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Catalyst for Creativity

As Jennifer Jelinek's early inclination towards science evolved, she found her life's inspiration in an unlikely place. by Dana R. Butler

Jennifer Jelinek, owner of JJ Interiors, was a chemistry major before she turned to interior design more than two decades ago. She graduated with an Interior Design degree from Colorado State University and is a professional member of the American Society of Interior Designers. Jelinek's interior spaces have been recognized in many publications and garnered numerous awards.

How did you become interested in interior design?

"When I started to think about what my future looked like, I thought, I just want to help people. I was initially thinking about psychology because I love how the brain works. And then my first major was pre-med chemistry, but it was just not satisfying me. I talked to a lot of people and really thought about things in my life that I enjoyed doing. One thing that kept popping up, especially in conversations with my mom, was that I played with Legos. We had these big boards, and I would space-plan rooms and create doors and put furniture in place. When I was a kid, I had no idea that could even be a thing. But through my research and career counseling, I realized, wow, I could be a designer. I'll give a big kudos to Legos."

Would you say that you have an overall style that's true to you?

"I like Frank Lloyd Wright's philosophy that form and function are one. I used to agree with his mentor Louis Sullivan, who said form follows function. But you can't have one without the other and create a successful end result. I love mixing textures and incorporating great, classic lines of furniture along with unexpected things—something fun and playful with unusual proportions, more color. I would call it beautifully functional."

How do you approach a new project?

"I'm very much a traditionalist when it comes to the design process. The interview piece is so important. Clients are interviewing me: Are you the right designer? Is your approach the right approach? How do you structure your contract? And I'm also interviewing a client. An important question for me is why they want to hire a designer, why they've reached out in the first place. You can glean a lot of information from that interview. I like to talk about how they use each space, what they like, what they don't like, what things make them feel comfortable. Part of what my clients want is me showing them things that they would not pick for themselves that solve their challenges, products and tools that help them live a better life in their homes."

How do you like clients to prepare for those early meetings?

"Most of my clients are custom home owners who are building something new. They may have started the process with the architect, may have a budget, and they clearly are going to have some inspirational images." I ask them not to bring hundreds because then the client can get confused, and their images are all over the place. They have very clean, classic, white rooms. They have very rustic, mountainy rooms. It can be overwhelming.

I love to see that they are targeted and have ten to twenty images that really spark the feeling that 'I love this room, but I don't know why. I just love how this room feels.' We're not here to replicate the design that somebody else has already produced. It's the feeling; how do we recreate that for them?"

What are some things you notice in other people's homes?

"Many times, I find that people try to get all of their favorite things in one room or one space, so there isn't really a focus. And each favorite thing has no place to shine because it's among a million other things. I have many favorite things in my house as well, but you have to give them some space to breathe. Another thing that I think clients really struggle with is scale and proportion and making sure that things are sized appropriately—that can be a difficult challenge for folks."

What inspires you?

"Travel is a huge piece of my life in terms of decompressing and inspiration. I can be in a museum and focusing not on the artwork but, rather, a mosaic on the ceiling. I notice those little design elements, such as a tile pattern from 200 years ago, and I think, that was really beautiful and smart. Sometimes things in a culture spur design out of necessity rather than creativity to solve problems in these unusual, innovative ways. So, yes,

ABOVE: In the dining room of a Granby home, Lucite furnishings and glass chandeliers enhance the landscape. The metal and wood table rests upon a custom scalloped-edge hide rug reminiscent of delicate lace. Metal and glass-front cabinets housing back-lit wine racks are a dramatic backdrop.

BELOW: The Grand Lake great room is a welcoming space for the family to gather. The built-ins with custom cushions and pillows provide a luxe seating area with ample storage, while the inviting swivel chairs and ottomans allow for relaxation.

travel for me is a really big deal: color palettes, other cultures and communities, food, and the natural world and plants and colors and textures of leaves—those things get me excited."

What do you like most about your job?

"We spend so much time in a built environment, whether it's work or home or school, and I think the importance of design is underrated, not only from a functional aesthetic standpoint but how it makes people feel. It goes back to helping people, making people feel really good, and creating spaces that are healthy and happy and spiritual and joyful to live in." 🍀

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