

The Washington Post

MAGAZINE **MAKING IT**

Stay-at-Home Moms

Redesign Their Lives and Launch a Home Decorating Business

BY ELIZABETH CHANG

Sunday, October 7, 2007



Selling Refinement: Suzan Meredith uses her designer's eye, and a partner, to help make rooms beautiful.

Ashburn resident Suzan Meredith was drawn to interior decorating. She had been sewing since she was a child growing up in Michigan and Utah, had an affinity for fabric and an eye for design, and had helped plenty of friends decorate their homes.

When her younger daughter headed off to elementary school, Suzan, now 47, wanted to turn her passion into a viable career and a second income for her family. Appreciating the entrepreneurial sensibility of her husband, Todd, who co-owns a political consulting firm, she also wanted to have her own business. But the stay-at-home mother of two, a former meeting planner, says she didn't have the confidence to start a decorating venture without any formal training or certification, especially in the hypercompetitive, hypercredentialed Washington region.

Then Suzan learned about the Interior Refiners Network, whose 200 active members specialize in flat-fee, one-day redesigns where clients use items they already have. For customers, "refining" is often a more affordable option than hiring an interior designer, who would likely charge a higher fee and perhaps a commission. For those interested in decorating, becoming a certified refiner doesn't require a special degree or accreditation, as becoming a licensed interior designer does.

Suzan spent one week and \$3,500 on an "intense" course in New York in 2005 led by Lauri Ward, who founded the IRN in the early 1980s. Meanwhile, friend and fellow Ashburn resident Jennifer Mangum, a stay-at-home mom of four who had majored in accounting in college but also had the design bug, took the interior refiner course at home on CD, which costs \$2,500.

With certifications in hand, Suzan and Jennifer, now 37, teamed up to found Redecorate Today last year. "What's really great about our business [is] we go with two sets of eyes and two sets of arms," Suzan says. The partners set up a Web site and made the rounds of local furniture and accessory stores, dropping off their business cards. "Our first client was a lady who got our card from the rug store and called us out of the blue," Suzan recalls.

The team does everything from color consultations to shopping. Prices to refine rooms are determined by size and range from \$125 for a bathroom to \$650 for a room up to 30 feet long.

Laura Merrell, who lives in Potomac Falls in Loudoun County, found Suzan and Jennifer through Google, and, intrigued by the flat fee and the idea of using what she already had, hired them to fix up her family room. "They moved things around and moved pieces that we had throughout the house into the room, and it really did look like a complete revamp, but it was our furniture," she says. She has since used the team for three other projects.

Suzan and Jennifer average about eight jobs a month and work three days a week from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Overhead is low; Suzan needed only a computer, a printer and a place to store fabric samples. Gross receipts for the first half of this year were \$70,000, she says, and each partner netted about \$25,000.

"It's a great fit for me," Suzan says. "It's very rewarding personally because people are usually so grateful and thankful, because we make them feel better in their house."

www.redecorate-today.com 571-333-0222 Suzan Meredith, IRN & Jennifer Mangum, IRN

Redecorate Today is a joint marketing effort by Meredith Interiors, LLC and Interiors by Jennifer, LLC. All rights reserved.