

Interview with Designer-Author-Columnist Marni Jameson

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Some women look at a man and think, how can I change him to make him perfect? Marni Jameson does the same thing, but with houses. The nationally syndicated home design columnist and author of "The House Always Wins" and "House of Havoc," which is due in February, is a self-described "serial decorator," with a whole-house remodel and a few new-home constructions under her belt. The Denver resident began her column, At Home with Marni Jameson, in 2004; it's now in more than 30 newspapers throughout the United States and Canada.



Although her column is a humorous guide for people who want to do things themselves — or at least micromanage those they hire — it isn't just about decorating. Jameson's readers know all about her husband, Dan, a business consultant, their two teenaged daughters and even their dog Theo. And they also know that Jameson believes that a home — regardless of its size or style — supports, nurtures and sustains the people who live in it.

How did you become the mistress of home renovations?

By default. Right before we got married in 1989, Dan and I bought an old fixer. We were young and in love; what else could explain it? We spent several years rebuilding it, and got in way over our heads. By the time it was built, there was almost no money for interior decorating. But I'd come that far and was determined to have a beautiful home. So I got very resourceful. Since then we've built two more homes, and along the way I started writing a home design column for the Orange County Register about everything I'd done wrong. That column got picked up as a weekly for national syndication, and here I am, still figuring it out as I go.

How do you juggle writing, two active daughters and decorating?

Writing is a great career when you're trying to also raise kids, because you do, at least in theory, have flexible hours. I work odd hours, and often drag my column with me to work on during gymnastics meets, flute recitals or while waiting for the school bus. The decorating often happens because I need something to write about that week, but I really don't need much encouragement because I enjoy it, and there's always something that needs attention.

You use your family as column fodder. How do your daughters feel about that? Your husband?

Uhh, I get mixed reviews at home. Mostly, I think my kids think it's cool. Many of their friends, teachers and even their principal, read the column. The girls feign mortification, but I think they like it. I deliberately don't use their names in the column, and refer to them as the older daughter, or the younger one, to give them some privacy. We have different last names ... but when I was writing "House of Havoc," I asked them if they wanted their names in, and they both said yes. So they're in. As for Dan, he mostly wishes I'd leave him out of it, but that's not going to happen. He's the source of too much good material.

Household chores always seem to be the bane of relationships. How do you and your husband handle it?

Dan and I argue about plenty, but not about housework. When Dan met me, I had my own condo and a weekly housecleaner. I wasn't going to get married and start doing housework. We kept the cleaning lady, and bumped up the frequency after kids arrived. Now that the kids can pitch in — in theory — the cleaning lady only comes every two weeks. It's non-negotiable. I need it for my sanity because I get grumpy cleaning, and

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no one else cares if the place looks like a frat house. Other rules that help: Everyone does his or her own laundry. Even Dan. And whoever cooks does not clean. If I make dinner, which I usually do, the girls or Dan do the clean up. It mostly works.

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