

'Design Star' Champion Leslie Ezelle Offers Relationship Advice for a Happy Home



By Sarah Ribeiro

This season of HGTV's 'Design Star' showcased former contestants vying for the winning spot one more time. After her participation in season six, Leslie Ezelle returned with her eyes on the prize. And in the dramatic finale episode, which aired August 21st, her focus paid off: she won the \$25,000 prize and an appearance on an HGTV show. The interior designer, breast cancer survivor, former Dallas Cowboy's cheerleader and mother of a blended family has a lot on her plate, but she isn't letting anything get in her way.

Ezelle says she thrives off her design career. She has been

producing her own design clips since her first round on 'Design Star' in hopes of getting her own show. Her personal home remodeling, coupled with her lessons in how to "tame your domain," has been keeping her busy, and she says she'd love to use television as a means of sharing her ideas and helping others find solace in their home.

"I'm producing a little show now called *The Real Modern Family*," she says. "I'm currently three months behind schedule and it's been very stressful having my family as my clients and taking input from the kids! Whenever these type of things come up, I'm swamped from the beginning of the day to the end of the day."

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Despite these struggles, Ezelle says her life doesn't get in the way of her family. Her "tame your domain" theory comes from the connections she has found between design and everyday life. According to Ezelle, "your energy comes from your home, and design plays a huge role in that. Your home is in direct correlation to your family – if you have a kitchen that works physically and if you have a dining room that works with that kitchen, then you have a great space to spend time together."



A design clip from Lezlie Ezelle's portfolio. Photo: Lezlie Ezelle

Ezelle and her wife Libby don't always agree on design though. Ezelle has a more contemporary style, while Libby prefers traditional decor. The pair combat this difference with "sweetness," Ezelle says, a method they learned from a relationship expert on a couples' retreat. Leslie encourages couples building a home together – whether new or old – to remember that physical belongings are solely physical. "If you have a happy relationship with your spouse and you're trying to blend your style, the best thing to do each night is to compliment each other," she advises. "Instead of using criticizing words, you just have to be diplomatic and remember that you're talking to someone who you love. You're trying to blend styles – why would you want to be critical and mean? That does zero good."

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The design star has three pieces of advice for couples looking to blend their style:

- 1. Write down your must-haves, and share them with each other.**
- 2. Design is not just about having pretty things in your house. It's about having a home that is a reflection of your lifestyle.**
- 3. Practice talking to each other like strangers and being sweet and polite. You have to maintain that level of respect and be mindful of each others' feelings.**

Design has helped Ezelle with more than just her family life. In 2008, she was diagnosed with breast cancer – a rollercoaster involving six weeks of radiation and two years of reconstructive surgeries that left her embittered. "I didn't struggle with breast cancer; I struggled through treatment," she shares. "I didn't feel sexy; I felt weak, broken down and bitter. I kept saying, 'I'm not a victim,' and I was really angry."

But she took her mother's advice in pursuing her design career and made it on to 'Design Star.' "When you're going through something bad," remarks Ezelle, "you can't see why you're going through it. It became clear to me when I got on the show. I never would've auditioned for the show had I not gotten breast cancer. I said, 'I can't let my breast cancer be what's motivating me.'"

After competing on 'Design Star, Ezelle connected with Courtney Arbour, a marketing manager for Susan G. Komen, and together, they came up with the idea that "you can't strap a good woman down" – a sculpture of a metal bra crawling the tree of life.

Ezelle's sculpture, Ann-e Girl, which was named after her children's aunt who passed away from breast cancer, travelled around Texas, turning buildings pink for the day and raising awareness. "This was my way of embracing breast cancer rather than being angry about it," proclaims the designer. "The inner strength you gain from pursuing your goals is where you get your empowerment. If you're not going after your dreams, you won't feel sexy; you won't feel powerful; and you won't feel like a woman."

While design may have helped her cope with the ups and downs of life, Ezelle's real comfort is in her family. "The relationships I have my wife and my children completely outweigh everything else," she says. "Design, work, cancer – it's our love that matters."

You can keep up with Ezelle on her Web site at www.LeslieChristineDesigns.com.