

Creativity at all Costs.

An exclusive interview with Christopher Lowell on his new collection, why design is important and the moxie required to succeed

By Echo Surina

Few things (or people for that matter) are as one dimensional as they might seem on the first take. Christopher Lowell is no exception. Sitting across from me in a black pin-striped suit with arms folded across his chest, the self-made home design celebrity projects success and business acumen. Lowell shows a well-thought passion for his work and worldview. Sometimes leaning forward, sometimes back, like a butterfly, his enthusiasm bounces from topic to topic, accelerating and landing on point, only to flutter on to something new moments later.

Pronounced dead at birth in the middle of an Alaskan winter, Lowell has shown signs early on that his destiny would not be dictated by probability or what the mainstream says he can or can not do. He just does it.

Under his parent company, Christopher Lowell Enterprises LLC, Lowell has found much success: winner of the Daytime Emmy for Outstanding Service Show House, best-selling author of six home design and in-home entertaining books, host of television and radio shows and the office furniture he created for Office Depot has been the best-selling furniture of its kind in the world.



Lowell-isms

- We tend to believe in the world around us instead of in ourselves.
- Everything is art. Everything is creative.
- Where there's fear, there's no creativity.
- It's always good to have things going on the side; you need diversity with creativity.
- Make a list of what you love about your life and look at it daily.
- Experiment—your home is your laboratory.

The interview starts in first gear: decorating. His responses throttle, building up, only to shift into other areas of interest of broader scope. Why is decorating important to Lowell? His answer: It shows what's happening inside a person's head and heart. He draws connections between decorating and the American psyche, 9/11 and courage, begging the question—as a society, what are we about as a collective force?

Describing his staff of 25 as “futurists,” Lowell explains his company is an industry leader, currently researching and designing projects that will launch in about three years. “I have projects I did 10 years ago that I’m hanging on to,” Lowell says. When he thinks the American public is ready, he will introduce products on his TV show to gage public interest before they go to production. “We don’t indulge ourselves as artists. We don’t want people to emulate us, but define their own style.”

So what do futurists think about when creating fresh designs for a multimillion dollar company? Relevancy. They look at change under a microscope: lifestyle, social identity and budding collective interests and patterns—what needs do Americans have now that they didn't years ago and how are social norms changing?

There has been a shift in responsibility between the sexes. Decorating is not solely a female task anymore. “Men no longer feel emasculated by touching a bolt of fabric,” Lowell says. “A guy will no longer wake up in a poppy bedspread, because *she* liked it.” Even manly men want to make decisions about their homes (or at least veto the floral and gingham bedroom motif). “The Wolf range has become the Rolex or Gucci bag. That’s why men have gravitated to it,” Lowell says, explaining kitchen fixtures are a fashionable status symbol.

Mega-tasking is the next best thing since that oh-so-masculine Wolf range. Opting to shop together, couples save the hassle of multiple trips. Lowell says they don’t want to do fix-ups on weekends, piddling around the house. Instead couples prefer to



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finish their home project in one day so they can spend their time in other ways such as socializing and frequenting their favorite hot spots around town. Partners want to experience their home together.

Couples are finding they need a vacation after a vacation to ease re-entry into normal life, says Lowell. Returning from a trip and attending to everything that was put on hold (voicemail messages, heaping inboxes at work and overflowing mailboxes) is so jolting, many couples opt to stay home and not take a vacation in the first place, he says, adding they want reclusiveness and rejuvenation within the confines of their home.

Christopher Lowell's New Collection

Lowell's new collection of mix-and-match fabrics, trims and educational tools allows couples to create flexible, non gender-specific, sexy spaces. It offers 80 fabric options including silks, poly silks, chenilles, velvets, jacquards and embroidered sheers along with 250 trimmings and embellishments like tassels, tiebacks, cording, fringe and pillow appliqués. The collection is available exclusively at Jo-Ann Stores Inc.

"People are spending more time away from home, and because they feel good at their favorite restaurant or hotel, they are taking note and bringing those ideas home. Why should they only experience luxury when they're away?" asks Lowell. The result is a growing popularity for unisex, classic design common in public places.

Sept. 11 changed many things, design included, says Lowell. "People went into their homes as if they'd never been there before. It started out of fear. They didn't want to travel. They wanted to stay at home more. It started a resurgence of home remodel."

But once people started spending more time at home, they wanted to

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"The homeowner says to herself, 'I'm going to make my home a reflection of who I am.' And the next question is, 'Who the hell am I?' That question is crippling. We never spend time to think about this."

decorate and make it more "them." He explains, "The homeowner says to herself, 'I'm going to make my home a reflection of who I am.' And the next question is, 'Who the hell am I?' That question is crippling. We never spend time to think about this." Suddenly, selecting a couch means much more than furniture choice. "It's now about who am I and how do I express that?" We struggle to make decisions about the home because we do not know who or what we're trying to express.

Forget fear.

So what does design have to do with purging fear? Everything, according to Lowell. "By helping people eliminate fear, their creativity comes out to play. Stay curious," he advises. Design is a vehicle that allows us to show the world, and ourselves, our interior selves. And if we



don't know who we are, we can work out the answer through design.

Design provides a forum for expressing oneself—a noble intention indeed. So when Lowell isn't helping Americans self actualize through decorating, what does he do? The question was posed more than once because his responses, although interesting, didn't answer the question. Then the butterfly landed on topic.

"I had to make the choice about five years ago. I decided my personal and professional lives would have to be one in the same. I'm very proud of making that step," Lowell

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explains, as he otherwise wouldn't accomplish everything he desires. A lifetime dedicated to a goal—what's the success he's looking for at the end of this road?

"Success for an artist is finding an audience and having a relationship with them," says Lowell. "Nothing is more tragic than art that is never seen, music that will never be heard."

A self-proclaimed workaholic, Lowell is convicted about his mission: Help people overcome fears about self expression, so they are free to be imaginative. "Creativity—it's innate and exists whether or not we recognize or encourage it. It's like breathing," he says. "Too often, people are afraid of not being talented or getting rich off their creativity and they push it down." The world can always stand more beauty, more art. Sharing your soul and creativity is part of what makes us human. When it's kept in a crucible, unshared and untapped, it implodes. Van Gogh would agree. ☒

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