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Spotlight on Elki Horn

Debi Pinelli • A & J Interiors

“Elegance is an inside job, whether it’s window treatments or yourself”. So says the extraordinary Elki Horn of Interior Elegance by Elki. I had the pleasure of interviewing this exciting woman at her workroom in Wayne, New Jersey in the company of several of her staff and her current protégé, and fellow WCAA-NJ member Rose Iulo. As I toured the workroom, I was impressed by the number of samples--everything from applied trimmings and bandings to shade styles. She even has samples of various drapery widths so clients can better understand just what a “width” is. As a designer, we know pictures speak a thousand words, but an actual sample sells the job. From her attention to detail to her fabulous personality, it’s no wonder Elki has clients as distant as France! Elki grew up in Panama and came here to study...of all things...dental hygiene. Although I think she’d be a fun hygienist because she’s got the gift of gab and makes you feel extremely comfortable, her true gift is her ability to transform simple fabric into

something spectacular. While living in New



Hampshire, Elki began sewing clothes and like so many of us, transformed this skill into her now thriving business. She moved to New Jersey and worked at Calico Corners for about 10 years honing her skills. She then opened her own workroom and started on her journey. A savvy business woman, her philosophy is twofold: clients can probably find something cheaper, but they’ll probably *never* find the same level of quality and service. Elki’s viewpoint is that when you teach and share your knowledge you always get something back. She believes you should share

your God given gifts with others. This sentiment led her to begin a mentoring program years ago where she is extremely generous with her time and knowledge. She requires her “mentorees” to be with her two days a week for a minimum of 2 years. They learn her workroom techniques so they too can fabricate window fashions to European standards. They travel with her to design consultations and installs...her protégés gain access to her vast industry knowledge and her incredible work ethic. She has mentored dozens of women, many of whom have gone off and opened extremely successful workrooms. Rose, her current mentoree had many wonderful things to say about the program, but the one that says it all – “she feels blessed to have had her path cross Elki’s”. All the WCAA-NJ chapter members are familiar with Elki and her “paperless office”. She shared some great tips with us at our January meeting on how to get the most out your Ipad. What greater testimonial is there than to have an audience member confirm how quick and responsive she was because she had access to his client’s info

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Message From the President

Ellen Salkin • NJ Chapter President

A community is defined as a unified body of individual people with common interests and people grouped together with common goals.

For the last 8 months, I have been involved with a community, the committee which has put Windows To Success V together. A group of people who have worked so very hard and put in so many hours, not for self recognition but because they each feel so strongly about our larger community, our WCAA Central NJ Chapter. This event could not be put together by just one person. This committee spent hours organizing, writing letters, making phone calls and reaching out to our larger community of people in the window covering industry to help make WTS V a true success. Each part of this event was put together one piece at a time. We started with an idea, then pondered it, then discussed it and sometimes even obsessed over each and every idea as the whole day seemed to come together.

Today, thanks to the WTS V committee, we are fortunate to be hearing from Scot

Robbins, Ren Miller and Jana Manning, our accomplished guest speakers. To have vendors, old and new and from near and far who have come to participate and show their support and to have attendees not only from our chapter, but from other WCAA chapters as well as guests, all who have come from all over to be here with us today.

Why do we have WTS in the first place? Because we all have one vision; to make sure our local NJ chapter is sustainable, to give us the ability to continue building relationships in the window community, to make sure new ideas and learning experiences are available to us every month and to help our chapter strengthen itself and develop towards its full potential.

I am so very proud to be the president of our chapter and to be a part of our very special community.



Windows to Success V Vignette Contest

Rosemarie Garner • NJ Chapter Vice President

It has been an exciting time for the WTSV committee. Along with all the preparation (and there is a lot!), we have had the privilege of compiling and judging all the entries for the Vignette Contest. This a new addition to our already fantastic event and one I hope will continue year after year.

We had 5 very strong submissions. Some were hand drawn and some used rendering software. All were detailed, professional and beautiful and it was a truly painful process for the committee to judge.

What I am most impressed with is the time it took to make such wonderful designs; this is a selfless act as there is no guarantee that, after doing all the work, yours design will be chosen. As I said to the entrants whose designs were not chosen, that commitment does not go unnoticed. The committee was humbled by the detail, and by extension, the effort and creativity it took on behalf of all the entrants. This kind of involvement in our chapter is part of what makes



it so great. I want to extend a personal invitation to each and every member to get involved on some level with our Chapter. Whether it is entering the Vignette Contest next year, or volunteering on a committee, your experience with WCAACNJ will only be enriched, and it will do our Chapter proud.

