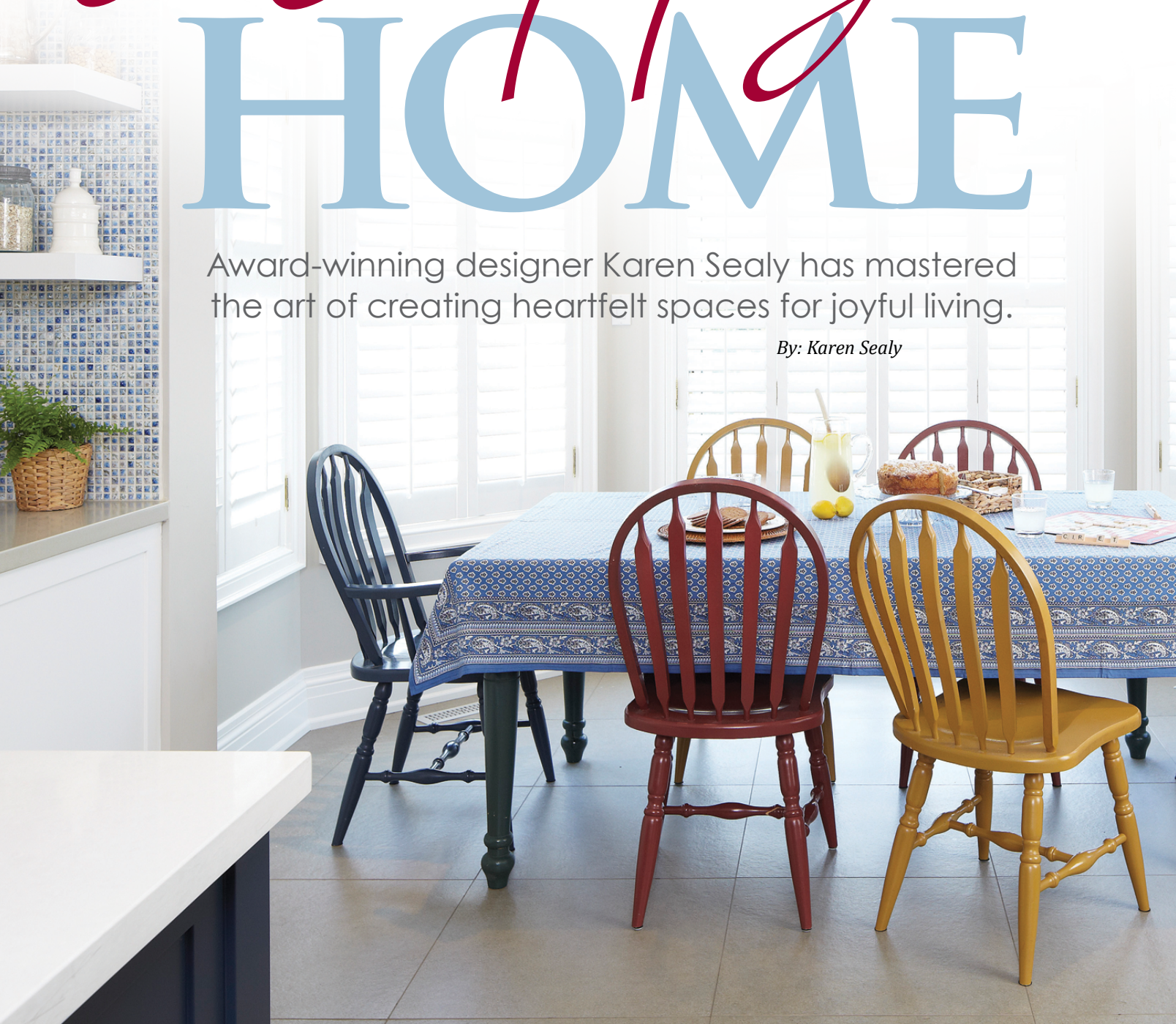


# A Happy HOME

Award-winning designer Karen Sealy has mastered the art of creating heartfelt spaces for joyful living.

*By: Karen Sealy*



**M**y journey to becoming an interior designer wasn't a direct path, but in retrospect it was perfect. After getting a psychology degree from Brock and then studying commerce at Queen's, I found my way to Toronto to begin my career. I worked in marketing, project management and business development. Even as I advanced my career, I felt that there was more on the horizon. And there was – without knowing it, I was laying the foundations for running my own design business.

The turning point came when I bought my first house and recruited my dad to help renovate the main floor. We had always done small-scale construction projects together and I felt confident that we had enough skills to tackle this one. It was tough, dirty work – ripping out lath and plaster and shovelling it into boxes and hauling it out – but I loved it! I had flashes of my childhood dream to work in this field and I trusted my instincts that it was time to make some major changes to realize that vision. For me, living a joyful life is about having faith and not letting fear take over. It's a choice.

