

# Marni Jameson

## To Define Your Style Think Like Plato

By Marni Jameson



House Beautiful

The woman at the party got right down to it. After the usual first-meeting patter -- Where do you live? Who does your hair? -- came the inevitable: What do you do? When I said I was a home design columnist, she got a horror-stricken look I'm used to. Translated: "I'm never having this woman to my place." Then she just came out with it: "Okay, so is your home all tricked out?"

"Heck no!"

"You're kidding?"

"I'm just like most people dealing with the same three-pronged trap -- no money, no time, no courage." "But it's your business."

"My business is making myself feel better by letting readers know they're not alone as we try to make our homes look like something better than the dog's breakfast." I'm no threat to the common home decorator. I have all the same issues. I just get

paid -- about enough to cover my Starbucks tab -- to vent about them, and offer a little hard-won advice along the way.

Then she hit on a common stumbling block. "My problem," she said, "I like so many looks I don't have a look."

"I can relate. One minute a sleek modern look sweeps me away. Next I'm in love with rooms filled with cozy English florals. Then a Tuscan-styled home with terracotta pavers turns my head. They're all great looks, but not in the same house."

"So how do you *commit* to one?"

"It's like marriage," I say. "Success requires love, faithfulness and discipline."

We laughed, but she got me thinking: *How do you define your style?*

I was lucky to have someone tell me my style, before I took off on a wrong and expensive track. When I moved to Colorado from California four years ago, I was smitten with all the Rocky Mountain interiors. I walked through model homes decorated with heavy wood furniture, rough hewn timbers, and muted shades of olive, rust and brown. The mountain lodge decor made me feel as if I were on vacation. If my home looked like this, I thought, I would always have that vacation feeling, which of course is pure tripe.

Meanwhile, I was building a home and needed professional help -- in more ways than one. I hired a Denver interior designer for eight hours of consulting to help me pull together the

background -- wall color, flooring and tile treatments -- and to give me a design direction. I'd take the project from there. I showed her the local interiors I loved, and some pictures of my former home and furnishings.

"This look is great, but it's not you," she said bluntly. "This is too Beaver Creek. The lines are too beefy, the furniture too heavy, the granite counters too thick. It would be a mistake. Everything I can see about you leans toward French Country, lighter lines, something more European. Look at the furniture you've already bought." Was this woman a designer or a psychic?

Suddenly, the typical Colorado lodge-style armchair sitting by the Colorado fireplace did seem like something Paul Bunyan would sit in, not five-foot-three me. I would feel like Goldilocks in Papa's chair. In that Oprah moment, I stopped trying to make my new interior into something I wasn't. Rather I was going to be myself in a new place.

Short of finding an interior design psychic, how do you find your style? I floated the question by Stephen Drucker, editor in chief of *House Beautiful*. "You were lucky," he said, when I told him my story. "Most people have a blind spot about their style."

Start by going through stacks of home design magazines, he said. "Tear out pictures of any rooms you like. When you have 50 interiors, go back through them. A look will emerge." He also recommended looking around your home, for the three things it would break your heart to part with. "If it's a pine table, a hand-woven throw and a canvas sofa, you're a country girl."

Beyond that, I believe you also need to pretend you're Plato, and ponder some deep questions.

### **Where am I?**

Look at the architecture around you and of your home. Architecture and geography should influence your décor. If you have a colonial home in New England, a Moroccan decorating scheme would be a mistake.

### **What am I doing here?**

What is the job your house needs to do? In great design, function comes first, form second. "Be brutally honest when analyzing how you live," said Drucker. "If you never entertain, turn your dining room into a library." An executive bachelor who is a gourmet cook should have a much different home from that of a family of four kids with two dogs.

### **Where did I come from?**

Consider your heritage and express that in your home. I'm a fifth generation Californian with European roots. I feel most at home with a style I would call relaxed Old French with a few nods to the west. I like many looks, but this one suits me.

While you don't have to strictly stick to one style, if you pick one -- modern, rustic, traditional, country, ethnic -- be consistent. Mexican, Scandinavian, and Early American are all distinctive looks. Blend them and you get a camel wearing plaid and stilettos.

***Marni Jameson is a nationally syndicated columnist who lives in the Denver area. To add her weekly column to your publication, contact her at [marni@marnijameson.com](mailto:marni@marnijameson.com).***

*Copyright © Marni Jameson, 2008. May not be reprinted without author's permission.*

# Marni Jameson

## When a Child Says: I Want My Space -- Purple

By Marni Jameson



[www.brocadehome.com](http://www.brocadehome.com)

“Purple,” said my 12-year-old, when I asked what color she wanted to redo her room.

