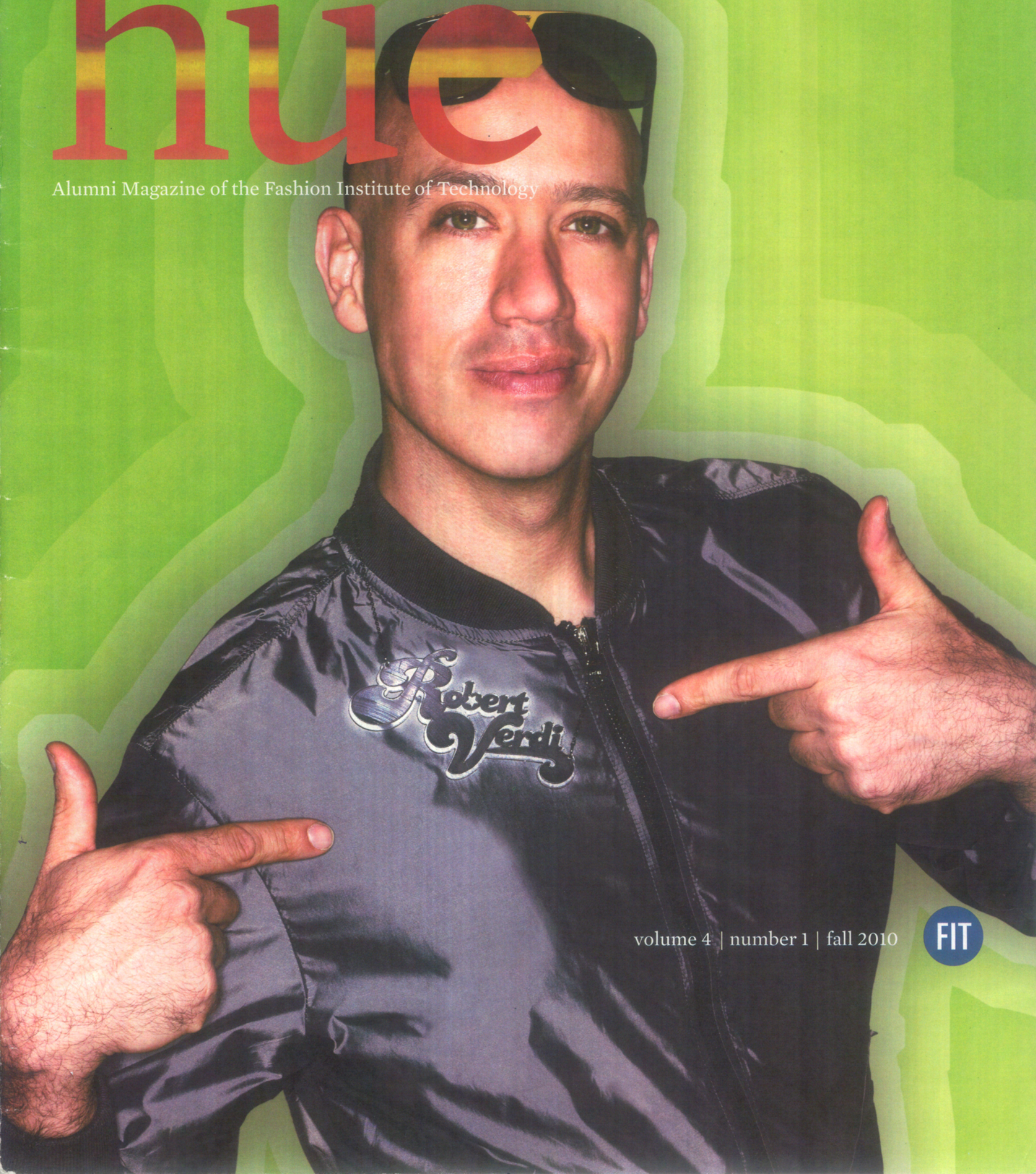


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FIT

CITY VIEWS

Cathy Hobbs, Interior Design '06,
on design, on real estate, and on-air

By Greg Herbowy



In 1999, Cathy Hobbs, then a broadcast journalist for New York City's WPIX-11, enrolled in FIT's Interior Design program. She had long taken an interest in the field. In her lean years, newly graduated from the University of Southern California and working on-air at a TV station in Bakersfield (a job she began while still a student), Hobbs made her own home decorations, stitching drapes and pillows and reupholstering furniture. As her WPIX assignment was to cover breaking news live in the evening, it meant free days and many nighttime hours spent, Hobbs says, "sitting around. So I figured, 'Why not do something constructive with the time?' That's where I ended up doing my FIT homework—

in the studio, waiting for news to happen."

Seven years and three Emmy awards for her reporting later ("I was nominated for more Emmys while I was at FIT than when I wasn't," she says, and boasts a total, so far, of five statuettes), Hobbs graduated with her BFA. By then she was already a few years into her second career, having founded her interior design firm, apherea, while still a student. Last year, Hobbs left the newsroom and launched *Metro Residential*, a weekly real estate and interior design show she executive-produces, co-hosts, and co-owns. The show airs Sunday mornings on WPIX, available to 10 million-plus homes in the greater metropolitan region. This summer, she and her husband welcomed their first

