “I always liked tinkering with things, figuring out how to make things and fixing things,” she relates.

Still, DJ opted to pursue what she considered a more stable career path and planned to become a lawyer. She started at South Carolina State as a Political Science major but left college after two years and pivoted to insurance.

DJ was a successful policy broker for multiple companies over the years, including MetLife, MassMutual and Aflac; in 2009, in fact, she was Aflac’s top agent in South Carolina. She also raised two children, Jessica and Jason.

In 2014, DJ, who is divorced, moved from Charlotte, North Carolina, to Williamsburg to be closer to Jessica and her husband and two children, Taylor, now 18, and Riley, 12. Jessica’s family lives in New Kent County.

“I just missed my granddaughters,” DJ says. “I used to drive up here from Charlotte every six to eight weeks, and that still wasn’t

enough time with them.” Jason and his wife and daughters, Sophia, 10, Aubrey, eight, and Harper, two, live in San Antonio, Texas.

By then, DJ already had begun her foray into the design world. In 2011, she had what she describes as an “epiphany” to create bras and panties with positive affirmations written on the inside and crystals decorating the outside. She named the line “Covenant by Deborah.”

“The idea is that when you touch each piece, it reminds you of the positive thoughts that are on the fabric against your skin,” she explains. “And when you touch the crystals, you feel what a rare and special gem you are as a woman.”

Soon, however, DJ realized that she needed more education on marketing and product sourcing to advance the fledgling business. She enrolled at the Art Institute of Virginia Beach in 2016 and majored in Fashion Design and Marketing.

At a teacher’s suggestion, DJ went on to Tidewater Community College for an associate’s degree in her childhood love, Interior Design. She also earned Career Studies Certification as an Associate Designer, Kitchen and Bath Designer, and Green Design for Interiors. “Right away, I knew I’d found my tribe,” she remembers. “Everything was easy and so much fun for me.”

A New View for You serves clients throughout Hampton Roads. DJ prides herself on listening carefully as clients describe their visions for a space, although she’ll also gently suggest tweaks.

“If I know for a fact that something’s going to look like a hot mess, I’ll say, ‘Um... y’all can’t put my name on that,’” she says with a laugh. “I say it in a nice and joking way, of course, and then we talk about other possible ideas and directions.”

In general, DJ steers people away from single-color themes and “matchy-matchy”

layouts. A personal fan of pastels, she aims to combine colors and mix materials such as glass, stones and metals in mosaics to give rooms new depth and character. Ideally, all design elements flow together like a musical symphony, she says.

“I think my biggest tip would be, don’t be afraid of color,” she advises. “Go ahead and paint something ‘risky’, because if you don’t like it, you can easily change it. You can even try a peel-and-stick mural that you can just take down if it doesn’t end up working for you.”

DJ’s home, for example, incorporates plum-colored chairs and walls with soft pink and green hues and accents that give it a warm and tropical feel. “It sounds like a lot of colors, but it works,” she says. “It’s a good sign when you always want to come home.”

Much of DJ’s business has come from repeat customers and word of mouth. Some of her clients have become more like friends, joining

her for meals and birthday celebrations. She also does her best to serve homeowners with a range of budgets.

“A lot of times, people think they could never afford a designer, so they just go with a contractor,” she notes. “Really, though, they often can, and my job is to get them exactly what they want.”

In her off time, DJ enjoys spending time with her family, reading, listening to music, and playing tennis. She also recently discovered a passion for skydiving, which she did to mark her 60th birthday.

“It was incredible,” she recalls. “What a rush! I’m definitely going to do it again. I may even try to get my certification this summer.”

As she continues to grow her design company, DJ also is reworking her Covenant by Deborah undergarments with a plan to relaunch that line this year.

DJ Thomas’ own personal redesign, in other words, has been a huge success. NDN