“Like a pale lavender, or a midnight plum?” I asked, hopefully.

“No, bright purple.” She showed me a wallpaper she’d found in a catalog. The color was called peony, and so bright I had to feel my eyebrows to be sure they were still on.

“Oh, I see, something subtle.” Sigh.

I wanted to veto her plan, but thought of that video that made the rounds last month, the one of Randy Pausch, a Carnegie Mellon professor of computer science who’s dying of cancer, giving his last

lecture. It would be overwhelmingly sad if it weren’t so darned full of good, life-affirming advice. “If your kids want to paint their rooms,” he said, “as a favor to me, let them do it. Don’t worry about resale value.” Pausch decorated his boyhood room with quadratic equations.

But my daughter doesn’t want to paint the periodic table of elements on her wall. That would be different. She wants hot purple print wallpaper. Worse, she wants a purple bedspread and matching stool -- in crushed velvet. The only place I ever felt crushed velvet belonged was inside an electric guitar case. How can someone who shares my DNA think crushed purple velvet looks good? The more I say, “Ugh,” the more she likes it. The only thing we agree on is that her room needs a redo. The bedspread has worn out, and she’s outgrown the small French florals and doll shelves. She’s moved onto posters of gymnasts at cirque de soleil, which she hopes to be one day. (We’ll have the career talk later.)

“I get that wanting to redo your room is a healthy developmental step,” I say.

“Oh, please, not the development talk.”

“I understand that kids need to find their individuality, and all that.”

“What does this have to do with the wallpaper?”

“Can’t you separate more tastefully?”

“I like my taste.”

“I mean could you choose a color scheme that might actually go with the house?”

“Mom,” she says bluntly, “I don’t want my bedroom to look like anything in the house.”

“All righty, then.” Pausch’s words fill my head like tinnitus. “We’ll do it your way. You can thank Professor Pausch.”

“Who?”

“He painted math problems on his walls as a kid.”

“You just don’t understand.”

Where have I heard that before? I flash back to my adolescent bedroom, my tolerant parents. I ushered out the blue butterfly bedspread and drapes my mother had custom made, and replaced them with Indian tapestries I bought myself from a local import store. I covered the walls and ceilings with tapestries, too, hung Indian bells on my door, and burned coned incense so long in the bathroom I permanently scorched the Formica. And my parents let me stay.

I discussed the issue with Angela Lamson, a licensed marriage and family therapist, in Greenville, NC. “This isn’t about the room, of course,” she said sounding very therapist like “When kids feel the urge to change up their room, there’s a big reorganization process going on inside them.”

“Does that mean parents have to undergo some remodeling, too?”

“I’m afraid so.”

Here’s what else Lamson says parents should keep in mind when kids say: I want my space my way.

- **Set rules.** While kids should have a big say in how their rooms look, they also need – and want – guidelines. One rule: no destruction. (They can’t spray paint graffiti on the bathroom tile). The room needs to be safe, and that means clean.
- **Get over yourself** and the fact that your child’s room may spoil the visual flow of your house. It’s more important that the room be a place your child can bring friends and say, “This is me in 3-D.” Not, “This is what my mom thinks I should be.”
- **Offer perspective.** An adolescent can’t foresee his taste changing in a couple years, while you know (or at least hope) it will. Thus, don’t pay a lot for their more, uhh, eccentric decorating choices. For instance, I agreed to the wallpaper – for one wall, not four. And she agreed to a well-made white woven duvet cover (classic) instead of the purple velvet one. But she can adorn it with her (cheap to change) purple crushed velvet pillows.
- **Get a second opinion.** If your child won’t agree with your decorating judgment – no, neon orange isn’t a good wall color choice -- ask a design expert at a home improvement or design store to render an opinion. Slip them a five to side with you.
- **Focus on the upside.** No matter how hideous the look, redecorating a bedroom is a great way for a child to experience the reward of having a vision and realizing it. I can’t think of a better backdrop for life.

*Marni Jameson is a nationally syndicated columnist who lives in the Denver area. To add her weekly column to your publication, contact her at [marni@marnijameson.com](mailto:marni@marnijameson.com).*

*Copyright © Marni Jameson, 2008. May not be reprinted without author's permission.*

# Marni Jameson

## Virtual Decorating – Now There's an Idea

By Marni Jameson



When faced with decorating a room from scratch, what I need most is a running start. But I'm often stymied at the start line. I can either wing it myself, or hire a pro. In the first case, the results usually land someplace between timid and terrible. But I can't afford a professional for every room. Plus, interior designers are bad for my marriage. Mention interior designer and my husband becomes just like Steve Martin in "Father of the Bride." He hyperventilates and freezes the bank accounts.

