Lori Weitzner Keeps Her Eye on Design

By ELAINE TAYLOR-GORDON

NEW YORK – When Lori Weitzner floats by with her Raphaelle blond curls and paratrooper boots, it is hard to equate this slip of a woman with the design powerhouse that she has quietly become.

A real stealth ranger, her Pacman-like intensity has succeeded in creating a design empire, while she has delegated the administrative details to other right-brain experts.

"After years of building Lori Weitzner Designs, I realized that what I really hated could be delegated to someone else, and that person was Susan Whalen, CEO of Pollack, who runs a tight ship," Weitzner said in an interview last year. "My sale of the design entity I built allows me to maintain and continue design control with none of the business and administrative details, which set me free to diversify and stream creatively without any of the barriers that used to slow me down and keep me up at night.

"The six years since I sold my company have been my most productive and continue to be so. I'm designing hardscape materials for Artistic Tile, Trimmings for Samuel and Sons, and now jewelry. Because I'm not bogged down with the business side, I'm free to explore and create and start new businesses. For me, freedom is the fuel for creativity."

Weitzner was interviewed during NY Design. She participated in a panel discussion about technology in design and as the outlier in the group, immediately interested us in doing an interview.

"A wonderful example of this is the evolution of my passementerie designs created as jewelry for the home for Samuel & Sons, into fashion jewelry, using the same ancient hand embroidery techniques employed by artisans in Calcutta," Weitzner says. "In my experience, no machine or other mechanized form of textile production has ever been able to replicate the beauty, richness and unmistakable uniqueness of the handmade."

She uses these same handmade, artisanal techniques for her wallcovering designs. She has had an unconventional career path.

"Little did I know when I set out to become a painter during my undergraduate years at Syracuse University that I would be inspired to change lanes into textile design," she says. "And how could anyone have foreseen my first job designing Laura Ashley-type designs for bedding would inspire me to jump ship without a net and display my designs at Indigo in Lille. That led me to Italy, designing for Missoni, and later for Sacco for 12 years–culminating in my big break in NYC with Jack Lenor Larsen."

Timing can be everything. In 2008, JP Morgan Chase was offering women-owned businesses revolving credit lines of $100,000, around the time she opened her design studio.

"This made it possible to start my first independent effort into wallpaper design, production, and sales," she says.

Nowhere is her organic approach to design more evident than in the Lori Weitzner Design's Chelsea studio.

All around there are her statement boards and boxes filled with bits and pieces of shards, yarns, and materials that attract her magpie eye; photos and drawings by her children, as well as paper constructions.

"Everyone working in this studio can paint and draw," she says.

Her design process begins by asking questions.

"Our process often varies depending on the project, but I would say that what is consistent is that we always begin by talking and asking questions and treating the project holistically," she says. "What is the concept, and how does this make sense and fit our brand? Do we need this? Does the world need this? Will it resonate? How can we make it unique?"

Technology has become an important part of the design process.

"We all use our computers (Macs) and various programs like Photoshop and CAD to help us take our original artwork and get it into a state that can be reproduced easily," she says. "We do repeat work usually on the computer, after the original work is done by hand. We use a top-of-the-line scanner to capture the art as best we can and then manipulate it on the computer." F&FI

Lori Weitzner

Letter B
Let Her Be
To Be or Not To Be
Be All You Can Be
Be Yourself
Be Free
The Be All and The End All
Let It Be
You Be You, and I'll Be Me
Meant to Be
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