

# furniture lighting & decor

## *setting the stage*

business experts share tips  
& tools for a successful 2024



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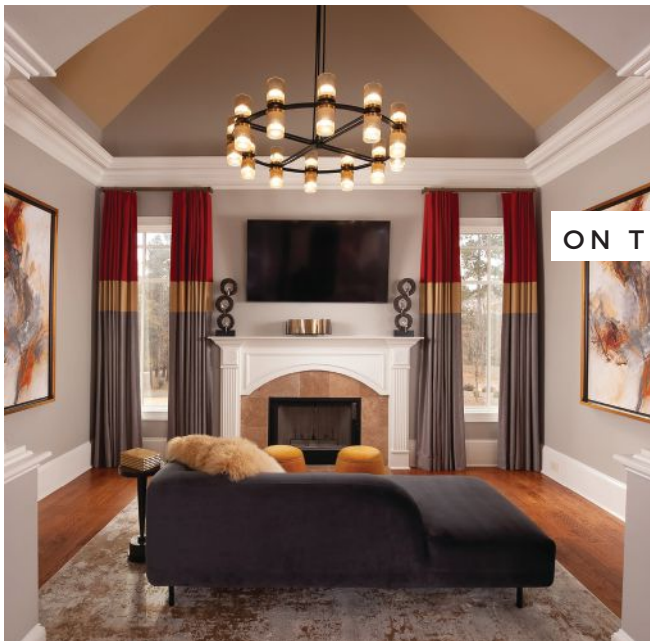
Barbara Elliott and Jennifer Ward-Woods share their trailblazing design journey.



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Danny Russo delivers a natural, organic flow in this dining room.



**ON THE COVER**

The Sisters & Co. share this bedroom retreat (see their story on page 19), boasting a glamorous shaped chaise, ring chandeliers for a touch of elegance and floor to ceiling drapes in red, gold and gray shades for a pop of color and added privacy. [barbaraandjennifer.decoratingden.com](http://barbaraandjennifer.decoratingden.com)

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**AFFILIATES**



## TRAILBLAZERS

**S**tepping into the interior design world separately and then coming together in one location has something to do with the success sisters Barbara Elliott and Jennifer Ward-Woods have experienced in their interior design business. Their passion, tenacity and guidance from Decorating Den, where the sisters built their franchised interiors business, have also played roles in their ability to meet challenges and thrive over the past 25+ years.

While Elliott and Ward-Woods always had a love and a penchant for interior design — dressing up their own homes and those of friends and family — neither started in interior design. Elliott was a CPA, and Ward-Woods was in the insurance industry in North Carolina. Ward-Woods jumped first, opening a Decorating Den franchise in her home state. Elliott followed two years later, purchasing a Decorating Den franchise in Stone Mountain, GA, just outside of Atlanta.

It didn't take long for Ward-Woods to make the move to the Atlanta area to join her sister, as running this business solo and as a single parent, while successful, had its pressures.

When Elliott purchased her franchise, she convinced Ward-Woods to make the move and join forces. "There wasn't anything big I was leaving behind," Ward-Woods says. "We were similar in everything we were doing, so it was natural for us to work together."

"We both always had a love for design," adds Elliott. "We decided we had a gift for design and wanted to expand upon that. Decorating Den was an easy way to get started as it came with the business strategy and knowledge we needed to get up and running."



**Jennifer Ward-Woods (left) and Barbara Elliott are the sister duo behind The Sisters & Company. In the rooms they design, color and comfort are top priorities that attract clients.**

### LEVERAGING THE FRANCHISE MODEL

While, at that time, the sisters hadn't gotten any formal interior design training, they took design classes, and leveraged the knowledge, support and tools Decorating Den offered, helping them get off to a solid start. "Decorating Den gave us a roadmap and a path," says Elliott. "If you followed the steps, it helped you to be successful. Plus we had support from all of the other designers across the country."

"Decorating Den helped us turn our passion into a business," Ward-Woods adds. "Things are a lot easier now going into interior design. When we came in, there wasn't social media. We couldn't see all of the wonderful things you can see now."

In addition to that roadmap and support, Decorating Den also provided — and still provides — business systems, marketing suggestions, the strength of a larger buying group and technology, particularly as it has pertained to website management.

