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Behind the Mic to Behind the Scenes

Newscaster-turned-design-star Cathy Hobbs brings big personality to every set

By Allison Geller

Television was always Cathy Hobbs' ballgame. Before she took to the screen to share her design expertise, appearing most recently on Oprah Winfrey's eight-city "The Life You Want" tour, she was scooping up Emmys as a television newscaster.

As a young reporter in the early 1990s, she volunteered to cover tough stories like the Siege of Sarajevo and the Great Flood in Missouri, always on the lookout for ways to build her chops. That same dedication applied to her career transition. "I always wanted to make sure that I had the highest level of experience and deliver that as a professional," Hobbs says. "For interior design I felt the same. I didn't want to be a reporter who woke up one day and called herself a decorator."

As a child growing up in Columbia, Maryland, Hobbs used to ride a bike around her neighborhood and look at the homes being built, imagining where the various rooms were going to be placed. "I had always had an interest in real estate and design, but from a really organic standpoint. It was just something that I enjoyed but never really thought that I would transition



into a career," she says. In fact, her career in television also had an indirect start. She had been studying marketing and finance at the University of Southern California, doing business internships the whole time. One day it occurred to her that TV reporting might be fun, and she took an internship at a TV station in Bakersfield, about 50 miles north of Los Angeles. "I would attend school during the day Monday through Friday, and then I would drive up to Bakersfield on the weekends, where I was a weekend reporter on the NBC

affiliate." Working that first job, Hobbs wasn't exactly flush with cash, so she scoured flea markets and thrift stores in order to furnish her apartment. That was her first inkling that she might have an eye for interiors. "A lot of people would come into my little apartment and say, you know, I think you have a knack for design."

In 1997, she made the move to New York to work at WPIX-TV. While pursuing her career as an evening newscaster, she decided to take a design class or two "as a hobby." "What started as a hobby just continued," she says. Though her design education began as purely a creative outlet—she still has the easel from the painting class she took one morning a week before work—



it eventually turned into a second degree. **"I went to the FIT [Fashion Institute of Technology] in the morning for classes, and then covered fires and shoot-'em-ups at night," she says.** Hobbs' scored her first paid design job through a friend of husband's, who hired her to redo his bathroom. "Halfway through the project, he said, 'I want you to do my kitchen too.'"


Based off of those samples, Hobbs slowly began to accrue other clients. In 2005, she and her husband bought an apartment in Williamsburg (when the neighborhood was still up-and-coming) and her real estate agent encouraged her to try her hand at staging and styling. Soon she was hooked, and began the self-branded company that is now ten years old. Despite the fact that she had the degree and ASID certification, though, she found that it wasn't always easy to win the trust of potential clients. "I was known as a newscaster. I was on television in New York City in millions of homes every night from 1997 to 2009 as a newscaster."

"The big transition for me was when I was cast on HGTV design star season six aired in 2011," Hobbs says. Cast out of 7,000 people, she was one of 12 finalists to be featured on the series. "I think that's when

people said, 'Wow, this gal is serious.'" Despite the obvious differences, Hobbs sees a major parallel between her career as a reporter and her self-reinvention as a designer and stager: both of them require the astute skill of interpretation. "My background is taking a big huge concept and making it understandable to millions of people in the form of a news story," Hobbs

says. "Similarly, you can take this massive or confusing space and make it digestible and understandable to a potential buyer so they have that emotional trigger to then make a real estate transaction." Her work has been influenced by her worldwide travel—she believes that "as a designer it's really hard to interpret different styles if you have not traveled extensively"—but also by her effort to stay fresh, take risks, and learn from others in the industry. "If there's a job that I don't get, I actually want to see what that person did, because I want to learn from that experience and grow for the next time. I think that creative people are constantly growing," Hobbs said. Her tenacity comes straight out of two decades of reporting for the news, when there was no hope of getting a coveted interview without a brazen overture. As Hobbs says, "I'm always willing to knock on that door."



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