I'd like to mention by name all who took the time to enter the contest: Irene Hurley (chosen), Debi Pinelli (chosen), Mary Vignone and Evelyn LaLicata, Ceil DiGuglielmo, and Carmelina Larocca

The two chosen designs will be displayed at WTSV, and all attendee will have the opportunity to cast their vote for their favorite, and let me tell you, it will be hard to decide. There will be a prize for winner and runner up.

WCAA National News

Linda Principe • National Board President

When was the last time you looked at the benefits from the WCAA National organization? Now is a great time to review the benefits and realize the value of your membership.

One of the biggest benefits is being a chapter member. As a member of our Central NJ chapter, we are so fortunate to be able to avail ourselves of the networking, support, friendships, and education at each of our monthly meetings. Other members around the country who are members of their chapter feel just as fortunate.

WCAA also offers a Virtual Chapter which is open to any National Member, whether you are a chapter member or not. Many national members who do not live close to a local chapter belong to the Virtual Chapter, which meets monthly in the evenings via go-to-webinar. Having the opportunity to attend a wonderful full-day event in our area like



Windows to Success is another valuable benefit. We can learn from the experts in our industry and visit with vendors who support the organization, and set up new accounts.

The Industry Partners who support the WCAA are passionate about our businesses and want to see them thrive. Many of them travel around the country to educate the members, generously donate catalogs and samples, and provide percentage discounts on purchases of their products. It is important that we, as members, patronize our IP's with our business.

When you order from the IP's, I would urge you to keep track of the discounted amount you received on your order. You will be surprised to see your savings, and in many cases, you will make up the cost of your national membership.

Our monthly lunch-n-learn programs conducted online offer you additional educational opportunities from industry experts. This free member benefit is worth the price of your national membership alone.

Other valuable benefits include a certification program, the opportunity to study and certify and show your clients you are an expert in your industry. Also, you may want to look into the shipping program or the State Farm discounts.

WCAA National is examining our member benefits closely, and we hope to bring you more value for your membership in 2013.

Spotlight on Elki Horn (continued)

right on her Ipad. There were so many great take aways from that meeting but one of my personal favorites – getting pdf's of the hardware catalogues and just bringing in the finish samples. LOVE THAT!

This force of nature known as Elki works hard and as she says, plays hard. Her designers have access to her fountain of knowledge all year round, but in the summer she takes Mondays and Fridays off (literally, she turns her phone off) and spends time at her beach house in Ocean Grove. She says all her designers know not to call her on those days. Elki loves to entertain and is a great cook. Her hobbies include reading...you guessed it...drapery books! Along with her recently retired husband Will, Elki has 4 beautiful and successful children, Elki, Henry, Maritza and Many.

How Good Is Your Stick-to-it-ness?

Vita Vygovska • Vitalia, Inc.

It is January 31st as I write this article, knowing that you're reading it while or after attending the WCAA-NJ Windows to Success Event in March. Oh, how I miss it... It's a safe bet that I am probably nursing my new-born daughter at this time, but I'm with you in spirit. **What inspired my writing today is actually the event our chapter held on January 3rd, when Elki peeled back the curtain to her paperless business operation.**

What action did you take after it? Did you start using any of her helpful gadgets? How about her ipad app recommendations? Did you make a commitment to your own paperless operation? Did you do anything? Nothing? Something?

For my part, I was really inspired. And impressed. And committed. Or so I thought.

I was committed - until it got hard. Until it was taking too much time. Until I got frustrated. Until I was reminded that everything takes a learning curve. Until I remembered that everything takes persistence and perseverance. Until I came to the crossroads of "to stick with it or not to stick". **You see, my "stick-to-it-ness" was really tested.**

I thought if I was going through these challenges, surely some of you had the same experience. I wanted to share mine, in hopes that it might be helpful to you.

My biggest take away from the January meeting was the notability app. Prior to the meeting I was testing a different app, but Elki said that Notability was the best – and I trust the expert. I purchased the best stylus pen money can buy. I started using the app for (1) taking notes dur-

ing meetings, (2) taking measurements during appointments, (3) creating production orders for my workrooms, (4) drawing rough sketches of window treatments during appointments. I told you, I was committed.

But my commitment quickly turned to frustration. And here's why.

The nifty stylus pen didn't turn out to be all that. Despite the advertising promises, it was not nearly fine enough nor responsive enough.

It took me exorbitant amount of time to complete the tasks that I've already streamlined. Here I'm talking about my production orders – the information that I use to communicate my exact specs and standards to my workrooms. Ordinarily something that would take me about 30 minutes, was taking me 5 times as long, using notability. What was the point, I kept thinking to myself. This gadget is supposed to save me time, not waste it. And I refuse to use it just for the point of using it (Elki's great quote comes to mind: "You're using a \$700 gadget to check e-mail? " I'm totally with her).

