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Los Angeles Design Star

Kari Whitman



By Lori Dennis, ASID

Our summer design star is one busy woman. In addition to servicing clients like Jessica Alba, Don Johnson, Emilio Estevez and Don Henley, she runs ACE of Hearts, a non-profit organization dedicated to rescuing dogs from shelters, stars on a television show, retails a paint line so posh it's called "wall makeup" and designs eco-friendly dog beds. This Colorado native began as an actress, but returned to her first love, interior design, and never looked back.

LD: What was your first "big break" into the design field?

KW: My first big break came when a friend of mine bought a 22-unit condo building in foreclosure in Brentwood. He took a chance on me, paid me virtually nothing and hired me to remodel the kitchen and baths in all units

and to do two model units. The model units sold first and the every single new owner hired me to design their units. I was shooting NYPD blue as an actress at the time and I called my agents and told them to throw away all my pictures because I was hooked on being a designer!

LD: So how did you become interested in interior design in the first place?

KW: It was innate. From as early as I can remember, I was always painting and drawing, rearranging and redecorating my room. Even in elementary school I was driving my Mom crazy.

LD: Is there anything you bring from being an actress to your interior design practice?

KW: An understanding of what I don't want to do and an awareness of the 'nepotism' of Hollywood. One of my first clients was Emilio Estevez, who also gave me my first acting job playing his girlfriend in Men at Work. He's still a wonderful friend and having Hollywood connections has helped me attract celebrity clients without even setting out to do so.

LD: What inspires you?

KW: The earth, the colors, the textures, the flow of nature is a huge inspiration for me. Bringing the outside in for me is a way to work. Many times I'll bring a wooden box filled with pieces of rock, a piece of bark, some flowers, some sand and this will create a color palette for me. I like to save the earth in my work as well and believe that should be a must for all of us.

LD: Which designers have influenced your work?

Art and architecture influence my work the most. Wallace Neft is an amazing architect from the '20s. I also love Philipp Starck and Christopher Guy is fantastic. I so love Waldo Hernandez, but really art and old architectural, craftsman pieces are my inspiration. Frank Lloyd Wright rocks it...no pun intended.

LD: What do you consider to be your greatest professional accomplishment?

KW: Being able to have work not feel like work. The passion I have for design is endless. I can work 100 hours a week and it never feels like work. I breathe it, I sleep it, I live it, and it's consistently on my mind. The house I just finished is my favorite house that I've completed. The client didn't have a clue what





green was and we did the entire five million dollar project green - and that is an accomplishment.

LD: What was your impetus for becoming a green designer, anything to do with coming from Colorado?

KW: I'm a tree hugger from Boulder Colorado with hippy parents. I've been green my whole life. I've been green before it was cool. I still have a pair of Birkenstocks.

LD: What are some of your favorite green products?

KW: Bonded Logic (www.bondedlogic.com) makes insulation using 100% recycled jeans, with no

formaldehyde, fiberglass or VOCs. I just used it in the home of a hip, young Prince and there's absolutely no odor. I love it!

The unique countertops from EnviroGLAS (www.enviroglasproducts.com) are some of my favorites. They look like gorgeous granite, but they're actually made from recycled windows, mirrors and soda bottles.

TOTO (www.totousa.com) creates the most luxurious high-efficiency toilets, faucets and bathtubs. Not only do I swear by their products, I love supporting companies like TOTO--everything they do is green! I

love using ForeverLawn in clients' yards. It's an eco-friendly synthetic turf that looks amazingly realistic. It's made from recycled materials, it eliminates the need for pesticides and fertilizers and it saves water. Plus some cities will give you a break on utilities if you swap your real lawn for Forever Lawn.

Mrs. Meyers (www.mrsmeyers.com) is my absolute favorite line of cleaning and pet products and always on my must have list. It smells great, has cool packaging and is safe for people and pets!





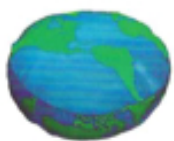
Kari's Top Ten

1. Her dogs Madison & Lucy



2. Her staff

3. Ms. Meyers cleaning products



4. Greener Pup Dog Beds

5. EX Voto

6. Her ceiling in her bedroom

7. Her dog statue

8. Wiejske Wyroby Polish Style Petite Dill Pickles

9. Boulder, CO

10. The stairs in her home



LD: How do you find green products that match your design sensibility?

KW: I was never able to not find a green product for what I was looking for. The internet has made this so attainable. It's easier and most of the times cheaper than you would think.

LD: What was your inspiration for launching Greener Pup, your line of eco-friendly dog beds?

KW: I have a non-profit dog rescue called ACE of Hearts (Aceofheartsdogs.com) that I founded 12 years ago. I have saved over 2,000 dogs. Our kill rate in LA is 500 per day. Every one of my clients has adopted a dog from me. The best energy you can put in a house is a dog. Dogs should never live outside. They should be part of the family. I would constantly be making custom beautiful dogs beds to match the motif that I just created for these dog friendly clients. That inspired me to create greener pup. Everything is recycled but the zipper. All of the covers are donated from amazing fabric vendors. You choose your cover to match your room and all of the profits go back to ace of hearts dog rescue. If you rescued your dog, you get 20% off your first order. The fabric choices are amazing; there are no dog beds out there like it.

LD: Tell me about Wall Makeup .

KW: Wall Makeup (www.wallmakeup.com) saves money, saves time and saves the environment. I always mix my own paint colors because the color on a paint chip will never be the same color on your wall! That's what inspired me to create my eco-friendly, do-it-yourself



am very excited about. I am also designing a line of sustainable furniture, made mostly of metal and wood. Also, a line of durable but elegant rugs.

LD: Will we be seeing you on TV again?

KW: YES!!! I am in production on a new show and am very excited about it. I can't say much, but it's going to be very fun, green, entrepreneurial design show with a twist.

paint-mixing kit. You can create custom colors on your own using a few drops of tints and a small amount of a neutral base. So you're not wasting (or paying for) five small cans of five different shades of green. You can achieve your ideal shade using Wall Makeup with less than 1/2 cup of paint. And, you can use the kit again and again!

LD: Wow. I'll be buying some of those kits! Any new products in the works?

KW: YES!!! I am designing a line of funky fun, with a splash of Hollywood glam lighting for lamps plus, which I

LD: What advice would you give new designers or people who are considering becoming designers?

KW: Take your ego out of it!! Always remember that the space you're designing is someone else's space, so you want to help them make it their own with ideas and plans to create the 'vibe' that they're looking for. Being a designer can't be all about you, it has to be about the space, the personality of the client and their willingness to be pushed over the edge with creativity. I can't tell you how many times my clients have said that they hired me because I'm not a "know it all" designer.

