

Focus on the Client Guiding Mission of Decor & You Owner

by Linda Zukauskas

SOUTHBURY — The name of the business is very telling at Décor & You, 900 Main St. South.

Karen Powell, CEO, CFE, founder, owner and green leader, told Voices, “We’re different than most businesses in the design world because of how we focus on the client. Over the years, we’ve found that most people want their own look, but they just don’t know how to do that.” She explained, “Decorating can be complex, with a lot of moving parts. You see a store for paint, another for furniture and still another for carpeting. It’s rare to see all those parts put together because of the complexity. We help people where they need it the most, in putting all those parts together.”

She added, “Most people would love to have that wow factor and can usually get to good. It’s the rare person who can get to wow if they’re not a professional designer.”

Ms. Powell was able to call on her years of experience to publish a book called “The Styleprint Design System,” which illustrates the discrete steps of decorating. “The first half of a decorating project takes place in the head, focusing on wants. If more than one person lives in that space, we blend those needs. Then, we need to take into account the character of the space itself.”

According to the designer, all homes are unique and the physical characteristics of a space,

including how light comes into the space from the outside, must be brought into the equation. “Or the whole thing won’t work.”

Other factors include personal preferences and lifestyle. She asks questions to learn about her clients and if they have pets or children or simply want a chair or sofa with a higher platform so it’s easier to get in and out of a seat.

“Decorating is not just the pretty side of things. A room has to function.” She cautioned that clients might not consider some aspects of decorating without prompting from a professional.

“Sometimes we have a clean slate, but that can be just as challenging in terms of narrowing down choices,” Ms. Powell said, remembering the time she created a room in a designer showhouse as one of the most challenging jobs because there was no client to provide a necessary component of the equation.

In other cases, clients are simply tired of the way their space looks, “It’s nothing they can put their finger on but they know it’s wrong.”

Ms. Powell is passionate about her work, but her entry into the industry was more of an evolution than a direct path.

After teaching business at Nonnewaug High School for a decade, Ms. Powell decided she needed more flexibility in her professional life as she cared for her daughter as a single mother. She won a piece of art while attending a conference and was



Karen Powell, CEO, CFE, founder, owner and green leader with Décor & You, 900 Main St. South, Southbury, feels decorating must function, feel good when you walk into the space and finally, look good. (Zukauskas photo)

immediately interested in the importance of color and how art could be an extension of self within a home.

Embarking on a new career as a consultant, she was happy to see clients pleased with her input in placing the right art in the right place with matting to coordinate with their existing décor; their trust in her grew as they fell in love with the results. “They were willing to take the next step and change window treatments or rearrange furniture.”

As her skills grew, the company expanded its offerings and the educational opportunities provided to its consultants. “We could help clients transform their rooms.”

One of the most important aspects of her work then was an idea that has stuck with her through the present day. “We helped people go from confused to smiling, with eyes sparkling.

The whole thing was customer-driven.”

When the consulting company went out of business, Ms. Powell decided to continue the work and, with input from her husband, founded her own business, then expanded it as a franchise. “He saw the possibilities and was so supportive.”

Her training as a teacher came in handy as she transitioned from training fellow coworkers to training employees and other franchise owners. “This is the best of both worlds, where I’m in business for myself, but I have the systems and tools of a community.”

As she works with clients, Ms. Powell will offer multiple options because, although she is confident that all choices will produce highly desirable results, she likes to give clients the chance to consider something outside the box.

“I throw in something they’d never think to do and ask them to try it on mentally.”

That distinctive option might be a wall covering, which she says can add dimension to a space and set a tone, “But it can be difficult to select the right pattern and texture. I ask them to consider these options but always let them know, they’re in charge.”

As a trusted advisor, she’s seen how what might seem unattractive at first can be very appealing with the right light or just a few days of living with the new look.

She recommends against following traditional paths to decorating, which can be sources of frustration.

“Buying a sofa is not decorating. You’re purchasing a utilitarian piece and you can’t make decisions about scale and fabrics

out of context,” Ms. Powell said, noting that lighting can make a huge difference and she urged homeowners against underestimating the power of personalizing their space.

Illustrating that idea of making a house into a home, she remembered a client who not only hated where she lived but had a husband who was highly skeptical that decorating would improve the situation.

A leap of faith allowed Ms. Powell the opportunity to decorate the first floor and a good portion of the second.

She said the client later confided that it was her husband who would take the lead in giving tours of their beloved home to friends and family. “That makes me smile because that’s what I wanted for them.”

Those interested in learning more are encouraged to email kpowell@decorandyou.com to set up a complementary strategy option session or SOS.

There is more information about Décor & You programs at teamconnecticut.decorandyou.com.

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