child, a daughter. Her work pace has yet to flag. "I was making calls the day after I delivered," she says.

Hobbs recounts much of this while taking a photographer and this writer on a tour of the Livmor, a recently opened condominium building in Harlem for which she designed the children's playroom, gym, lobby, hallways, and screening room. She also decorated the Livmor's model residence, a furnished but unoccupied apartment for prospective buyers to tour. Warm hues—particularly orange, which Hobbs calls her "signature color"—predominate throughout, and a large wall in the lobby is covered with a distinctive woven wood paneling. The earth tones echo the brick and brownstone of a romanticized Harlem. The panels resemble basketwork and thatched roofs, and suggest more remote sources of inspiration. "I've been all over," says Hobbs, whose experiences abroad include covering a food drop in Sarajevo with the National Guard during the Bosnian Civil War. "My travels have definitely influenced my work."

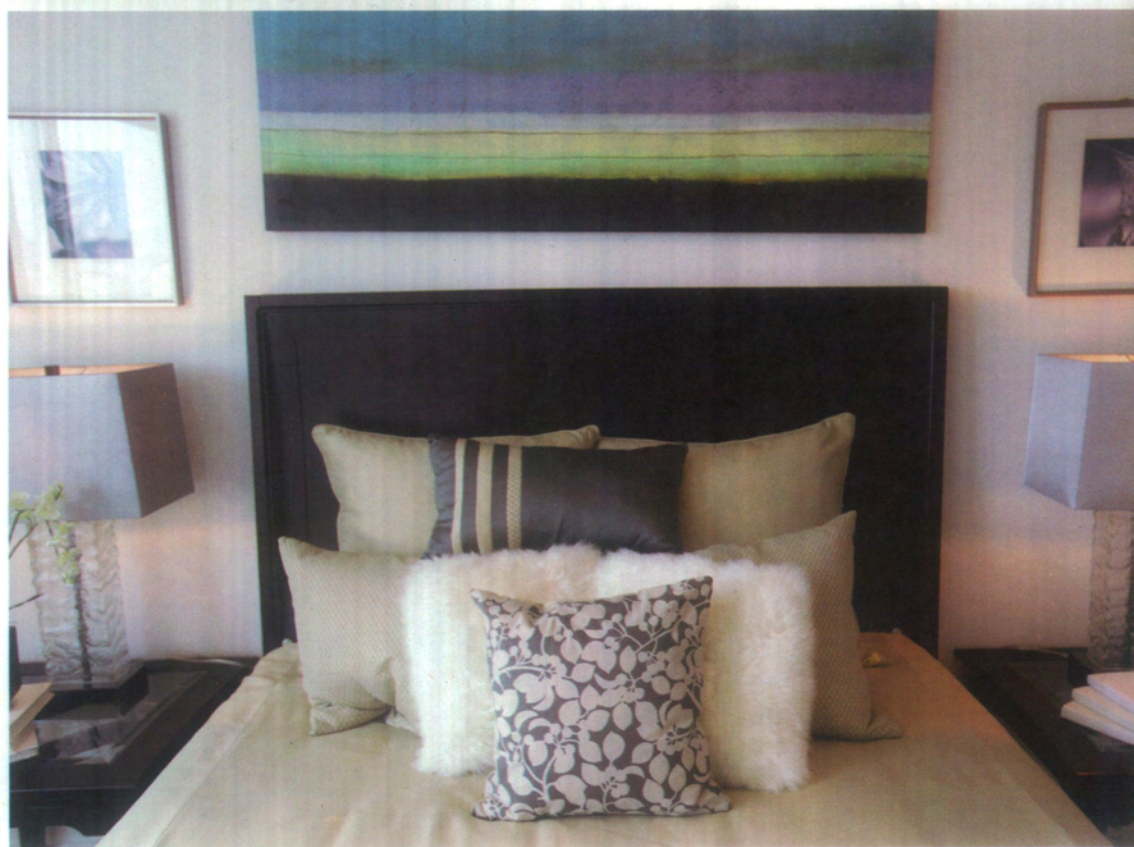
The Livmor is aphereä's biggest project, in size and prominence, to date, and Hobbs's pride in the work is evident. "I presented three design directions to the developers," she says, "and they picked my personal favorite." As she makes her way through the building, she talks warmly with everyone she encounters, from management to

