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Designer Crush: Courtney Thomas Design

Heading up a full-service interior design firm isn't easy, but for mother of four kids under 12, Courtney Thomas, running a tight ship is second nature. Born to a designer mother, Thomas grew up running around auction houses, remodels, and new builds, taking frequent field trips to antique showrooms, fine art houses, and the power tools section of Home Depot. By the time she enrolled in classes at Parson's School of Design in New York City, Thomas was hooked on the world of art, style, and architecture. Now, Thomas and her team design functional and family-friendly homes that are livable yet luxurious. Learn more in our Q&A below.

By *Michelle Konstantinovsky* on 05/13/18 at 11:34 pm



Photo courtesy of Stephanie Wiley.





1. How did growing up with a designer mother influence your professional passion and steer your career?

She fueled my creative and DIY side. She could fix things. I remember she had this poorly lit workroom at our childhood house with all her workbench tools and sometimes I'd break toys just so I could watch her fix them...and get really frustrated with me. To this day, I still think most things can be fixed with wood glue and clamps. I loved that she loved getting her hands dirty and would unreservedly tackle projects as small as our classroom dioramas to jobs as large as new builds and remodels. She could adapt quickly. She'd be wearing overalls covered in drywall dust one minute and a long green, silk dress the next. Her versatility and enterprise shaped my interest in both design finish and construction.

2. What does "livable luxury" mean to you?

It is the iconic "Mom" dream. It is a space that proclaims us to be adults surrounded by beautiful things while the house controls the chaos with functional storage, smart technology, crypton-coated fabrics and room retreats for the parents. It is the Michael Caine quote: "Be like a duck: calm on the surface and paddling like hell beneath".

3. Where do you draw inspiration from?

For soul and emotional inspiration, Brene Brown. For relatable design inspiration, Kelly Nutt, Amber Interiors, Studio McGee, Blackband Design and Honey and Fitz.

4. How do you define "California style"?

Relaxed, casual design with a light/airy vibe. Ours is an Indoor/Outdoor lifestyle. California style blends outdoor elements with interior finishes: wood wovens, lightweight, organic linens, sisal rugs and lots of potted, drought-tolerant plants.

5. What are some of the practical ways you create beautiful spaces for clients that are also kid-friendly?

Storage. Clutter comes with kids. We can't contain it, but we can often hide it. I spend lots of time discussing use of space with clients to determine what they've got and what they don't want on display. We try to find clever ways to account for their kids ever-changing "stuff". Crypton-coated or Sunbrella fabrics also help keep adults from chasing sticky-fingered kids out of adult rooms. Gone are the days of plastic covered sofas.

If you have the space, give them a playroom. It's much easier to shut the door on the mess than it is to build storage for it everywhere.

6. What are some of the most recent design trends you love, and which would you rather not see again?

Ok, to be fair, the word "trend" can make me crazy because it invokes feelings of high school inadequacy and factions of popular vs. unpopular. I want to design for clients and not for their neighbor. That being said, I do have a trend crush on aged brass fixtures and black clad windows. I love the Modern Farmhouse look with it's casually hip, "don't you wish you were this cool" approach. A trend I could do without...flush mounts on the ceiling in place of can lights. I don't mind the occasional flush mount, but replacing all recessed lighting with it is a lot of unnecessary ceiling action.

7. Describe your ideal Sunday.

Brunch and a Bloody Mary. Then, unstructured time: no soccer games, no "honey-do" list, nowhere to be.

8. Who's your dream celebrity client and why?

Kristen Bell, sigh. How she hasn't felt our undeniable chemistry yet is beyond me. I am a little miffed she chose another designer, even one I respect and even though she doesn't know me from Adam, for her recent design project. I can wait for the next one, Kristen. I love her sense of humor and I love that she does boundaries well. She indulges in self-deprecating humor without disrespecting herself. Her mommy insights are on point and just plain funny. I feel like she'd be the fiercest of friends: fueled by fun, protective and loyal, and kind even when it's hard.

Lightning round!

9. Dogs or cats?

Dogs, no debate.

10. Roller coasters or water slides?

Roller coaster. Water slides give me wedgies.

11. Beach escape or mountain retreat?

I have questions. Is it crowded at this beach? Do I have a private island? And where are these mountains? Are we camping or glamping? Is this still a lightning round?

12. Snickers or Kit Kats?

Snickers!

13. Dance machine or karaoke queen?

Dance machine. Family tradition. No one should have to hear me sing.



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