

behind the scenes

ELLEN MARCHANT



Sarah Richardson

PHOTOS BY BRANDON BARRÉ

If you haven't watched Sarah Richardson in action on *Design Inc.*, grab the remote and change the channel to HGTV. The award-winning host takes you through the entire design process from start to finish—no holding back for the cameras. It can get ugly, but the rooms always end up looking beautiful.

Ellen: *Did you learn how to sew at an early age?*

Sarah: Yes, my mom says I was about 4 years old when I started sewing. She was a great seamstress and helped me develop a love for anything creative. We had a tiny breakfast nook off of our kitchen and my mom turned it into a craft/sewing room. I started using a sewing machine when I was about 7 years old. I used to make all sorts of things. In the fifth grade, I made a bright blue plaid taffeta pleated skirt complete with a proper waistband. By the time I reached high school I sewed formal dresses without a pattern and started dreaming of a career in fashion design.

Ellen: *Has knowing how to sew helped your career?*

Sarah: I can't say knowing how to sew has made me a great success, but being good with my hands and very detail oriented is part of what I'm best known for. In the early days of my career sewing allowed me to complete projects at an approachable price point. I sewed everything from slipcovers to drapes, pillows, bedding and accessories. Some people even paid me for my services!

Ellen: *Where do your ideas come from? What inspires you?*

Sarah: I'm always inspired by the beauty of fabrics. I often find that texture, color and pattern give me new ideas about using fabric in an unexpected way. I love combining several fabrics together for an unusual and unexpected effect.

Ellen: *Walk me through your design process. Is there a starting point?*

Sarah: There's always a starting point for every space. Sometimes the architecture of the room gives me an indication of the mood and feeling. Or sometimes I start with a favorite item in the room, such as a decorative rug or piece of artwork. Many times I just get a feeling for a scheme I want to experiment with and I start with a collection of fabrics that clearly illustrate the mood and feeling of the room.

Ellen: *How do you trust that your clients will love your design?*

Sarah: I trust myself completely as I have a reserved approach to color. I prefer to use light natural colors and materials for all the main elements in a room. I use color sparingly for decorative effect. In all cases, with good design, less is always more.

Ellen: *Can you give our readers some tips for reupholstering furniture? What are some things to keep in mind?*

Sarah: Make sure that you find the piece comfortable and really like it before you invest in reupholstering. Only reupholster good quality furniture (if in doubt, ask a professional upholsterer for an opinion).

Ellen: *Are some fabrics better suited for upholstery?*

Sarah: I like antique velvet and chenille for upholstery fabrics. Stay away from any fabric with a lot of polyester or olefin as it feels scratchy and often has too much sheen. If you want to know how a fabric will stand up over time, crunch it into a ball; hold it there for about 10 seconds, and then release. If the wrinkles release quickly it's likely a good fabric choice for upholstery. Choose something neutral and classic that you will love for a long time as opposed to a bold trendy color that may go out of style.

I generally select inexpensive upholstery fabrics in natural fibers, such as cotton, wool, linen or rayon. They tend to last longer. Save more expensive and decorative fabrics for pillows and drapes.



Check out www.sarahrichardsondesign.com to peruse Sarah's signature furniture collection.

Ellen: *What's the easiest thing our readers can sew to change their décor?*

Sarah: Pillows, pillows, pillows. Spend some extra time and effort on decorative trims, such as buttons, pleating, piping, patchwork and fringe. You can get great inspiration from magazines. Hone your skills experimenting with small fabric scraps left over from other projects. That's a great way to make a lovely change to a room for very little money.

Ellen: *Do you remember a favorite thing that you've sewn?*

Sarah: I taught myself how to make slipcovers and that was a real accomplishment! And I'll always remember the first formal gown I made. It was a beautiful deep-blue taffeta, strapless with a ribbon-trimmed crinoline. I made it without a pattern and it fit beautifully.

Ellen: *What does your home or office look like? Do you change the décor often or does it stay the same?*

Sarah: My home is very contemporary. The pillows change every year because I find new fabrics I can't live without. My office is always in flux ... that's the life of a designer! Cheers!

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Design Inc. airs on HGTV. Check your local listings for dates and times. Visit www.hgtv.com or www.designinc.ca for more information.

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