Frustrated, but not beaten, I decided to get my head together and think about it constructively. I realized that there are lessons for me in this experience. Here they are.

Everything takes time. Expect it going in. Don't fool yourself thinking that something would just come naturally. It takes a learning curve and practice to get a hang of anything. Some things may take longer than others. Some people may take longer than others. I have it on the authority of a professor that I highly respect that it takes 100 invested hours to make something a workable solution. God, I hope not. Perhaps not 100,

but definitely more than a few.

It is imperative to get an understanding of full capabilities before dismissing a solution. In other words, I must know full potential of notability before deciding that it's not for me. I don't have to be proficient in using it yet, but I must have a good idea of what it can or cannot do. The right question to ask here is not "how does it do xyz", but "does it do xyz at all". To achieve an understanding, I need time. So back to point #1.

How much time depends on the value I assign to the presumed benefit. If after understanding that

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Vita Vygovska is the award winning owner of Vitalia, Inc, an author, a window treatment expert, and a business coach to the interior design trade. She started her business in 2006 and in two years took it to 6 figures net by applying the very marketing and business strategies she teaches her clients today. Vita is a sought-after speaker at design-related events and organizations nation-wide. To check out her programs, products, and free resources, including FREE CD: 5 proven strategies for a profitable design business, visit www.VitaliaInc.com. To be added to the waiting list for her popular 1-1 coaching program, go to www.GetItDoneProgram.com

OMG!!

I Should Have Gone to That Meeting

Robin Matthews • Seams Sew Right

We were all sorry to have missed November's meeting with Jill Robson. The meeting was cancelled due to hurricane Sandy. Jill's all day presentation "Be passionate about the artisan quality of your skills in the workroom" and "Design Challenges" has been rescheduled for May 2, 2013. This is surely one meeting you will not want to miss! (again!) Did you miss our Holiday party at Jumping Brook Country Club? If you

did you also missed Ellen Salkin's recap of 2012, a fabulous lunch, a time to get to know each other better and Stearns Matthews surprise musical entertainment. A great

time was had by all! iPads, Stylus, and Scanners...Oh My! On January 3, 2013 Elki Horn gave a presentation on going paperless. The buzz around the room was that this was one of the most informative meetings thus far. Who knew there were so many apps apropos to the design business? Those members who did not own an Ipad were ready to rush right out and buy one!



How Good Is Your Stick-to-it-ness? (cont'd.)

notability does xyz, I estimate that it will save me 15 minutes for every production order I do, which amounts to a savings of 100 hours a year, I should be willing to invest 50 hours to be proficient at it. That's a 50% ROI. By the way, my numbers here are random. The logic is not, and in there lies the lesson. Another 'by-the-way' is that it's impossible to figure out the numbers exactly, I can only come up with best educated estimates.

The opportunity cost. This is an economics term and one of my favorite concepts from undergrad. Its point is 'what else could you be doing instead what what you're doing now? And does it presumably yield a higher benefit?' Applying it to my example: should I be spending my resources (time, energy, and mental bandwidth) to learn and perfect notability OR should I work on the estimate for a prospect. The latter may yield immediate financial benefit, the former – eventual financial benefit.

I was glad to be reminded that any change challenges our status quo. Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's not. I was excited that I took the time to not necessarily learn the new thing, but put together the above criteria for pursuing the new thing to begin with.

If you're wondering how far I've gotten with notability, I can tell you that I'm probably at about 50% of understanding its capacity and 20% proficiency level. Both numbers, of course, are intuitive, as there is no formula that can tell me how well I know something, especially in the situation where I don't know what I don't know. Using the above criteria, I decided to put it on hold, because my time was better spent on getting the immediate financial benefits in light of the impending maternity leave. While on maternity leave, my hope is that I can come back to it again (for those experienced mothers out there, please don't think I'm naïve. Let's call it optimistic, ok?).

These were my experiences and my lessons. I hope they shed a guiding light, albeit faint, onto your own path to making the decision: "to stick or not to stick".

New Year's Resolutions

It's Not Too Late!

Joe Jankoski • National Board Member

We have a wonderful tradition of starting each New Year with a handful of good intentioned resolutions. Unfortunately these commitments sometimes fade away during the course of the year. Experience shows that you have a better chance to keep a resolution alive for a longer, if the resolution is simple and achievable. That said, I will offer up some simple and achievable resolutions that you can consider committing to even though it is mid-January. There is lots of time left in 2013. I am assuming that you are doing many of these already – so that is why I have listed a bunch. Consider picking two or three that will bring value to your business and that you will be able to execute. It is a great opportunity to improve.

How about:

This year make sure you ask every consumer who makes an appointment... "Where did you hear of me" and keep a log of those responses. In 2013 you need to invest in the best source of new leads.

