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STAR-POWER  
STYLE  
MICHELLE  
WORKMAN  
ON CELEBRITIES,  
INTERIOR  
DESIGN  
& HEAVING THE  
HO-HUM  
BY DANA SHAVIN  
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Ask celebrity interior designer Michelle Workman what the biggest decorating mistake people make is, and she

doesn't even have to think about it. "Not following their heart," she says. "Being afraid to make a mistake, or to show themselves."

You might as well have asked her what the biggest mistake people make in life is. Because whether it's about helping clients create a comfortable living space that fully expresses their personality, or about Workman's own move this month from Los Angeles to Chattanooga, following one's heart is key. You might call it her philosophy. Not following your heart—that is, looking to someone else for a vision of your home's interior (or your own future)—is something she cautions against.

Workman should know. An interior designer in LA for 15 years, she has been featured in such publications as *Veranda*, *Traditional Home* and *InStyle* magazine to name just a few, as well as on HGTV, *Martha Stewart* and *Oprah*. And she has worked with the likes of Jennifer Lopez, John and Kelly (Preston) Travolta, and Kirstie Alley, people who, had they not followed their hearts, would never have found their way into ours.

Whether talking about her blog, her new e-book series about color, fabric and inspiration, her five-episode Web series *Glamour Goes South*, which follows Workman's move from LA to Chattanooga, or her plans for wallpaper and fabric design and licensing, Workman's enthusiasm is palpable.

"You sound like you love what you do," I say, to which Workman responds, "I really do, to the point where I get a little dumb!" She says she's been known to offer her decorating services for free just for the opportunity to see a particular home come together.



Whether she's working with celebrities or working with non-celebrities, she takes the same approach to match each person to their own particular style. "You know," she says, "everyone wants to be treated like a celebrity. Everyone wants to be listened to and respected. And they should be. And that's what I do."

Another crucial element of Workman's heart-following philosophy can be found on her blog, *Furnishing a Fabulous Life*. "Heave Ho With The Ho Hum," the tagline for the blog, is Workman's way of encouraging people to skip the boring and take more risks. How exactly does Workman define "ho hum?"

"Beige!" she says, laughing. What she means is, anything that doesn't challenge the imagination or express personality. "But you know," she adds, "there are people who are afraid to make bold choices, and then there are people who honestly don't know what they want. I try to find the things about them that are exciting and quirky."

While she would never coerce clients into making decorating choices they aren't on board with because, as she says, they are the ones who have to live in their home, she does believe that part of her job as an interior designer is to help people stretch. She talks about one particular client who requested a "Jennifer Lopez" style house—a quiet, romantic palette of grays and mauves. Workman asked



her to send photos torn from magazines of things that spoke to her. What she received took her completely by surprise: a slew of items in hot pinks, emerald greens, teals and turquoises.

"I don't know if she didn't know herself well or if this was her secret self. She came off as shy until you got to know her, and then she was charming and adorable and vivacious." In the end, Workman and the client went with a hot pink entry hall, teal green dining room, and other rooms bursting with pinks and emerald tones. "She calls me every other day to tell me how much she loves her house," says Workman. "It's very fulfilling when that happens."

And that's just one example of how Workman leads by following: by stepping back, encouraging her client's true self to shine through, and then helping them express it in colors, fabrics, and furnishings. It's perhaps fitting, being from LA, that she likens her job to that of film production. "First you have the script-writer (that's the homeowner, who is telling a story with their home). Then you have the director, the person whose job it is to



bring the visual elements in the story to life (that's Workman), and then there are the actors, the people who make the whole thing come alive—the construction workers, the tile installers, the wall knocker-outers, etc. It takes everyone to make it happen," she explains.

Asked how she manages to walk the fine line between bringing her vision to a project and remaining true to the homeowner's vision, Workman says it's something she's developed over time. Her emotions allow her to connect with her client on a deeper level, which is very important, but she must keep them in check so that the client's vision leads the way.

So why does a high-powered interior designer who is used to

working with celebrities make the move from LA to Chattanooga? "I can tell you I didn't just throw a dart at a map," she says. "I researched places to live thoroughly. And in all the categories I searched, Chattanooga kept coming up."

She cites fast Internet service (important because her husband is CFO of an Internet company), the schools, the hospitality and the quality of life. Overall, says Workman, she wanted a safe, wholesome environment in which to raise her two children, and Chattanooga won. She is excited about moving to Look-out Mountain this month. And she's excited about working with clients not only in the Chattanooga area but in surrounding cities as well. **CM**



## FAVORITE CHATTANOOGA SPOTS

### The Knitting Mill, North Shore:

"The antique store remembered me from when I came in two years ago," she says. "It was amazing."

### Public House, in Warehouse Row:

Workman says she loves the local restaurant not only for its soup but also for its interior.



## MORE INFORMATION

**WEBSITE:** [Michelleworkman.com](http://Michelleworkman.com)

**BLOG:** [Furnishing a Fabulous Life: Heave Ho With The Ho Hum](http://Furnishing a Fabulous Life: Heave Ho With The Ho Hum)  
[MichelleWorkman.com/blog](http://MichelleWorkman.com/blog)

**WEB SERIES:** *Glamour Goes South*  
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