

dog lady design files

“I want to be her” Series: an Interview with Joanne Laurie of J Laurie Designs

I talk to the owner of the most incredible home on the 2015 Hoboken House Tour about her JCPenney couch, her mix of high and low design style (she shops at Target people!), and finding interior design success in Hoboken.

When I signed up to be a Hoboken House Tour Volunteer, I basically demanded to be stationed at the best house. Melissa, who ran the volunteer portion of the tour, told me “Yea, sure”.

But low and behold, day of the tour she whispers: “**don’t tell anyone else, but this is easily the grandest place on the tour!**” I was assigned to the 10th and Willow masterpiece of Joanne Laurie: an immaculate, multi-million dollar glittery play pen of a house. If you appreciate a timeless yet trendy appeal, if you’ve got a thing for white kitchens, and swoon over glossy black circle doors, damn, this house is for YOU. I mean, she’s a beauty.



Interior designers can be pretty intimidating, atleast for me, who is just getting started diving into this new passion of mine. But not Joanne. When I walked into her home to volunteer for the tour, she asked me if I needed a sweater and if I was OK by the door, if I needed water, if I needed any help (maybe I also just looked gross that day? Totally possible). And once I spotted a set of decorative boxes that I agonized over on Joss & Main and never ended up buying..I knew we were kindred spirits in design!

She’s definitely someone who lights up a room. Her laugh is contagious, and she’s pretty hysterical. I asked her to sit down with me at Anthony David’s in Hoboken to girl chat about design. She agreed (also because, she says, people are probably tired of her talking about it!) and

we stayed for an hour discussing design details only us people who have a weird thing for tile would enjoy.



DLDF: So how did you get started doing this? I did a little social media stalking and see you went to school for it.

Joanne: Yep. Well after I graduated, the 1st jobs I got were designing retail displays, and I was just like, this is not what I thought I would be doing with this degree. So I stopped for a while but a few years ago, once we bought this home in Hoboken, I picked it back up. We also have a cottage in the Poconos I've been designing. People saw our home and I started giving advice to friends, and from there word spread!

DLDF: For chics like me just starting out in the design world, would you say we need a degree? How do we get started? Tell us your secrets!

J: My own home was the best experience. I told my architect that I learned so much designing this home with her than I ever did studying in school. You just don't get that kind of experience without actually doing it yourself. I'd definitely encourage you to go get a degree, but you just have to start designing. I actually sketch by hand; I did that with a project I worked on where I planned out a kitchen and living room. I did it to spec, ofcourse, with measurements and everything, but obviously it would have been easier in a program! But I would say start helping your friends decorate. Go shopping with them. I designed for friends for free just because I enjoyed it, but now I've got my home and a few other projects in my portfolio and I'm able to start charging for my work. I'm also very lucky that I'm in a position to choose my own projects.

DLDF: What are some of your design sources? Where do you get your ideas from?

Joanne: I used to be a huge shelter mag girl, but I don't look at those much anymore. At this point I know what I like and whats quality, so if I'm proposing something, I have my go-to sources. I go to the Design Center in the city all the time. Most of the stuff my clients look for are custom. They don't have massive budgets but they want quality. I have this guy that does

cabinets. He takes forever, but he's really really good. It's also about your relationships with contractors and vendors. You need to get to know your area and who does good work and work with them. They enable me to do great work.

DLDF: I know you divulged your secret about having a JCPenney couch. That made me feel normal. Where do you usually shop? Your thoughts on Target?

J: Omg, I shop way too much at Target! I love Target for small décor, they've got some amazing little trinkets to really round out a space. Good design doesn't have to be expensive. It's all about mixing but making sure its good quality. I love West Elm. Crate and Barrel is great. Pottery Barn is nice but its gotten way too expensive and you can find similar styles elsewhere. My JCPenney couch I found when Joanthan Adler did a capsule collection. I love that couch! I probably shouldn't have told you it was from JCPenney, but I've told everyone at this point, haha!

DLDF: The 10 catalogues Restoration Hardware sends out gives me anxiety.

J: Their stuff is nice but again, expensive. Their tables are like \$6,000.

DLDF: What would be your dream job? What's your dream client?

