



ALL-STAR JUDGING PANEL DELIVERS EXPERT EVALUATIONS IN NEW SEASON OF 'HGTV DESIGN STAR'

Original HGTV Design Star Winner David Bromstad to Mentor Finalists

New York, N.Y. [For Immediate Release—June 6, 2011] With the addition of a star-studded panel of guest judges, including designers **Thom Filicia, Robert and Cortney Novogratz, Nate Berkus** and **Kathy Ireland**, as well as Food Network's **Paula Deen** and **Dina Manzo**, event planner and former cast member of *Real Housewives of New Jersey*, *HGTV Design Star* returns for a sixth season on Monday, July 11, at 9 p.m. ET/PT. The series' celebrated line-up of stars includes HGTV's own returning judges **Genevieve Gorder, Candice Olson** and **Vern Yip**, as well as a guest appearance on the panel by **John Gidding**. **David Bromstad**, the first *HGTV Design Star* champion, will mentor the finalists as they compete for a chance to win their own show on HGTV. Hosted by **Tanika Ray**, *HGTV Design Star* will air on Mondays through September 12.

The finalists, who include professional interior designers, retail merchandisers, stylists and artists, must impress the judges with their ingenious designs and sharp on-camera skills to avoid elimination. This season's competitors include: Alisha "J" Allen, Chevy Chase, Md.; Meg Caswell, Chicago, Ill.; Kellie Clements, Edmond, Okla.; Mark Diaz, Miami, Fla.; Leslie Ezelle, Dallas, Texas; Blanche Garcia, Montclair, N.J.; Kevin Grace, Chicago, Ill.; Douglas Hines, Atlanta, Ga.; Cathy Hobbs, Brooklyn, N.Y.; Bret Ritter, Brooklyn, N.Y.; Karl Sponholtz, Chicago, Ill.; and Tyler Wisler, South Orange, N.J.

The judges will visit the location of each design challenge to complete in-person evaluations of the finalists' work. The finalists also must successfully complete tests of their on-camera hosting skills, which range from providing simple design tips to executing a full design demonstration on a national talk show. Along the way, David will offer the finalists his helpful design insights and hosting advice.

"This year's finalists are established designers at the top of their game," said Kathleen Finch, general manager, HGTV. "We put them through rigorous design challenges in real homes, tested their on-camera presence, had seasoned industry experts evaluate their work and even asked them to execute a design demonstration on *The Nate Berkus Show*. Viewers will find this season entertaining and compelling as they witness the emergence of the next HGTV Design Star."

Yip adds, "This season, I've seen the single best room design in the history of *HGTV Design Star*."

Beginning Monday, June 6, visitors to HGTV.com can expand their *HGTV Design Star* experience online. Fans will find bios for finalists and judges, photo galleries and full episodes of past seasons. Immediately following the premiere episode, visitors can watch vlog posts by previous *HGTV Design Star* winners, including Emily Henderson and Antonio Ballatore.

Meet the HGTV Design Star Finalists:

Alisha “J” Allen

Age: 31

Chevy Chase, Md.

Instead of pursuing a career in political science at the behest of her parents, “J” says she decided to follow her dream to be an interior designer. With more than 11 years of professional experience, she has designed dozens of residential and commercial properties across the country. J, who studied interior design at Howard University, says she can do anything for her clients, whether it’s paint a room, build a table or reupholster furniture. She characterizes her design style as eclectic and modern. She says she loves to incorporate a client’s global souvenirs into the design to personalize the space.

Meg Caswell

Age: 33

Chicago, Ill.

Meg says she began her career in design the moment she decided not to attend law school. After she earned a degree in criminology, she soon enrolled at The Art Institute of Chicago where she earned a B.F.A in interior architecture. The interpersonal skills she learned during her criminology studies helps her develop a profile of her clients and uncover their true design preferences. As the owner of a design firm and a home décor store in Chicago, Meg characterizes herself as a determined, direct and high-energy competitor. She describes her design style as a preppy mix of modern and traditional, but she also counts the vibrant pastel colors of “Palm Beach chic” among her favorite looks.

Kellie Clements

Age: 33

Edmond, Okla.

A self-described “fireball,” this married mom of two says people sometimes underestimate her design talent. Originally from Arkansas, Kellie grew up in an artistic family. Her parents were artists and allowed Kellie to mix paints and create artwork in their studio. Kellie, who holds a degree in interior design from the University of Central Arkansas, has more than 10 years of professional experience as a designer with a residential builder. She calls her design style “warm contemporary”—that is, it includes lots of color and whimsical touches.

Mark Diaz

Age: 33

Miami, Fla.

Mark, who grew up in a large Cuban family, says he always had a natural knack for design. After winning a scholarship for his design work in high school, Mark went on to earn a B.A. degree, Design in Architecture, from Florida International University. With a self-described passion for edgy, modern styles, he moved to New York City where he specialized in luxury hospitality

design. Despite a successful career, Mark says he missed the Florida sun and returned to Miami to start his own firm. His favorite design styles, which include mid-century modern, Asian-inspired minimalism and post-war industrial, combined with his love of martial arts, are the inspiration for his current line of chandeliers that are crafted from brass knuckles.