So, I went back to school yet again. This time I had a mortgage and other expenses and the cost of school to contend with. Yet as daunting as that felt, I never had any doubt that I would find a way to succeed. It's interesting to reflect on my life and realize that whenever I've made a decision that felt right, it has seemed like I've had the wind at my back to propel me forward.

It has only been when decisions haven't resonated with me that I've felt resistance, as if I was turning off my path and experiencing the force of that wind working against me.

From the moment I made the decision to go back to school, everything fell into place. I took on my first clients a few months into school, explaining that I had a good eye, knew something about construction and had knowledgeable contacts from whom I could seek advice when I needed it.

Taking on paying clients helped me in more ways than the obvious. It threw me into real-life scenarios where I could gain invaluable industry experience while bringing any questions to my instructors at school, who were generous with their time and advice. By the time I graduated from interior design I had a full client roster and a profitable business.

Less than half a year later, I was selected for and won HGTV's *"Designer Superstar Challenge"*. Six months after that I was asked to be a guest décor expert on *"Cityline"*, the longest running and most successful daytime show for women in Canadian history – I am thrilled to be a regular on the show to this day. After a few years HGTV contacted me again and asked me to help them come up with a show I'd enjoy being the host and designer for. That's how the series *"Summer Home"* was born.

It's been 10 years since I renovated my first home, and I still know without any doubt that going back to school for interior design and starting my own business was the right decision. I love being an interior designer! It's an honour to be invited into people's homes and lives to create their oases. Being able to create a space where people spend their most precious times, with the people they love, is a gift that I am so thankful for. It involves so much trust and faith, and when it's all done it's a privilege to witness clients truly enjoying their new homes and to hear them say, "It's so us!" or, "Wow, you really listened and knew what we needed even better than we did!" That makes me so happy!

I've been fortunate to be able to share my passion for interior design with the HGTV (Canada and US) and *"Cityline"* audiences. Early on I realized that if I remained true to my dream of being the best interior designer I could, and shared this authentically, people at home would either relate or not and that I would be okay with it. I enjoy TV because it allows us to do the famous "reveal" which only happens in TV world. It's so fun – it's like Christmas morning for me! So when HGTV decided to change the format for *"Summer Home"* away from design and more towards decorating and decluttering, I knew it wasn't for me. My true passion has always been design, which addresses how to make a space work functionally while being beautiful.

**To make a decision that puts joy first, whether it's about starting or stopping something, you need to be consistent with your heart.**

It wasn't easy to hand over *"Summer Home"* to a new host. I'd invested who I was in that show. I'd helped create it and then I'd watched it grow and succeed. It challenged my beliefs to let it go, but I felt it was necessary. It's at times like this when decisions are tough, when we are challenged to confirm who we are and what's really important.

**As hard as it was I am glad I stayed true to myself.**





## KAREN'S 5 TIPS

### FOR INCORPORATING MORE JOY In Your Home

1

Think about sight lines and make sure that wherever you are sitting in your home you are looking at something nice. For example, when you are relaxing you may not want to be looking at stacks of paperwork you didn't finish that day.

2

Ideally create spaces that embrace nature, such as big windows that look out onto a treed yard, a river, or a garden.

3

Use items in your home that you love – anything from colours to pieces that were handed down to you that bring fond memories.

4

Don't over clutter your home. Plan your storage. Don't hoard. I've often said a cluttered house is a cluttered mind.

5

Invite people you care about to spend time in your home with you. Nothing brings warmth to a space like friends and laughter.

Speaking of challenges, it took me over a week to write this article. Life is extremely busy running a thriving design firm, making time for family and friends, and trying to find some "me" time. I'm still struggling to get the balance right, but I think we all are. As I write this the phone is ringing, emails are flooding in and text messages are alerting me that someone needs my immediate attention. As I pause to answer a call, I thank my lucky stars that business is booming. As I hang up the phone I am glad I answered – it was a man who wanted to organize a consultation for his wife as a surprise gift. I'm grinning ear to ear at the thought that following my passion has allowed my particular set of talents to flourish, and that doing what I love is a gift and sharing it is a gift, too.

For me, living a joyful life is something I do every day by appreciating the constants in my life. That consciousness creates the opportunity for enjoying countless happy moments. Of course there are still discouragements and hardships, but living with joy regulates these too, so that I can remain consistent and not dwell on those times. Simply choosing joy has had the greatest impact on the quality of my everyday life, more so than any other decision I've ever made.



Award-winning designer Karen Sealy is equally at ease in a hardhat or heels – her passion and knowledge of the two sides of design set her apart in her field. With formal training in interior design and a degree in business and psychology she is well prepared to create fabulous spaces that look and feel great, and stay on track and on budget. Karen is the owner of Sealy Design Inc, and is a regular décor expert on "Cityline". She was formerly the host and designer of HGTV's "Summer Home" (season 1), which aired internationally. Karen is also the winner of HGTV's "Designer SuperStar Challenge" and has been featured in a variety of media outlets from *The New York Times* and *Elle Décor* in the US to *Style at Home* in Canada.