J: I'm working on a few fun design sessions right now. I've also got a big project coming up in Hoboken which would be amazing to get. I'd be doing everything, which is what I love. I love working with contractors, but I also love selecting and designing the final products and finishes. My ideal client would be someone with my style who needs all of the final details and lets me go shopping for them!

DLDF: I hear ya! Who doesn't want to shop on someone else's dime? Sign me UP. Would you ever take on a client that was completely different in style from you?

J: I doubt it. I'd like to think they took a look at my site 1st before calling me, and if what's on their isn't interesting to them, I'm probably not going to be able to design something that they ultimately like.

DLDF: Speaking of design, if you could describe your style in 3 words, what would it be?

J: Oh man, talk about putting me on the spot! I don't even know! I'd say Modern yet Timeless Traditional, but I have to get back to you on that.

(For discovering your own style, check out Betsy Helmuth's podcast on this very topic: <http://www.bigdesignsmallbudget.com/> - Episode 28 – Style Search)

DLDF: I've recently been on a house tour kick. Are you a fan? Any must-go-to's or skip-its?

J: I usually go to the one in Kipp's Bay (<http://curbed.com/tags/kips-bay-decorator-show-house>) but haven't had the time this year. House tours are fine and they can be fun but I find them unrealistic. A homeowner isn't going to have 100 sitting rooms or spend that much money on flower arrangements or wallpaper. But I like to go to them to get ideas for interesting ways to execute things for clients. At one of them I found the coolest window treatments for bathrooms. I hate those blinds that start from the bottom of the window and you use a pull to lift and lower

them – they are awful – but I snapped a picture of the house tour bathroom as an idea, and when my client was like “What do I do with my bathroom windows?” I had the perfect idea! It was this really cool screen inside of the window; and it came from the house tour! So that’s what I do. I would LOVE to go to the High Point Market in North Carolina.

DLDF: OMG, me too. If only... I have to say the last house tour I went to was a bummer. The Upper Saddle River tour was so girly, and had the same issue – 1000 sitting rooms. It’s like, how many couches can one person see?! What’s your #1 pet peeve when you enter someone’s home? Is there a mistake you see homeowners making all the time?

J: Oooh that’s a good question. Hmm. Lighting. There should always be multiple sources of light in every room. You can have the most amazing space, but if its not lit well, it will look terrible. Clients also need to understand that all of the lights have to look like they flow in a room; they can’t just be all over the place. They all need to work together. It’s also amazing what some paint can do to a room. I can’t tell you how much more money people could get for their places when they put them on the market if they just painted that yellow room a gray. You need to design for the masses if you’re selling!

Our interview wound down by talking a little about Joanne’s family and her weekend plans coming up, and then what bloggers she follows as well as her musings on current Jersey City and Hoboken design happenings.

DLDF: I’m really inspired by other bloggers in the space. Do you follow anyone? Do you devour shelter mags?

J: I used to. I used to read everything. House Beautiful, all of them. But I don’t do it too much now. If you haven’t read her yet, you should check out COCOCOZY – she’s got a great feed and articles on interiors – you’d find her blog super interesting!

DLDF: Any comments on the design community and what’s happening in Hoboken and Jersey City interior design? Any local shops that you love for home décor and interiors?

J: Oh, its exploding! There are so many projects happening right now. It’s a great time to be covering this industry. If you’ve got some time check out Galatea Linens – its right on Washington Street in Hoboken – they’ve got really nice bedding sets and their price points are great for true quality linens. I think a major element that’s missing in this area is a place for good, affordable art. Sometimes you might score in Homegoods, but other than that, everything I’ve ordered online comes pixelated and looks cheap. There’s really nothing around here that sells great, original art that doesn’t cost an obscene amount of money! I’ve got a friend who has incredible pieces, but you can tell they are collectibles. She truly COLLECTS art. But for those of us that just need something on our walls that doesn’t look like crap, its hard to find! I check out Etsy for pieces, but there’s a big need here for that.

Joanne’s expertise is for hire! Check out her website for more photos of her gorgeous home and to talk with her about any upcoming projects that you have. Her design style is an insanely inspiring mix of high-end approachability and timeless on-trend.