Leslie Ezelle

Age: 43

Dallas, Texas

Leslie, a former Dallas Cowboys cheerleader, cruise ship entertainer and mom of a blended family, has a wide variety of design experience ranging from remodels to home staging for real estate agents. Leslie, who describes herself as fun with a larger-than-life personality, helps clients “tame their domain” and believes that a stress-free, organized home offers the happiest and healthiest environment. With her preferred design style of “simple, traditional elegance,” she offers a less-is-more design philosophy that’s easy and inexpensive. Above all, Leslie considers herself a survivor. After winning a two-year battle with breast cancer, she is ready to live her dream as the host of a HGTV design show.

Blanche Garcia

Age: 32

Montclair, N.J.

Despite a childhood filled with frequent moves, little money and the unexpected death of her father, Blanche says it was her dream of becoming an interior designer that kept her going. At age 15, she started as a volunteer for community building projects and, a few years later, pursued her studies in interior design. Today, Blanche is a licensed interior designer and business owner with many high-end residential and commercial clients. Blanche identifies her design style as “green glam” and loves to enhance traditional eco-friendly materials with touches of glamour and luxury.

Kevin Grace

Age: 42

Chicago, Ill.

Kevin, a fashion merchandise director and window dresser from Chicago, says he was first inspired to become an interior designer by watching design shows on TV. Encouraged by friends who loved his room designs, Kevin decided to follow his dreams and audition for *HGTV Design Star*. He describes his favorite style as “eclectic retro”—a look with a mid-century feel that includes clean lines and pops of color. On a small budget himself, he says he designs with “cheap” in mind and understands the importance of re-purposing items whenever possible. Kevin says he is a lot of fun, friendly and focused.

Douglas Hines

Age: 44

Atlanta, Ga.

Born and raised in New York City, the arts have always been a part of Doug’s life. Growing up, he studied visual arts and design and then later turned his passion for aesthetics into a career. Doug worked for several of New York’s top advertising agencies as a graphic designer before moving to Atlanta 12 years ago to open an art gallery. His talent for art consultation soon led him to designing interiors for several of Atlanta’s restaurants and nightclubs. While his favorite design style is mid-century modern, he also loves the glamour of Hollywood regency and the sleekness

of modern minimalism. Doug, who describes himself as a loyal friend, loves antiques and yard-sale cruising in his spare time.

Cathy Hobbs

Age: 42

Brooklyn, N.Y.

Originally from Maryland, Cathy went to school in California for business and eventually became a broadcast news reporter in New York City. Despite winning five Emmy awards for outstanding news reporting, Cathy's passion for design propelled her into a second career. She attended morning classes at the Fashion Institute of Technology, where she earned a bachelor's degree in interior design, and then returned to the station to report the evening news. Married with an 8-month-old daughter, Cathy now owns a flourishing interior design company and specializes in residential and commercial properties. She says that her signature design style includes Asian influences paired with touches of Hollywood glamour.

Bret Ritter

Age: 30

Brooklyn, N.Y.

Growing up in a military family, Bret spent his childhood moving to different countries around the world, including India, Germany, Panama and Japan. He soon discovered a love for design because with each move he learned how to make every new space his own. Bret, who holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Art Center Design College in Tucson, Ariz., is a project manager for an eco-conscious construction company in New York City. Bret says he loves mid-century design that includes environmentally friendly, energy-efficient building materials. Although he describes himself as a nice guy, he has been known "to get very intense when he works."

Karl Sponholtz,

Age: 42

Chicago, Ill.

As a kid, Karl says his love of design was "there from the beginning." By age 10, he frequently rearranged his parents' furniture while they weren't home and was mesmerized by building blocks and floor plans. Karl, who studied architecture at the University of Illinois in Chicago, has more than 10 years of practical design experience and says that he can excite people with his passion for design. He characterizes his personal design preferences as "ultra-modern minimalist," but often completes traditional designs for his high-end clientele. As the youngest of six, Karl says he is extroverted, loud and loves to live in the moment.

Tyler Wisler

Age: 35

South Orange, N.J.

After completing high school in Honolulu, Hawaii, Tyler moved to the east coast to attend Marymount University. Since earning a bachelor's degree in interior design 12 years ago, Tyler has worked as a professional interior designer in the New York City area. He believes that most of his design skills were developed by on-the-job experience with clients, who he says appreciate his attention to detail. Tyler says he enjoys the latest design trend of "industrial chic," which includes the use of recycled materials and dark metals paired with wood. As a professional

designer, he says he always strives to give his clients the design they love, but will not hold back if he disagrees with a design decision.

About HGTV

HGTV, America's leader in home and lifestyle programming, is distributed to more than 99 million U.S. households and is one of cable's top-rated networks. HGTV's website, HGTV.com, is the nation's leading online home-and-garden destination that attracts an average of 4 million unique visitors per month.

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