



Life Designs Carol Davis

BY MARGIE MORRIS

Long before HGTV, **Carol Davis** was performing magical makeovers on Sherman homes and offices. She approaches every job with an almost ferocious enthusiasm. "I've always been passionate about the interior design business," Carol says. "I enjoy working with people and creating havens for work and relaxation."

Visualizing options that transform physical space is what Carol does best. She's been at it since opening her first store on West Lamar in downtown Sherman in 1981. "I had moved to Sherman three years prior and felt the time was right to open a design-oriented business in a town that was so openly friendly and showing some positive signs for growth in retail," said Carol. "It was a pretty sad-looking building, but I could see the potential and most importantly, it was affordable!" Carol went to work creating enticing curb appeal and an interesting product mix.

Two locations and 20 years later Carol and her husband, **John**, opened Interior HomeStore at 702 N. Travis. She smiles when asked about how they run a business and remain married. Admittedly, working so closely together can be difficult, but Carol says they have learned the importance of staying out of each other's way if the sparks start flying! Getting seri-

ous, Carol calls John her pillar of strength, especially when she is stressed over a difficult decision. "After we talk it through, he has this wonderful way of making it better with his usual sound, sensible advice and wisdom. Thankfully, he understands the need for some longer work days and vacations geared around furniture markets. So I would say I'm a lucky gal and believe that one of my best ideas ever was marrying him!"

Carol remembers sitting quietly at her grandmother's breakfast table watching as the older woman thoughtfully placed every floral stem in a carefully chosen vase.

Each has separate and distinct responsibilities for making Interior HomeStore a success. John heads the receiving, service, delivery, and installation departments.

Carol focuses on retail sales, design, advertising, and purchasing. They depend on what Carol calls "five fabulous employees" to maintain the store while she and John are out and about. "I may be the conductor waving the baton, but they are the ones who truly make the music - and what a beautiful sound they make!"

If you want to watch her work, you'd better wear track shoes. Carol's personal demeanor is gracious and friendly, but she is also a busy businesswoman with a crowded calendar. She is in and out of her well-traveled white van in an instant, her signature brown curls (with blond highlights, of course) bouncing as she strides toward whatever project she has managed to fit into today's schedule. Notebook in hand, she prepares to scrutinize every inch of the area requiring her attention.

Her first priority is to learn about her client's taste, how the room will be used, what challenges are evident. She is quick to begin formulating design solutions that will make the space as enjoyable as it workable. "It's important to create an atmosphere that is accommodating, yet peaceful, by surrounding yourself with the things you love. If your wall colors are soothing, your fabrics appealing and your furnishing arranged for comfort, your room is well on its way to greatness!" Carol insists that treasures must speak to your heart for years to come, not just fill up an empty space.

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Carol's decorating sense came early. She remembers sitting quietly at her grandmother's breakfast table watching as the older woman thoughtfully placed every floral stem in a carefully chosen vase. "I'm lucky to have my grandmother's eye for design, but my mother played an important role as well. She allowed me to use my bedroom as a sort of lab. The wall color, draperies and furniture arrangement was changed as needed - which was often!"

Born in Shreveport, Louisiana, Carol also lived in Mississippi, Indiana and Ohio be-

“If you love red, use red somewhere in your home, whether on the walls or just the seat on a desk chair.”

fore landing in Texas. "My parents taught me that 'a little hard work won't kill ya!' I was encouraged to get a job as soon as I turned 16 so I could learn work ethics and also just how far money really goes, especially since I gave a portion back to my parents to help with our family of seven."

Carol's education includes earning her Texas Association for Interior Design license. She attends continuing education classes regularly to keep accreditations updated. During her school years, she says she was a bit of a Lone Ranger - at a time when not all young women had professional ambitions. "I knew I wanted to control my destiny and open a business of my own when the time and place were right." One thing formal schooling didn't teach her was: "that taste is a matter of choice, but quality is a matter of fact!" Carol now

advises clients to buy the best they can afford so there are no regrets down the road.

Her belief that people will remain loyal to you and your business if you treat them with respect and consideration was a lesson learned early. "When I needed money to spruce up my first store front and buy some inventory, the first two banks where I took my business plan turned my loan application down. The third gave me the loan, which I paid back in a year. I've been showing them my appreciation for their belief in my abilities ever since." Despite being approached by others to move her accounts since then, Carol remains loyal "to the ones who bring me!"

Asks what three practices she most attributes to her success, Carol is adamant: "First, I set a standard of excellence when it comes to customer service and then work hard to make that an ingrained habit. Second, I'm always exploring opportunities and possibilities available to take the next step toward growth. And finally, I like sounding confident, being confident, projecting confidence in all matters of business, but delivering it with a touch of light-heartedness. I hate being too serious – it makes life all work and no play!"

