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## Home designer is living her dream

By DIANA CARR , Middletown Press Correspondent

**DURHAM -- Step over the threshold, and you are ushered into a captivating world of soft silks, plush fabrics, music that is a balm to your soul, and glorious fragrances that wrap around you and beckon you to linger for awhile. It is a world reminiscent of a simpler time and place. A delight to the senses, it is a welcome respite from the hustle and bustle just outside the door.**

You have entered Home Gallery, the showroom of designer Lisa Davenport. Located at 2534 Main Street in Glastonbury, it serves as her "working portfolio." Here, potential clients can see her work first-hand, as well as purchase furniture, mugs, fabrics, and accessories. Davenport's love of the arts dates back to childhood. The daughter of an artist, she says, "I always had a creative edge. I loved to draw things, and I knew I had talent. I knew it would be a disservice to myself if I didn't at least start an education in the arts."

After high school, she attended Middlesex Community College in Middletown, where she received an associate's degree in commercial art.

Upon graduation, she landed a job setting up window and store displays at Bob's Stores in Middletown. While there, she heard there was an opening for a decorator at American Paint and Decorating in Glastonbury. So with the attitude of, "What the heck? I'll try my hand at it. I really don't have anything to lose," she was off to work as a decorator for Ed Richman, the owner.

"I think it's important to know there's a difference between a designer and a decorator," says Davenport. "A designer is somebody who has invested the time and money for an education -- where that education is not just about pretty fabrics and wallpaper. A decorator puts together nice things, and has no formal education."

A designer studies such things as construction, textiles, the custom design of furniture and cabinetry, how we live and work in a space, and the American Disability Act requirements (which involves working with special-needs clientele).

"I think my passion for design really began when I started to work for the paint store," she says.

"When people began to come back to me excited about their spaces, based upon my recommendations, I realized that if I get that much of a reaction out of paint and wallpaper, imagine the reaction if I do a whole room.

"What I found working there," Davenport continues, "was the opportunity to work with people. I love working with people. And it gave me a creative outlet. So I decided I needed to go back to school and learn how to do it right."

She began her studies at Paier College of Art in Hamden after her first child was born. (She has two children -- Ashley, 12, and Joey, 6.) Meanwhile, she was still working at American Paint and Decorating. Richman opened Home Gallery in 1995, and she became his partner in 1998.

Richman, she says, does the behind-the-scenes work; he handles the finances and the day-to-day business. "He makes sure our business is giving back to the community," says Davenport. "He's very passionate about charitable work.

"We're very involved with our community here in Glastonbury, and we try to do as much as we can. Sometimes we donate our time, and sometimes we donate merchandise."

One of the recipients of their philanthropy is the Connecticut Children's Medical Center in Hartford. They created 12 centerpieces for the gala affair that was held Oct. 23, and hid a CCMC button in each one. For each person who found a button and returned it to them, they donated \$100 to the hospital in his or her name.

In addition to her charitable work, Davenport has managed to find a number of venues for her talents. She designed two chairs in her showroom, as well as the cabinetry that houses the carpet and fabric samples; she has been a guest on several television and radio stations; she spoke about interior design at the Durham Fair on Sept. 25; she won two awards for her restaurant design while at Paier College of Art; she is affiliated with the American Society of Interior Designers, the Connecticut Coalition of Interior Design, the National Association of Women Business Owners, and the Glastonbury Chamber of Commerce; and she designed the dining room for the Shoreline

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Foundation's show house, which appeared in "Decorator Show Houses" (by Tina Skinner, Melissa Cardona and Nancy Ottino).

The Shoreline Foundation in Guilford is a nonprofit organization that raises money for the community. With that goal in mind, they created a show house -- a house that displays the work of various designers -- and charged admission to the public.

Davenport's design for the dining room was selected. "This was difficult," she recalls, "because I had no client, no personality to design for. It was shortly after Sept. 11. My husband is a firefighter, and it was a very emotional time. I wanted to create something warm and intimate."

She was delighted when her design was selected for "Decorator Show Houses."

"Being published in this book is a huge accomplishment. They collected designs from top designers all around the country."

Ninety-nine percent of Davenport's work is residential, although she "would love to do a restaurant." She "does everything from soup to nuts," and designs such things as rugs, furniture, built-in cabinetry, window treatments, and custom upholstery.

"If I can't find what I need," she says, "and if their budget allows it, I design it myself. Our only limitations are our imagination." She often designs for people who are building their homes. Working closely with the contractors, she helps her clients choose lighting, flooring material, molding details, plumbing fixtures, etc. "Whatever they need assistance with." She also custom-designs furnishings for special-needs clients.

Davenport employs many different styles, with each design determined by the personality of the client.

"My philosophy is to keep design fun, entertaining and easy, but most importantly, to create a space that reflects my client's personality. I spend a lot of time getting to know my clients.

"A good designer doesn't need to like every style," she continues, "but he or she needs to appreciate all styles. And in that appreciation, they're willing to work within all styles."

Her own home, she says, is eclectic. She likes a lot of different styles and periods, and her furnishings run the gamut from antiques to modern pieces. "My home is a very warm and comfortable environment. It's not formal."

Davenport's husband gives her carte blanche to do whatever she wants. "You know what you're doing," he tells her, "and you do it well. So just do it."

"He doesn't fight me on anything," says Davenport.

"I'll come home with something and ask him what he thinks, and he'll just say, 'That's fine, Honey. Whatever you want.'"

"The most important thing when designing," says Davenport, "is to involve all the senses. I tell clients all the time that interior design is an experience." She recommends the use of visually appealing objects, delightful aromas, wonderful textures, delectable food, and soothing sounds. (She sometimes upholsters walls in order to reduce distracting sounds.)

"When redecorating or designing your home, try to relax and just have fun," she goes on. "Incorporate the latest trends, but only ones that you know you can live with or those which can be easily and inexpensively involved."

The question, of course, had to be asked. Does she find herself critiquing the homes she visits? "When I go to somebody's house, I appreciate whatever their style is," she replies. "Not to say that they don't need help tweaking it, but I can appreciate where they're coming from. I don't give unsolicited advice."

Ask Davenport what she likes most about her work, and she says, "I get to work with people and be creative, and I love knowing that I was able to create a space that reflects my client's personality. I'm pretty much living a dream."



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