

A Flair for the Fabulous

By Stacy Majewicz



The home owned by Jesse Kline and her husband, Greg Munno, was featured on "Offbeat America" this year. Photo by Beth Culver

If you've ever driven down Van Anden Street in Auburn, you've probably noticed a house with a multi-colored picket fence. This is the home of Jesse Kline, a commercial and residential decorator, and her husband, Greg Munno. Jesse's services include home and office makeovers, party décor, retail window displays and commercial environments. Although she has worked on a variety of projects, perhaps the most eye-catching is her own house. The colorful fence is just the beginning. Each room is decorated from floor to ceiling with one-of-a-kind furniture, brilliant patterns and unusual pieces of art.

In fact, Jesse's house is so exceptional that it caught some national attention: In January, it was featured in an episode of "Offbeat America," an HGTV program that showcases unique and creative residences across the country.

Greg, a writer for *The Post-Standard*, said that Jesse will occasionally bounce ideas off of him, but the artistic vision for styling their house was completely hers. "I must say, I love living in this house. Every project she undertakes, no matter how odd it seems to me at first, ends up looking fantastic," Greg said.



Jesse wanted to use every color but white on the picket fence outlining her property. Photo by Beth Culver

Colorful beginnings

For Jesse, living in such a creative environment is the norm. "My parents were hippies, and when I was growing up they were very open to using bright colors and patterns all throughout the house," she said. "My mother is also an artist and has many artistic friends whose work adorned our walls."

As a child, Jesse was constantly drawing and displaying her work on her bedroom walls. As a teen, she was a collector of unusual items and quirky furniture, and she developed the habit of rearranging her room to find the perfect place for everything. In school, she took as many art classes as she could. A career in interior design seemed like the natural choice for Jesse. "I'd been helping friends and relatives with their home projects for years. Then, a close friend of mine challenged me to define my ultimate career, and interior decorating was my obvious choice. I then realized I would regret it deeply if I didn't pursue it," Jesse explained.



A fainting couch from MacKenzie-Childs sits below Jesse's painting gallery, while the living room features a military-issue 1930s red leather couch. Photo by Beth Culver

The creative process

When starting a new project, Jesse, who has a master's degree in art history and museum studies, doesn't like to approach it as a science. "I work first as an artist, second as a decorator," she said. "I approach projects in a way that focuses on the interesting objects. The challenge lies in how best to display everything in an inviting setting."

Jesse listens carefully to clients so that she can fully understand what they are trying to achieve and assess their comfort level with change.

One unique object or piece of material can give Jesse the inspiration she needs for a whole project. She also finds that traveling can spur a great many ideas. "I've gone to Mexico on several occasions, and seeing all the bright and decorative colors they use fearlessly was very inspiring to me," she

said. "The color palette on the east coast tends to be very conservative, so I have to work against that every day."

Collecting the materials to bring her ideas to life can be a lot of fun, and according to Jesse, very inexpensive. "Thrift store shopping and garage sales play an important role in my ability to be resourceful," she said. "Also, you may very well see my car pulled over on the side of the road because I'm 'dumpster diving.' I'm amazed at what people throw away."

On some occasions, Jesse doesn't even have to leave her client's house to find what she needs. "Some of my clients simply hire me for a 'rearrangement.' You certainly don't have to buy new things to achieve a different look. Rummaging through a client's attic and basement, I've often found exactly what

we needed. The piece just craved a little love and attention, which can be achieved through paint, a new seat cover, different knobs or a lampshade."

After Jesse has all the components of the project set, she makes sure that the whole space is pulled together. "Those final details are what give the room a polished look," she said. "Of course, I always remember that each room has to carry throughout the entire house as well."

An artist and an altruist

Jesse also works as communications specialist for the Cayuga County Office of Tourism three days a week, leaving the other four days for her to focus on her design work. This arrangement works out well, according to Jesse, who is an active volunteer. She can maintain



Jesse loved the stamburst center and checkerboard frame on this unique dining room table. Photo by Beth Culver

a steady income to pay the bills, and still have time for community work, such as organizing public art projects and providing event décor services for not-for-profit organizations. Jesse also serves on the steering committee for IGNITE, a group of young professionals who raise funds for community improvement projects and plan professional development workshops and trainings. "I enjoy the chance to give back and meet new people," she said.

The future looks bright (and colorful)

Jesse is looking forward to working on more challenging and unique projects. The majority of her experiences have been in residential design, but she is hoping to do more commercial projects. "I've had a fun time doing window displays and small business redo's, but I'm craving that funky club or lounge environment," she said.

Jesse would also like to explore a relationship with a retail venue to sell items. "I've been 'refabbing' retro pieces of furniture with all kinds of paper products like wallpaper, contact paper and wrapping paper," she said. "Then I tart them up more with 3-D objects like glass beads. I'm also redoing vintage lamps and making funky pillows. I'd like to think these pieces would sell if they were in the right market."

Whether it be an old lamp, a pillow or an entire room, with the Jesse Kline touch, anything that was once plain or ordinary will surely never be so again.



The curtains in Jesse's parlor are made from vintage ties. Photo by Beth Culver