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Columbia native makes final cut on HGTV's 'Design Star'

Broadcast journalist Hobbs designing a course for her future



Cathy Hobbs, a home staging professional and current contestant on HGTV's "Design Star," taught a home staging certification course recently using the interior of a house for sale in Columbia. (Photo by Nate Pesce / August 9, 2011)

At the age of 12, Cathy Hobbs would hop in the passenger seat of her mother's brown Cadillac Coupe de Ville and deliver the *Columbia Flier*.

Last week, Hobbs returned to Columbia with a different job: to teach a home staging certification course. The 42-year-old arrived with a bit more notoriety, too. She is one of 12 finalists to appear on the sixth season of "Design Star," the HGTV show that was filmed in New York from March 17 to May 1.

A 20-year veteran of broadcast journalism — and the recipient of five **Emmy Awards** — she said the transition from journalist to reality show contestant was difficult, despite her years in front of the camera.

"There's nothing like being a journalist and covering the news and facts and research and telling a story versus being on a reality show," said Hobbs. "What happens sometimes is edited for drama, and there's no comparison (to journalism), quite frankly. There were hours and hours and hours of footage taken, we're constantly miked. What someone is seeing (in the one-hour episodes) is a micro-microcosm of what took place on the show."

Ultimately Hobbs said, the difference of the genre of the shows is clear: "Reality shows are entertainment; journalism is news," she said. Still, she acknowledged that the show "was an opportunity to show my design skills and brand myself nationally."

Hobbs, who runs her company, Design Recipes, of out Brooklyn, N.Y., developed her skills in home staging and interior design as a back-up plan while she worked in television news.

"I became interested in interior designing because you always have to have a **Plan B**, especially in television," she said. "Your contract in (broadcast) journalism was up every three years, and I saw so many people shellshocked when they were told their contracts weren't renewed."

Hobbs started her broadcast career in the Los Angeles area while pursuing a business administration degree from the **University of Southern California**. Later, while working the night shift on television, Hobbs took morning classes at the Fashion Institute of Technology, in New York, and, after seven years, earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 2006.

Simultaneously managing a broadcast career and an interior design business, Hobbs said the greatest challenge she faced was time management.

"I was very fortunate to have a really good team," she said. "I took on an assistant and a project manager and freelancers that were great at designing. I'd leave them at design sites and go to the **television station**. They would email me pictures or phone videos (about how the project was going) while I was on the way to a breaking news story (for the station). I was literally working remotely from the design site."

Hobbs went to school at Swansfield Elementary and Harper's Choice Middle before her family moved from their Hobbits Glen neighborhood to Detroit.

"We were one of the early families to buy in Columbia in the 1960s," she said. "I remember walking everywhere ... the mall was just a tiny mall and nothing like it is now. We would go to the skating rink on Friday nights and I had bowling league on Saturday."

She said Columbia has a "wonderful quality of life" and "that's why it's grown so much."

Hobbs frequently returns to Columbia to visit her mother, Shirley Hobbs.

Shirley Hobbs moved back to Columbia following the death of her husband, Roger Hobbs, in 1994.

"My mother had such an affinity for Columbia, she decided to come back," Hobbs said.

Hobbs returned to Columbia Aug. 8-10 to teach a three-day Certified Staging Professional course. The course teaches participants how to stage a home or space to appeal to the greatest number of potential buyers.

The course typically enrolls eight to 10 students, but due to summer vacations, Hobbs believed, the August class enrolled two.

According to Hobbs, the course teaches "everything someone needs to know to become a home stager, to start marketing, building and growing a home staging business."

Hobbs' two students — Deborah Smith, of Eldersburg, and Patty Robbins, of Jarrettsville — said the course taught them the difference between decorating and staging. The group was working on an 1,800 square foot Columbia home that has been on the market for more than a year

"It's a very comprehensive program," Smith said. "I've gained knowledge about staging and hope to apply what I've learned by becoming involved with the staging community and work with real estate agents and home sellers."

Robbins hopes to use her new skills when she one day transitions from the medical administration field, where she has been for the past 15 years.

"I've learned there's a lot of planning and preparation that goes into it before actually staging it (a room)."

In working with Smith and Robbins as they moved furniture around the room, it was clear that Hobbs likes what she is doing and looks forward to the future — regardless of the "Design Star" outcome.

"Ultimately," she said, "my goal is to have a multi-level business that includes an interior design firm, product licensing, furniture design and a television show because, at the end of the day, this is what I really feel comfortable about and these are what I feel my skills are."

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August 19th : 7:30 p.m. (Pre-season game: vs. Kansas City Chiefs) ...

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