So when a designer I've known for years asked me to test-drive an affordable online design service he was launching, designerathome.com, I perked up: You pick a room you want to decorate, answer a short online questionnaire about the room's purpose and your preferences, and send in room measurements, photos and \$250. Two weeks later, you get a design scheme, like paint-by-numbers for your room. You take the job from there.

A little voice inside said: *Things too good to be true usually are, especially virtual things.*

Good designers usually charge \$100 to \$150 an hour. A design scheme for a room, including furniture layout, colors and fabrics, can cost from \$1,000 to \$2500 -- just for the plan. Designers also get a 30% cut of all furniture and fabrics purchased. That rubs.

I agreed to give Designer at Home a try. Although many rooms in my house could use a makeover, I picked the upstairs bonus room because it looks the most vandalized. The 16 x 17 foot room sits near my girls' bedrooms. Done right, it could be the perfect place for them to hang out in pajamas, watch television, kickback with friends, and grow marijuana. At present it's a refuge for unclaimed furniture and tacky ribbons from their horse shows and gymnastic meets. So I gathered my what-have-I-got-to-lose attitude, and sent in photos and measurements.

Two weeks later, a smart-looking package arrived to my door containing three design boards: one had the furniture layout; two had numbered fabric samples and photos of suggested furniture. A number key explained how to apply each fabric. It loved it, but needed to consult the real clients.

"What about my horse ribbons?" my oldest asked.

"In the plan," I showed her a drawing DAH included for a more attractive ribbon display. She stuck her thumb up.

My youngest took one look at the three cubed stools to be covered in marigold, copper and

lime suede and said: "Swee-eet!"  
I was off and running.

If you decide to give online design a try, here's what you can expect.

### **THE GOOD**

**Price.** For \$250 you get a high-level design that would normally cost a lot more. (The folks at DAH have exceptional design credentials.)

**Pace.** Typically, once interior designers give you a plan, they fold their arms and tap their feet as if to say, "Hurry up already." I decorate in baby steps: paint one month, sofa the next, drapes the next. Mainly because whenever I have some decorating money saved, the dogs need emergency dental cleaning, and property taxes come due. DAH doesn't care how long you take.

**Budget.** I worried DAH would recommend expensive furniture. But the furniture suggestions were from modestly priced suppliers including Crate & Barrel and homedecorators.com. The plan also used what I had. In the questionnaire I said I wanted to keep the carpet and wood blinds, and, if possible, the pine armoire, but everything else could go. DAH incorporated not only the armoire, but also the pine writing table and glider chair (recovered).

**Fabrics.** Interior designers can buy fabrics sold only to the trade, which you and I can't buy directly. These are often nicer, and more custom than retail fabrics, but you pay the designer's mark up. DAH has arranged with Kenneth McDonald, a leading supplier of designer fabrics, for you to order fabric through Kenneth McDonald at substantial discount.

### **THE NOT-SO-GOOD**

**Headaches.** These are all yours. Part of what you pay designers big bucks for is to see a project through. They ride herd on suppliers and contractors. With DAH this is your job. Although I would rather have headaches than mark ups, not everyone wants the hassle.

**Common Touch.** Because a designer never comes to your home, DAH won't provide the custom touches, like feline-themed fabric for cat lovers, that designers who visit in person can.

**Details.** Many will be left to you. For instance, DAH suggested some fun drape fabric, but gave me no picture of the drape treatment. I received a great wall color to highlight an accent wall, but no indication of which wall to accent.

**Risk.** You get one plan. Take it or leave it. DAH will answer a few questions by email, and will offer a minor revision. For instance, my scheme called for a leather sectional, a good indestructible choice for a teen rumpus room. But I have leather sofas in my family room, which DAH didn't know. I wanted something as durable but different. DAH sent a terrific faux suede replacement fabric.

**Bottom Line:** I can make a room look good, but not great. That's what designers bring to the table. And now to the Internet.

*Marni Jameson is a nationally syndicated columnist who lives in the Denver area. To add her weekly column to your publication, contact her at [marni@marnijameson.com](mailto:marni@marnijameson.com).*

*Copyright © Marni Jameson, 2008. May not be reprinted without author's permission.*