maintenance to the door-man. This ease with conversation, though no doubt honed during her broadcasting career, is nonetheless genuine and irrepressible. "The professors at FIT, they all know me," she laughs. "I mean, I was there for seven years! That 'Fashion Hot Dog' guy at the corner? He knows me, too." She has turned this skill to her advantage in interior design. Beginning with the people who sold units in the Brooklyn building she and her husband live in, Hobbs has cultivated a network of area real-estate brokers and developers who regularly come to her with jobs, and to pitch their more outstanding listings—"eye candy," she says—for *Metro Residential* segments. And through these relationships, she has come to find her niche, specializing in projects designed to maximize a property's sales potential (see sidebar).

Moving forward, Hobbs has plans to further meld her on-air and design occupations, building a personality-driven design brand that incorporates "a line of home products and books, the TV show, a blog, and radio spots." She has already begun the process of democratizing her services with aphereä's Design Recipes, step-by-step home-decoration guidelines, complete with resource listings (Hobbs's favorites include ABC Carpet & Home, B & J Fabrics, and Crate & Barrel's CB2 brand), for the d.i.y.-minded. Like Hobbs herself, 20 or so years ago.

OPPOSITE: Hobbs in the model unit of the Livmor, a condo building in Harlem. She furnished the space for buyers to tour. "I love designing model units," she says. "I get to pick out everything, from the vase on the table to the art on the walls."

BELOW: Hobbs in the Livmor's lobby; the model unit's master bedroom. "My work has a lot of Eastern influences, a lot of '40s and '50s Hollywood."



SELLING YOUR SPACE

On *Metro Residential*, Hobbs often takes on a "design challenge"—like converting an unfinished basement into livable space—for clients looking to boost their home's price on the market. But you don't need costly renovations to make a place more attractive to buyers, she says. Here are her four tips for owners looking to make a sale.

CLEAN You'd be surprised how many people don't take the time to do this right. Don't just sweep the floor—replace old, dirty light switches and electrical sockets and give the place a fresh coat of paint.

DECLUTTER People like to see furnished homes but they want to see the space, too. Edit, edit, and edit again, even if it means putting stuff in storage. You're moving anyway.

DEPERSONALIZE Too many personal belongings, like family photos on the wall, convey that this is "your" space.

NEUTRALIZE Too much bold color turns buyers off. Use muted shades for the majority of the space, with the bolder choices as accents.