

# COVERSTORY



HGTV'S

Cheryl Torrenueva

Toronto designer, Cheryl Torrenueva has a lot to boast about (not that she ever would!) Her chic look and keen eye for design have made her a hot commodity in the world of television design. It was only six years ago that she graduated with a Bachelor of Interior Design from Ryerson University and she could have never predicted what was yet to come.

On a whim she entered HGTV's Superstar Challenge, made it to the finals and the rest is TV history. Known as the "Posh Spice" of the design world, Cheryl had no problem landing gig after gig on hit shows like HGTV's Home To Go, Rooms That Rock and Food TV's Restaurant Makeover. In between shows, Cheryl has worked behind the scenes creating signature looks as the art director for HGTV's Disaster DIY, Design Interns and both seasons of SLICE's Superstar Hair Challenge. And to top it off, she has modelled and been a guest design contributor on SLICE's Three Takes, CITY TV's Cityline, Rogers TV, and GLOBAL Morning News and HGTV Online Style Sheet. She spent the bulk of 2009 designing and styling the Techno-chic SONY Spaces and Future Shop ConnectPro booth for Home Shows across Canada.

But her big break came when she was chosen to be the feisty on-camera Design Project Manager for HGTV's uber-successful Colin & Justin's Home Heist. "When we got her audition tape, it was a slam dunk!" explains Michelle Kosoy, production executive for Home Heist. And it is no surprise that Colin & Justin themselves, feel the same: "Cheryl will be the first lady of Canadian television!" they say when asked about their femme-fatale co-host. With endorsements like that, she is sure to remain the golden-child of Canadian design for years to come.

Cheryl is known for her polished and elegant spaces and with her picture-perfect style, a radiant on-air presence and an absolutely fierce design talent; don't be surprised to see Cheryl's star continue to rise in the television industry and beyond.

Q&A with Cheryl >>



### HOW DID YOU KNOW YOU WANTED TO BE A DESIGNER?

Looking back at my 3rd grade report card, my teacher noted that I really expressed an interest in building houses out of wooden blocks for the little chicks that our class raised for a science project. Unfortunately, I hadn't developed a love for colour yet so the colour palette consisted of neutral wood tones and builders beige. Whether it was Lego pieces, furniture or an old shelf to make into a loft apartment for Barbie dolls, I was always trying to build something!

After that, I was on a mission to become an architect. I spent many weekends browsing through builder magazines looking at floor plans and trying to figure out what my dream home would look like. I took every single drafting class that was offered in high school but then my dreams were shattered when I realized that I was awful when it came to physics. And I mean really bad! With the growing trend of renovating existing spaces as opposed to building new, it made a lot of sense to me that interior design would be a great fit.

### WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF DECORATING – THE PLANNING STAGE OR THE EXECUTION?

I love seeing how everything comes together so it would have to be the execution stage. I am constantly dreaming about beautiful spaces to design but it's just an idea until it finally becomes three-dimensional. When a renovation begins and I am able to see the drywall go up, paint being rolled on walls and all finishes being applied, then it finally becomes a reality for me! There is so much effort that goes into the initial stages so if a project isn't executed, then I often feel like I haven't finished my job. I'm a perfectionist and I like to see everything from beginning to end.

### WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE HOMEOWNERS WHO CAN'T AFFORD A DECORATOR?

Hiring a designer is definitely a luxury

as you are able to have someone else guide you to realize your vision or dream space. However, if you don't have the budget then it's an exciting way to get your creative juices flowing. I've learned a lot over the past seven years and the best way to tackle your reno is to follow a few simple guidelines because "Haste really does make waste" (even if you're a designer!).

You need to look beyond the fabrics and the furniture and think about how you want the space to function. Think about doing an analysis of each room and make sure that you are completely honest about everything. For the most part, there may be other people using the space so you want to make sure that their needs are heard too. Once you've narrowed down and prioritized the function and flow of the space, then you can "get real" and come up with a sensible budget. Remember that time is money and if you require outside trades to do the work, then put that into the budget as one of the highest line items underneath the cost of materials and finishes.

When you go around shopping for fixtures, materials, furniture and accessories, don't forget the tools of the trade. I always have a small binder with plastic sleeves where I can keep my magazine tear sheets, photo inspirations, fabric and paint chips at hand. I often separate them according to room so that I always have a reference of how my design is evolving. Keep a digital camera and measuring tape handy to document the style, price tag info and scale. Look for inspiration in furniture showrooms and model suites. These are great sources to reference when you're trying to make decisions for yourself.

Once you've done your research and analysis, it's time to edit what you like and don't like. Create a mood board to see how everything is pulled together and make sure that you are comfortable with all of your choices before tearing any walls out!

### WHAT ARE THE BIG TRENDS IN DÉCOR FOR FALL?

I've always curious to see what the new trends are each season, but I can honestly say that I don't really buy into them. I like

to look at what can be carried through to another season so that I am getting more wear out of each piece.

You can easily incorporate splashes of a trend with accessories but it's always best to only choose what you really love. I often look at pieces and think about how they could function in a different application. I guess that's the art director in me so I am always constantly looking for the perfect prop to be used in the next show!

Themes can be fun but only last for a short period of time, so save those ideas for your favourite occasions or events and take your time to find out what fits your personal style. Keep things timeless and you'll save more money down the road.

### HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR PERSONAL STYLE?

The rooms that I design don't always have the same theme or colour palette but the common thread that I call my personal style is "polished elegance". It's modern, sophisticated and refined with a bit of sparkle! I like to mix natural woods and stone finishes with metallic and highly polished details. Despite the budget, I like to create a high-end look and it's really about the process of finding materials that have the look and feel of something expensive. The minimalist sensibility works well in any interior because it gives all of the pieces importance without having to jam every nook and cranny with stuff. I like each space that I design to feel lived in but not cluttered with things that aren't functional.

Even though I love colour, I decided to keep my home rather neutral. I incorporated lots of visual texture with all of the surfaces so there's lots of personality! For example, I still have an Ikea couch from when I first found it in the AS-IS section and it had the perfect cream canvas slipcover which I have been using as the backdrop for my ever changing accent pillow collection. I've mixed various shades of white, cream, grey, brown and black mixed with mirrored surfaces, Lucite, suede, faux alligator, pony skin, metallic finishes and creamy sheer curtain panels that feel like eyelashes. They are all materials that I find timeless

## WITH CHERYL TORRENUUEVA

but used in a modern application. Even my hanging pendant is called the "Crazy shade" and creates a beautiful pattern on the ceiling that looks like shattered glass. So simple yet very dramatic! I love being at home because it's elegant, masculine with lots feminine details and most of all...really comfortable!

### WHAT'S THE EASIEST AND FASTEST WAY TO CHANGE YOUR HOME'S LOOK?

Use what you've got! You may have pieces of furniture that you already have in your basement or in another room. Think about using it in a different part of your home and creating new looks by changing up the accessories.

Use paint to add a dramatic colour on the wall or paint out all of your mismatched furniture pieces and accessories so that they are all the same colour. This will allow you to have different pieces within the same space but giving them a unified look.

Edit! Edit! Edit! If you want to make a

cluttered room more appealing, think about spending a weekend editing all of the things that you don't need. Without all the chaos, you will be able to look at the space in a different way and feel like you've increased the amount of space just by giving each piece some breathing room.

### WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE COLOUR?

I have a few! Black and white are my favourite foundation colours because they always make me feel good. I've worked with both ends of the spectrum (i.e. an all white space or an all black space) and I can always predict the outcome. I know how to create a balanced look and of course, how to be dramatic and go over the top!

I also love greys because they are so versatile. You can always find a grey to go with natural stone which I am constantly using in my clients homes.

This year, my favourite accents have been electric blue and emerald green. They add a lot



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of energy and vibrancy into a space and the room just comes alive.

#### HOW DID YOU DEVELOP YOUR SENSE OF STYLE?

My style has evolved over the past two to three years and I've grown out of my experimental phase. I know exactly what I like and whatever I choose must have some kind of detailing to make me feel special when I am wearing it. I like choosing pieces that have that extra punch, even if it's in a neutral colour. So interesting pleats, ruffles, ruching, draping, or a bit of sparkle is what always catches my eye. If I'm ever in a bad mood, I love finding the most over the top dress and wearing it with a great pair of 5" stilettos. A bit much for a normal day at work, but it definitely helps to make me feel better! A friend once told me that you should always look your best because you never know who you might run into. Perhaps an old friend, an ex...even Oprah!

#### WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR WOULD-BE DESIGNERS?

If possible, invest in yourself and take some courses to provide you with necessary design skills. As much as I hated being in school, I am really thankful that I was able to learn the design principals and the background needed to do what I am doing today. After you have a good foundation, then it's very beneficial to work with a designer. Don't try doing everything by yourself because there is a lot to learn! And a lot of it is gaining experience working with the trades and to get a sense of how things are done in the real world. Designing is the easy part, trouble shooting, scheduling and coordinating with a million other people is what's difficult.

It's great to start getting to know different suppliers and understanding products and how they work. Before I started in television, I interned at Gluckstein Design Planning, worked at a designer fabric showroom and an interior glass partition company to get a sense of how things worked on both the designer and supplier end. It really helped me to understand how to specify materials and finishes which made me a better designer for my clients.

#### HOW DO YOU BALANCE A FAST-PACED CAREER WITH YOUR PERSONAL LIFE AND WHAT DO YOU DO FOR?

I'm really thankful to have an understanding family, boyfriend and friends who support my crazy schedule. I've learned to make time for myself instead of running myself into the ground and working 24 hours a day.

When I have a free moment, I put my energy into creating a healthier lifestyle for myself which includes exercise, proper diet and sessions with my trainer, Josette Curry who keeps me in check! I've been travelling a lot lately so I spend a lot of time exploring and trying out new restaurants. I really want to expand on my culinary skills so I think that will be on my list of things to do over the next few months. I always say that I am the perfect assistant in the kitchen but maybe when I am tired of designing, I may try out to be the next Superstar Chef!

I also enjoy entertaining and travelling whenever I can. Next on my list this year is London, Spain and the Philippines!

#### WHAT'S ON THE HORIZON FOR CHERYL TORRENUUEVA?

This year, I am really focused on pushing my limits and trying new things. I've been lucky to work with a lot of bigger companies this year to create and provide consultations to give them a designer edge to promote their products. Check out Mirolin's Azzura luxury line of bathtubs and a new vignette in the Taps Toronto Showroom which should be completed over next few months.

I've been lucky to have the opportunity to work with HGTV Canada online to document the entire design process for the Empire Communities Model Home in Brantford, which was completed in May. This will be a mini web series that will be hitting cyberspace in the near future. Keep you posted!

With Colin & Justin's Home Heist airing all over the world and most recently on BBC America, it opens up a lot of doors for a lot of opportunities. I just finished filming a pilot for a design show in the USA so let's wait and see what the future holds!

