



Photography by Peter Rynwid. Kitchen by Ulrich, Inc.

{ TASTEMAKER }

DESIGN TALK

with Tess Giuliani

By Liz Donovan

Interior designer Tess Giuliani lives in Ridgewood, but one look at her sophisticated multicultural style and it's clear she's seen the world. Years spent living in Japan, for example, inspired a mural of koi fish in her bathroom that earned her Best Small Bathroom in America by the National Kitchen & Bath Association. A family trip to the French Riviera led to an award-winning kitchen design that both impressed guests and reminded her of a joyous getaway with her son. Still, after traveling the globe and being influenced by the many cultures she's experienced, she finds the most joy at home right here in Bergen County.

You worked in pottery and jewelry before interior design. Tell us about it.

When I finished college, I didn't know which direction to go in, and there was a pottery studio near my home, so I became a potter. I worked really hard at it—the other potters and I were throwing 100 pieces a day. A few years later, I was also apprenticing with a fine jeweler a few days a week, and I was hoping to get a job as a jewelry designer on Fifth Avenue. Cartier happened to be hiring, and somehow they chose me as their first female goldsmith in America. I was very proud of that.

And you launched your interior design career while living in Japan.

I lived in Tokyo for four years, and I knew deep down that I had more talent for interior design than I did for jewelry. So I had a plan: I designed my apartment and hired Matsumoto Interior Design, the big design company there at the time, to install doors on the huge balconies I had. My hope was that they'd see what I had done with my apartment and hire me as a designer—and that's exactly what happened. I got to work for clients who wanted something other than Japanese design in their homes.

How did living abroad influence you?

It broadened my horizons on different styles and the different ways people lived—the colors, fabrics and furniture they used. It also showed me how they used their space. For example, in Japan, people live in very small quarters and

find ways to create all the various spaces they need. I also saw the different ways people connected to one another—through food, music and literature. You can learn so much about a culture by what brings people together.

Your designs at your Ridgewood home won NKBA's Best Small Kitchen and Best Small Bathroom awards. How did those spaces come together?

When my son, Ryan, was 16, I took him and a friend to the French Riviera, where we rented an apartment. It inspired me to make my kitchen look like it was from the south of France. I gave it a blue-and-white color scheme and added the inscription "Café de Giules." That was my son's nickname—Giules for Giuliani.

My bathroom started with a deck. In 1993, I added a large deck to the back of the house and painted it to look like water with big koi fish and lotuses. Later, I took the deck down and decided to bring that design into my bathroom and mudroom. I did so much research on koi fish. None of my work is ever left to chance. It may look simple sometimes, but it's very complex.

What design advice do you have for people living in small spaces?

Large or small space, I'm a big believer in organization. A space should be able to breathe and function in terms of what we require, whether that's sitting at a computer, eating at a dining room table, watching TV or working in a kitchen. The problem is, we like "stuff." And

when people leave stuff around, it's always talking to them. It's important to organize your closets so that you can put things away and still get to them when you need them. When you keep your space organized, it's good for your head.

Why is it important to surround yourself with beauty?

Whether it's the sky, someone's face, a design or music, beauty is an energy that works to make you feel better and everyone else around you too. If someone tells you that you look good, you probably do, but they're also telling you that they feel good looking at you. That's the exchange that's going on.

You've traveled the globe. Why did you decide to settle down in Ridgewood?

I saw a great similarity between Ridgewood and the Long Island town where I grew up—the strong community, the good schools, the proximity to the city. And Ridgewood just has a lovely personality. The other night, I went out and watched *Raiders of the Lost Ark* at an outdoor movie screen in town. I almost wore my fedora!

Tell us about those hats.

I love hats! I have dozens of them. But I have three favorites. One is an Eric Javits that's straw and white with an open crown. I have another one that is black and straw with a beautiful wide brim—I wore it to my son's wedding. And in the winter, I wear a fedora-like hat that I bought at Bergdorf Goodman.