

Succeeding *with* Style



Lora at The Goldsmith Company in NW Portland (to the design trade only)

Lora Coburn's CoCo Designs Brings a Designer's Eye Home

Page through the photos in Lora Coburn's interior design portfolio and you can't help but notice: The rooms she designs are beautiful, coherent and colorful, but they also feel like home. That's exactly what Lora, owner of CoCo Designs in Portland, intends. She wants clients to feel as at home as she does in her work.

"I always wanted to be a designer," Lora says, "but I grew up in a small town where people didn't do that for a living — it just didn't seem possible. I started working in the mortgage business, but I was never really happy. I was always doing design for friends and family (on the side)." When the mortgage company began struggling, Lora started weighing her options. "A couple of close friends said, 'Maybe this is a sign that it's time to do what you've always wanted to do.'"

With little capital and a lot of faith, CoCo Designs was born. Lora's projects range from two-hour color consultations to full-service design. She has a particular genius for helping "regular" people find their flair. For anyone who's struggled with choosing just the right shade of green for the dining room or watched hour upon hour of HGTV without once knowing how to apply that information to an actual home, Lora is a godsend.

Selling design services to regular folks is sometimes tricky. The same people who gladly write checks for lawn care and plumbing installation aren't always sure they need — or can afford — a professional designer.

Fortunately, Lora is a natural communicator. Check out her blog at www.cocodesignspdx.com to find out — in clear, entertaining prose — why hiring a designer will save you money.

Lora's natural ease made her a perfect fit when HGTV began searching for local designers to appear on eight Portland-based episodes of "My First Place." Showcasing her work on HGTV was a dream-come-true for Lora, who applied for the gig without knowing who her client would be. "Actually, I responded to a request on Craigslist," she says. "When they called and said they were from HGTV, I thought they were joking."

Jumping right in and nailing a television appearance is Lora at her best. But it's no less improvisational than an average day at work. "I picked the worst economy to start a business," she says. "But no matter how hard it is, I love doing it. Every day, it's exciting to go to work."

Lora's business is built on personal connections. No surprise: She wants the same personal connection with her credit union, Rivermark. "I don't need a lot of financing right now, and my banking needs are fairly simple. But when I need help, I can always call and talk to a real person," she says. "They're awesome."