And while their franchise helped them get

off the ground and continues to support their business, it has been Elliott's and Ward-Woods' design style, ability to connect with clients and smart business sense that has led them to flourish.

In the beginning, the business consisted of the two sisters working from home. The first addition was an employee to handle the administrative work. At that time, Elliott was building a new home as well. It made sense to move the business to an outside location.

At first, it was a 400-square-foot office space. Then The Sisters & Company expanded to 1,500 square feet and added a bookkeeper. When they bought the building, they expanded to 3,000 square feet. The expansion was necessary as business continued to grow, and the sisters decided to bring in new designers.

Today, in addition to support staff, The Sisters & Company also have two additional designers and two design assistants. The larger space has also allowed Elliott and Ward-Woods to leverage warehouse space. They've also since added onto the building where their business resides. "The addition was more for inventory and receiving product," Elliott laughs. "Six months after we moved in, it already wasn't big enough. Now we have someone who manages



## design stop



Often clients don't know what they want in their homes until they see it, says Ward-Woods. The sisters take on room refreshes to full renovations.

that warehouse [bringing the team total to nine], and we've been able to get rid of all of our storage units." Business was robust before COVID, and as consumers were spending more time at home during the pandemic, business doubled and continues to trend substantially higher than business pre-pandemic, making the added square footage and staff a plus.

### FORGING NEW PATHS

While The Sisters & Company are under the Decorating Den umbrella, they are forging a unique path within the broader organization. "Through the projects we take and the work we do, we're a little bit more like trailblazers," Elliott says. "We're independently owned and operated. We're striking out there and trying things differently. When we first started and moved into a studio, that wasn't the model for Decorating Den. We've added designers when there were only a few franchises that were doing that. A lot of what we have done, we started doing on our own and Decorating Den has been supportive of it. They've come to see how they can incorporate it."

In their design business, Elliott and Ward-Woods aren't afraid to take risks or take on the bigger projects either. Their design portfolio includes everything from room resets to full

renovations. While renos weren't as common in the beginning, requests grew for those jobs. "We do everything," adds Ward-Woods. "You're only limited by what your ability is."

What gives Elliott and Ward-Woods the "extra" that many of their clients have been looking for?

For Ward-Woods, it's what potential clients see in their portfolio. "They may not know what they want, but they know it when they see it, and that helps us get a sense," she continues, adding that potential clients are often drawn by their use of color. "We teach our clients that you don't have to be afraid of color. There's a way to use it." Ward-Woods also credits her and her sister's knack for making comfort a priority while designing their beautiful spaces.

Elliott adds that their attention to detail is also something that attracts clients and keeps them for the long run. "We're very efficient at multiple layers. We don't forget about the ceiling or the windows or the accessories. We always complete a look, and we don't leave

anything unfinished," she says. "At our reveals, when a client says 'this room feels like me,' we love that."

And they look ahead, Elliott continues. Particularly where renovations are concerned, the sisters pay attention to how the home will fit the client in the future. "We have a lot of clients who are opting to stay in their homes long-term," she says. "If we're making renovations, we're doing it so we don't have to come back." To that end, Elliott and Ward-Woods consider aging and the future needs of clients. "We grow with our clients. You start to feel like family. You've shared life with some of

these clients. You know a lot about them, and they know a lot about you."

Ups and downs aside, because those can be expected in any business, building The Sisters & Company has been a dream for Elliott and Ward-Woods, and they wouldn't have it any other way. "It's the fulfillment I get from what I do," Ward-Woods notes. "The reward comes when you bring a client into that room and you know you've had a part in making that client really happy with the biggest investment they will ever make. It's a joy to do this."

Elliott agrees that bringing their clients joy is such an important part of enjoying going to work every day. She also appreciates the pace and diversity of what they do at The Sisters & Company. Next on the agenda is the possibility of product development of some sort. Elliott mentions that they'd love to get involved in fabric and accessory design. However, working with clients and creating beautiful spaces is her and Ward-Woods' priority.

"Every day we come in and there's something different, and that makes it exciting," she says. "It's such a pleasure to do what you love and make a living at it." **FLD**

By Diane Falvey

