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BEST DESIGN FIRM WINNER
GET TO KNOW JESSICA DAVIS OF JL DESIGN

EXPERT

BALANCING ACT

The winner of our Best Design Firm award in 2017, Jessica Davis of JL Design, pulls a room together with lots of color, and a little bit of give and take.

BY KAREN PARR-MOODY

During the Great Depression, iconic interior designer Dorothy Draper commanded readers of her newspaper column to “take that red and paint your front door with it!” This small assignment had a deep meaning: In the midst of scarcity, the nation should give itself some emotional luxury through color.

Interior designer Jessica Davis recently slapped a new coat of paint onto her front door in a move that was similarly significant: It represented the jettisoning of emotional weight after a dark night of the soul.

The color was pink. And not just any pink, but a blush pink, the color of ballet slippers and champagne and roses unfurling in the spring. Its meaning?

“This is a new day,” Davis says.

That act says a lot about Davis, the founder of JL Design, an interior design firm she operates in Berry Hill with three other licensed designers. Stylistically, Davis is anti-minimalist. Her rule is that there are no rules. One of her favorite sayings is, “If you love it, it will work,” a motto she uses, in particular, regarding artwork.

Like some limb-twisting yogi of design, Davis reaches in all directions to pull a room's elements into balance, placing visual totems imbued with sentiment throughout. In her world, a vintage View-Master is more crucial to a shelf's arrangement than would be a shiny, new bauble.

“If someone just wants me to go to West Elm and Pottery Barn and buy a bunch of cool things and put them on a shelf, it's going to look great,” Davis says. “But where is the

love? My favorite thing to do is to combine old and new.”

Color makes her happy. One favorite room she designed is painted with a Kelly green that covers everything—bookcases, walls, moldings, and window casings.

“I'm not afraid of color,” she says. “And when I have a client who's not afraid of color, that just makes my life so much better.”

Her effervescent optimism makes it seem as though Davis has never been better and like life has always been good. Not so. She graduated from Watkins College of Art in 2002 and held various jobs before founding JL Design in 2005. Initially, the firm experienced a meteoric rise. Then, the unthinkable happened: The financial meltdown of 2007 and 2008 rope-a-doped Davis financially due to systemic business failures in the housing sector.

“The fallout damn near ruined me,” Davis says. “During that time, I would drive to a Sonic Drive-In every night and car hop for extra money to try to keep my business afloat. It was hard, but bittersweet.”

Now, Davis gives off a celebratory vibe because, in a sense, she's running a victory lap.

“I think a home should be everyone's happiest place on earth,” she says. “Part of being a designer is connecting with people and giving them a lifestyle and a home where they can celebrate everything they do in their lives. That is a huge task that I don't take lightly. I really want to make people's lives better, as hokey as that might sound.” (jldesignnashville.com)



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