

Sugar. In the shape of cubes – genius.

Why should you offer guests sugar cubes over spoon sugar? It is the exact same thing, so why bother?

Because it is a decision to “live life a little lovelier,” as design expert Kristan Cunningham would say in reference to life and design. A southern girl from West Virginia, Kristan has made it big doing what she loves – making life better for people through interior design.

It is no wonder Kristan’s spunky and personable presence has brought her years of success from hosting HGTV’s *Design on a Dime* and HGTV’s *\$250,000 Challenge*, to being the “Design Buddy” on *The Rachael Ray Show*. Kristan is refreshing and unapologetic, sticking to her roots that good design doesn’t have to be expensive and everyone, no matter the price range, has the opportunity to live beautifully.

Kristan went to high school in Boone County, West Virginia, where she realized that design was her passion. “I am one of those people who never wanted to do anything else, I never had a back up plan,” says Kristan. “If this didn’t work out, I don’t know what I would have done.”

After graduation at The University of Charleston in West Virginia, she moved out to LA with her now husband, Scott. The move was prompted in support of Scott’s career in the music business, but Kristan’s was just getting started by linking with a high-end interior design firm working with celebrities and reality TV families.

The salary was good, and the firm was getting lots of press, but something was missing. At the time, Kristan was feeling jaded by the business, confused why her bosses wouldn’t listen to her suggestions to do the same things cheaper.

She jokes that her career at HGTV started as somewhat of an accident. “I was literally called out of the blue for *Design on a Dime*. I had done one episode of *Designer’s Challenge* the year before, and even that was an accident because my friend asked me to do it with her. She was scared she would freeze on camera, and she knew I wouldn’t.”

Kristan laughs about the whole experience poking fun at herself for losing the challenge, but her charm worked on HGTV viewers and the same production company offered Kristan, *Design on a Dime*. “It really could not have happened at a better time because I was right at the point of saying ‘this isn’t fun anymore’ and to switch back to really just helping people felt good.”

I cannot help but laugh at Kristan’s analogy for home furnishing: a sponge cake. “You need to have those first investment pieces, what I call the sponge cake. Buy a quality sponge cake. Good sponge cake is good whether

you have strawberries and whip cream or not. By making the right choices early on, you can live beautifully and do it slowly. Say you get a little extra money, you can add the whip cream and make it even better.”

Kristan uses this analogy often when dealing with clients, understanding that it’s hard to get people to commit to that big purchase, even if it is just a couch. Recently joining the team of Raymour and Flanigan, Kristan is proud to say they give their customers confidence in their purchases. “Feeling confident about purchases comes from being educated and informed. I got to play in the high-end world for awhile, and now I get to work directly with the people to help them figure out how to make those right design choices on their own.”

Kristan believes this is such fun time in the design world right now because people are getting savvier and savvier about interior decorating. “Now, you see that average folks in their homes are doing high and beautiful work that looks like designers did them.” She gets it – at the end of the day you’re supposed to feel safe as if your home is the one spot on earth that’s your sanctuary.

She is happy to give great advice to viewers. Kristan says they have an enormous amount of respect for each other even though “Rachael won’t hold a glue gun and I won’t boil water.” Kristan has a big heart and working on *The Rachael Ray Show* has given her the opportunity to really help people in the best way she knows – through design. The long list of good deeds of design include a stage for small town’s high school prom that got devastated by a tornado to Rosie O’Donnell’s rooftop at her theatre school in the city for students to enjoy.

Happily into her third season with Rachael Ray, Kristan couldn’t pass up the opportunity to work with Raymour and Flanigan. But don’t expect Kristan on any Labor Day weekend sales commercials. Kristan is proud to say she is not a spokesperson, but rather the resident design expert putting together style guides for customers to give them real information about basic design elements. “There are so many questions people have- does this line read traditional? What kind of piece should I pair it with? These guides are to help people find answers and guide them in their next design decision.”

Kristan is proud to sport the Raymour and Flanigan name, believing that they are doing something for their customers that no one else is doing – making them feel better about the money they’re spending.

Close to a decade in the business, Kristan is right where she wants to be. With hush-hush projects in the works, she is all smiles doing what she loves: helping people live better through accessible design ideas. With the support of her husband Scott and the thousands of viewers that have welcomed Kristan into their homes, Kristan is living the dream she always knew she could.

## KRISTAN CUNNINGHAM

Kristan Cunningham stands as one of HGTV’s most recognizable designer, and with her success as Rachael Ray’s “Design Buddy,” Kristan has only just begun. She is exactly where she needs to be – helping everyday people with design decisions. Energetic, clever, and fun with a big heart to boot, Kristan teaches us to “live life a little lovelier” everyday.

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