Even the most successful business runs into snags occasionally. When the rare difficulty with a client arises, Carol believes she has not adequately explained her role as designer versus what the client's responsibility is. "If I give a client enough information beforehand that shows how we will be working together, that should eliminate the



Carol and John Davis surrounded by their Interior HomeStore staff.

chance for confusion. Communication is the key to a happy home for both parties."

For many of us, the reality of decorating can be daunting, especially now that home design has taken on a recreational aspect from the media and transformations occur in 30 minutes or less. While there are principles designers use



Those who know Carol Davis well will instantly recognize her style: warm, inviting and using a palette of colors that compliments the owner's style.

to ensure a good outcome, following all the rules isn't necessarily the goal. In fact, well-known artist Mary Engelbriet said, "If I stopped to consult a color guide every time I decorated, I'd be too confused even to buy a throw pillow. My method is simple: Please yourself."



The kitchen has become a focal point for the family and comfort is every bit as important as style. Carol mixes design and function.

Carol agrees. In fact, the most important decorating advice she offers is to follow your heart. "If you love red, use red somewhere in your home, whether on the walls or just the seat on a desk chair." She suggests doing a fair amount of homework before making purchases. "Tear pages out of magazines, collect paint swatches, photograph pieces of furniture you love. Keep your ideas in a folder or a box so that you'll have all your ideas together in one place."

Then, Carol emphasizes, it's time to call in an expert! What looks great on television or in a magazine may need some tweaking to fit into your home or office. Over the years, she has heard many people say that their biggest mistake was not asking for help soon enough. "Even if you feel

capable of making your own choices in décor, it's always reassuring to know that you're on the right track – or to discover early what hidden pitfalls may derail your project," says Carol. "Most of my clients know what styles and colors they feel good living with. What they don't know is how to take the best of what they own and want to keep and mix it with a few new additions that help them mesh it all together so it has a new-and-improved flow and style."

A professional designer assimilates chosen elements so the finished room has a pulled-together and pleasing appearance, rather than a hodge-podge of mismatches. Carol says that on a

grand scale, such as building a new home or extensive remodeling, clients want help narrowing options to the very best choices available for their budget. "That's where design services can save clients time, money and disappointment."

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Design expertise can also bring an air of whimsy or elegant creativity. With the keen eye of a true artist, Carol uses wonderful pieces in unexpected ways. An antique dish drainer you might keep in the kitchen is a functional and interesting conversation piece in the office. "I find my inspiration everywhere and I have trained myself to be observant whether I'm at the movies, the grocery store, a museum or even cleaning out the garage!"

Her talent, experience, well-honed business acumen, and optimism have enabled Carol to maintain a thriving enterprise through good economic times and bad. "If you plan ahead and work to stay on a

If she had it to do over again, Carol says she would have played as hard as she worked.

consistent advertising schedule, the business slumps should be just bumps in the road, not potholes!" Carol said. "When I do experience a slump, I take advantage of the slow time to reorganize and catch up on a few in-store projects. In other words, make a positive out of a negative and keep making things happen!"

When asked what she would offer for new entrepreneurs, Carol advises, "First of all, do what you love! Second, set goals so you'll know where you're going. Accomplish them and then set new ones. Third, be able to accept and enjoy challenges, or it will be too easy to give up on your dream. Last, but not least, always give people more than they expect! Know that there will be sacrifices you'll have to make in your life in order to succeed," Carol continued. "A few, you may regret, but many you will not. Either way, you will be better and wiser for it and then can pass those lessons on."

If she had it to do over again, Carol says that she would have played as hard as she worked. Recognition of the need for balance sometimes comes with jolting life challenges. Two years ago, Carol's sister was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor which changed Carol's priorities dras-

tically. "She has shown me what the true definition of courage really is, as she still lives with her illness from day-to-day, but works full time and raises a family," Carol said. After a pause: "Wow, I thought I had a lot on my plate to deal with every day."



Each year Carol and John host at least one major charitable event in their store to support non-profit organizations in the community. "We have helped the American Heart Association, Habitat for Humanity and the Women's Crisis Center," Carol said. The first event to benefit the Susan Komen Foundation was held in 2006.

Those who have known Carol for many years say she hasn't changed a bit - that she still looks the same (she gives credit to her parents) and remains energetic and optimistic. When asked what five things make her happy, her response is swift and emphatic -- "My husband, my family, my friends, my work, my home."

On those rare occasions when Carol is exhausted or troubled, her prayer is: "To live simply, to recognize God in every face I see and to always be the change I wish to see in the world."

Ten years from now Carol envisions herself "pleasantly tired! But still very passionate about the opportunity to decorate one more home or, better yet, maybe a villa near the ocean." When and if retirement ever comes, Carol reflected on what she will remember most fondly. "How lucky I've been to visit so many beautiful homes, to have acquired so many wonderful new relationships and to have been taught by my customers the true meaning of style!" •



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