



Photos, Grant Black, Calgary Herald

Designer Jacqueline Corea shows off a tile display during a behind-the-scenes tour of ICON Stone & Tile, and two other showrooms open to interior designers.

DESIGN CRAWL

Behind-the-scenes tour reveals unique products

LISA KADANE
CALGARY HERALD

My first thought: "The 1970s called. It wants its fabric back."

My second: "That material would look killer on a throw pillow."

By all accounts, the swath of fabric I'm eyeing looks as if it's been cobbled together out of small nylon roses in colours from orange to blood red to deep green. It's both hideous and fabulous; perhaps that's why it qualifies as DWA Showroom's most outrageous fabric.

That's not an easily-won distinction either when you're competing with 1.5 million skews of fabric in a cavernous showroom that hides a sample of luxurious pink-on-green damask almost as handily as the warehouse in Raiders of the Lost Ark carked the crate containing the Ark of the Covenant.

This is not a dark and dingy place, however. Instead, DWA beckons material mavens with a clean, bright space featuring row upon row of hanging fabric samples and endless shelves of fabric books.

"Basically, what we are is a library" of fabrics, says showroom manager Jen Simpson.

"You can see why, for the av-



Guests tour ICON Stone & Tile, which specializes in exotic countertops and unique tiles.

erage person, this might be slightly overwhelming."

I'll say. And I'll read into the collective gasps and murmurs issuing from my fellow "design crawl" participants, to conclude they are equally awed.

Along with about 50 other women, ranging in age from mid-30s to mid-50s, I'm visiting three Calgary showrooms, two of which are only open to interior designers. DWA Showroom is the fabric wonderland; the second, ICON Stone & Tile (the one that's open to the public), specializes in exotic countertops and unique tiles; the third is Colin Campbell, a

gallery that sells wool area rugs and wool broadloom carpets.

This decor-focused event — complete with wine and nibbles at each location — has been organized by Coreia Sotropa Interior Design to say thanks to some of its customers, and to introduce prospective clients to the world of fabrics, tiles and carpets available exclusively to interior designers.

Designer Reena Sotropa says most of the fabrics, hardware, carpets and higher-end furniture and lighting that go into her clients' homes come from showrooms such as these.



Designer Reena Sotropa displays some exotic fabrics in the DWA Showroom.

you need to be with a VIP to gain entry.

"It's a bonus. It's a perk. I think it's a surprise to our clients. I don't think they realize what we can get our hands on," says interior designer Jacqueline Corea.

From a sumptuous silk brocade in chocolate, red and tangerine to a countertop handmade out of semiprecious stones to a New Zealand sheep's wool shag area rug with pile so long and thick I'm afraid I'd lose my baby in its fibres — at times on the three-hour tour I feel like I've won the Golden Ticket to incredible interiors.

I had my doubts, though I'm loathe to admit it now.

In theory, I understand the benefit of hiring an interior designer — they are, after all, trained to pull rooms together in a way that suits both the client and the house as a whole.

But I've kind of always been in the "I can manage to dress myself every morning, so how hard can it be to decorate my living room?" camp. I flip through shelter magazines. I've toured the odd show home. I recently bought a floor lamp.

But to realize I carpeted my house with an off-gassing nylon broadloom, when I could have chosen environmentally-friendly wool for the same price — an option I'd never even heard of, but that designers often recommend — really drove the point home.

"I realized there were places and wholesalers the average person doesn't have access to. And even if you did, you wouldn't have the knowledge to choose," says Kristin Fry, 51, who has had two homes done by Coreia Sotropa Interior Design.

Indeed, Corea says she can go into a showroom such as DWA and have a fabric scheme for a living room worked out in a couple hours, where it would take most people a weekend to sort through the materials — and still not have made a decision.

"They want to do it, they want to do it right, they want to be able to access a place like this," she says, gesturing to the lavish textiles waiting to clothe cushions and dress windows.

What? They don't all buy their curtains from big box retailers? No, and neither do they necessarily seek furniture and accessory inspiration from chic boutiques located in Cowtown's trendy design districts of 11th Avenue S.W., Kensington and Inglewood.

Believe it or not, there are places in Calgary where — like hot clubs in Hollywood —