Join the local Chamber of Commerce. Networking in your local community is important – the local Chamber makes it easier.

Bring up the issue of child safety on each and every selling conversation, to insure the consumer to makes an informed decision.

Update your profile on the WCAA web site. In many cases that is your customer's first impression of your business. Include your picture. Leaving it blank is a wasted opportunity.

Convert those paper invoices into an electronic data base of your old customers so you can enjoy the potential associated with direct marketing.

Smile more often... a positive attitude can be contagious. Call one old customer a day – thank them for the business – check to see if they are still delighted with what you have done – ask them if they know anyone in the market to buy new window coverings.

Refresh your shop @ home samples. Your customers cannot be exposed to worn out, soiled fabric samples or products.

Replace your taped phone message with an answering service or have all calls re-routed to your cell phone.

Potential customers are what you are looking for; you don't want to give them an opportunity to call someone else.

Never give up a consumer you contacted that did not

give you the order. They are "in-market" consumers, an extremely valuable group and worth a few follow up calls.

If you drive around in a company van consider a van wrap or easy to read signage. It is a moving billboard. Use it all of the time.

Send handwritten thank you notes to customers after the installation. In this electronic age – a simple hand written note stands out, tells them you care and it so simple to do. It will ignite positive word of mouth.

Your individual company brand is very important asset. Ask each of your employees: "What do you think our company stands for?" If their answers do not match up with your answer, you have an opportunity to re-establish your vision. Find new leads by partnering with other, non-competing, local businesses to share prospective names. The group can include the local furniture store, the realtor, the landscaper and the painting contractor. Their customer can become your customer.

Self improvement always makes the resolution list sign up for a class or on-line learning module offered by our industry partners.

If none of the above appeal to you can always go back to the old routine and:

Lose the same 10 pounds

Vow to get organized

Get in touch with that old friend

Read more books

Rip up one credit card

In 1850, Alfred, Lord Tennyson wrote:

Ring out the old, ring in the new,

Ring, happy bells, across the snow:

The year is going, let him go;

Ring out the false, ring in the true.

Let's all use one moment in time to ring in a "true" plan to prosper in 2013.



Get To Know Your Industry Partners

Comfortex

Moira Youmans, Decorating by Moira

Riding on the piggy back of Elki Horn's "Going Paperless" meeting, which I still aspire one day to achieve, did you know that Comfortex has all of its product guides, price lists and all sorts of great marketing materials accessible through your Ipad? Neither did I, which is one of the great things about writing these articles; I really do learn a lot!

I had such a wonderful conversation with Lisa McConnell of Comfortex. She happens to be my representative (as I'm sure she is to most of you). Like most of us we tend to have our "go to" products and when we use a particular company repeatedly, we tend to think we know all of their products. I was one of those people who thought I knew all of the Comfortex products. As Lisa started to tell me about them, I had to have her backup as I was mostly unaware of so many of them. I had not read any of the emails pertaining to PERSONA, design your own shade, since I never thought I had a need! I have come to learn and understand how it works and how we can easily open our business up to Commercial clients. She gave me a scenario about a Pizzeria which has a large window in front. For approximately \$100 plus the cost of the shade, the Pizzeria could turn their shade into an advertisement! Who knew?



In speaking with Lisa, we talked about Super Storm Sandy. She told me that Comfortex employees had a fundraiser for Sandy victims. She said Comfortex is a very family oriented company that does a lot for their community. For example their fundraising efforts allows them to give Christmas presents for needy children, as well as their employees. They have a few other employee programs as well, such as programs developed to help employees to stop smoking.

Lisa talked about sample books which is text partners up with all of their design-ple book your company buys, you re-purchases. It is a win/win for everyone. books for no cost as long as you sell the



needed for PERSONA. Comfor-ers and dealers. With every sam-eceive coupons to use on future Basically you get the sample product.

Comfortex puts a number of videos out poses. As for Ipad training, Comfortex a special webinar together for all of our free to email Lisa directly "Lisa.McConnell@comfortex.com" to let name is already on the list!

onto you tube for training pur-would be more than happy to put WCAA members, so please feel her know you are interested. My



Member Projects

I worked with a customer who was extremely nervous about working with me on this very complicated job. She felt taken advantage of by another company on a previous project. It took me 1 year to confirm this order. To put her mind at ease I did a template of the design., which helped her visualize the end result. It was just as important for the workroom to see it so there was no miscommunication. The center cornice was 130" wide and the long point 60". I hired 3 installers to put it up. It went up flawlessly. The end result? My client was thrilled.

Kathy Hamilton
Window Alternatives



Template of Cornice



Finished Product



To submit photos of your work for an upcoming issue, contact Ellen Salkin at wcaanj@optonline.net