

DECOR / APR 26, 2018

CURRENT & ECLECTIC DESIGN WITH UMA STEWART INTERIORS & LIFESTYLE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY: LAURA MOSS / WRITTEN BY: IBT GIRLS



Name: Uma Stewart | **Company:** Uma Stewart Interiors & Lifestyle

Title: Founder, Designer | **City:** South Orange, New Jersey

It seems like people know what they want to be when they grow up from age 10 and never waver – but for the rest of us it takes different jobs, career shifts, and/or extra schooling to narrow down the many options and hone our skills. Well, if you fall into the latter category, you're in good company! Uma Stewart lived many different professional lives before realizing her knack and passion for interior design. So, she set aside any limitations she had and went for it. Now, she designs homes, furniture, and textiles at **Uma Stewart Interiors & Lifestyle!** Below, she shares all about her inspiring business background, how this revelation struck her, and how she stays true to herself as a designer and in life in general.



Tell us a little bit about your career path! What was your first job?

My first job was working as a photo editor for a women's fashion magazine in NYC. It felt like such a great job to land but it wasn't a fit. Despite the title and setting, the job was more administrative than creative (like many entry level jobs) but it didn't end up being a fit and left me feeling like I wanted to work somewhere that was a better fit for my values. I ended up working as an acquisitions editor in book publishing, and then going to grad school to pursue an academic career, and then leaving that to pursue political organizing. Nothing seemed like a fit until I was (gently) hit by a car walking to work one day, and realized I was on the totally wrong path for myself.

How did you get your start in Interior Design?

Being knocked by the car and landing on my feet back on the sidewalk was enough to trigger a bit of soul searching and I quickly realized I wanted to pursue interior design. My mother was a designer and I was familiar with the work and felt a strong affinity to it. In my political organizing careers my friends would joke that I was very "fancy" compared to them. I finally realized it was in my DNA and found myself on the path to discovering how to establish a career.

inspired

BY THIS



When did you decide to start your own business? Were there any challenges along the way?

I worked for a few small retail design studios in my area, and I realized I wanted to start my own business and do things my own way. Freedom for my own creativity and way of working was very important because I had spent so many years doing things that didn't feel like a fit. There were many challenges, including the recession, and finding optimal ways for working with people, and understanding the market, and how to price services. The market keeps changing too, so you constantly have to be reinventing.



How would you describe your aesthetic?

My aesthetic is eclectic, yet clean and streamlined. My clients have a lot of different threads in their backgrounds and they have kids, so we try to do family-friendly spaces that also speak to the many sides of the clients' personalities. I tend to like formality, like real dining rooms and living rooms, but I try to rethink how people will use them and design them as spaces that feel special but also approachable, so that you could entertain in them, but also just hang out on your own and enjoy an extra beautiful environment.



Where do you start when designing a new project? What's your favorite part?

I think the designing starts the minute I see the space and hear the clients' talk about what they want. There is an alchemy there in the real bones and the dream of what the finished product will be. Floor planning is really the first step for me. I do it with paper and pencil on empty room templates we create on AutoCAD. It helps me tap into creative layout solutions instead of the strictly technical approach of drawing everything straight into AutoCAD. That frees up my computer for research. I look at a lot of inspiration when floor planning. That way, I begin to imagine the finished spaces, and start thinking through millwork and architectural improvements and their relationship to layouts and furnishings.

In your opinion, what makes the biggest impact in a room?

It depends on the room. When I look at spaces, I look for where the impact is or can be. If it is a room with amazing or unique interior architecture, the impact is built in. If it is a room that is more humble, then I begin to imagine the impact in custom millwork or major furnishings or wall color.

inspired

BY THIS



Do you have a favorite project ever? What was it that made it so great?

We recently worked on a large Victorian in Westfield NJ. The combination of the client, the house, and the direction we took made it a winner. I think it is always the client's commitment to do something exceptional that allows a designer to make a great project. We had that from the beginning on this particular project.

What are your favorite home decor trends happening now?

I don't love "trends" as a rule, but I see a movement towards homes that reference the past and nature, while being something totally new and forward-thinking at the same time. That excites me.





If you could give one piece of advice to aspiring designers out there, what would it be?

Set a strong intention for how you want your clients' experiences to be and for how your design will turn out and constantly keep steering back towards that. It's easy to get thrown off track by a million different things that come at you in a project cycle so hone in on those two things - it is very important.

QUICK ?'S

Favorite Place You've Ever Been: Japanese Gardens in Portland OR

Favorite Store for Interiors: 1stDibs

Best Coffee Table Book: The Artisanal Home

One Thing You Can't Live Without: My family. After that books-I need books