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### Q&A

## Design Star Gazing: Dallas' Leslie Ezelle On Breast Cancer, Reality TV and Bachelor Pads

By Merritt Martin Wed., Aug. 3 2011 at 4:00 PM  
Categories: Interiors, Q&A, RTVF

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It may not be on Bravo or have Andy Cohen's head talking after it airs, but HGTV's *Design Star* is just as addictive as any of the *Top Chefs*, *Platinum Hits* or *Work of Arts* out there.

The latest season of *Design Star* premiered with the same panel of expert judges (Vern Yip, Candice Olson and Genevieve Gorder) a new host (Tanika Ray) and new mentor (the disturbingly happy David Bromstad, who not-so-incidentally was the first ever winner of *Design Star*), and a new slew of contestants.

For four episodes, we've watched the designers battle through designing their own living space, the great White Box challenge (this time with restaurant supplies as their only decor options), a neighbor challenge and renovating a bed-and-breakfast. In just the first episode it was clear who fit all the categories: among them, Cathy, the hard-to-work-with, condescending snarler; Karl, the mural magician; Kellie, the perky spitfire; Mark and Tyler, the guys who were silently competing the moment they met; and Leslie, the Dallasite who dropped the f-bomb and did two push-ups in the first half of the premiere episode -- the exception to the category rule.



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Whether or not any of those other assumptions are correct, what is completely true is that **Leslie Ezelle** is stealing the show. She may not have won big challenges yet, but she cracks us up, her talking head segments are stellar and her banter with her fellow contestants is honest and refreshing. Also, she **blogs** about the show, covering what you see as well as what you don't see.

HGTV

She's the one of the few designers on the show you'd actually want to hire or hang out with in your home -- which will hopefully bode well for her given the prize for winning *Design Star* is a show on HGTV (so we could all hang with her all the time).

The Mixmaster caught up with Ezelle -- **local designer**, artist, mom of four (not including all the pets), wife, former Dallas Cowboys Cheerleader, breast cancer survivor, advocate for Susan G. Komen for the Cure, fan of soulful music (Adele is a favorite), and someone who finds the television production rule "Don't sing while you work" to be exceptionally difficult to follow -- while she was out in LA working on a friend's home, and learned about life on camera, her take on pink, who her favorite clients are in Dallas, and how you can de-lame a room in minutes.

**You have been a Dallas Cowboys Cheerleader so you're no stranger to TV cameras, but you were the first bleep of the season. It must be different being on camera with your every word recorded.**

Well, so far, and I'm looking forward to the more they reveal about me the better because living in Texas people have this stereotype that we ride to work on a horse and it's **Big Rich Texas**. You know, big blond hair and boobs. And I do have the big blond hair and the boobs and the diamond ring but I am gay and in a same-sex relationship and I've got four kids and am a breast cancer survivor and other interesting things, along with the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleader background all mixed up.



I'm really good at censoring the f-bomb around my kiddos, but when I'm around adults all bets are off. It's two totally different environments for me. So, in that environment I definitely have a potty mouth, which is terrible. But I promised my kids - with my kids I've cussed but the f-word, no - and so I told them, "There's not going to be any beeps, babies. I am not going to cuss. I'm going to be so good; you're going to be so proud of me." First one, right out of the shoot - beep! And then I actually said a cuss word then! Like, "Oh shit! Why did I do that? Shit, I just said it again!"

But I feel completely, 100 percent comfortable in front of the camera, but me having to edit - as you can see now in this interview - and come up with my own script for these teeny, tiny 30-second camera challenge things? [Laughs] That was hilarious. I kept thinking, "When are they going to put up that little monitor like the reporters have?" With that, I'd be able to knock that shit out. A cue card? Somebody else write me my script - that I can do. I have a background in acting and theater and all that - that I can do. Me come up with a script? Not so much.

Let me tell you this: Being on this reality television thing, I had no idea that there'd be

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cameras up my nose-hole and getting the pores of my face every morning. So, considering the fact that they would come downstairs, and the only way I could figure out how to keep the cameras from coming downstairs was just to basically be buck naked. I would yell, "I'm buck naked; don't come down." 'Cause we're not that kind of a show.

**Episode One's coffee table made of tires hinted at this [and this week's episode featured Ezelle's triptych of paintings on the client's existing carpet backing], so do you enjoy using re-purposed materials or re-purposing old pieces for clients?**

My favorite thing to do is to find a piece of junk and breathe new life into it. I kinda tie it into the story behind my new line that I keep in my head: I breathed new life into a piece of furniture that was just about to be trashed.

After breast cancer, I had another fresh breath, some motivation in me, and had another life that I'm living now. And so the same thing with this little piece of furniture. I'm gonna take this little piece of junk and make it into something beautiful. So, yes I do love to do that.

I love using that piece [the tire table] and I love using edgy pieces like that in an environment like the [*Design Star*] penthouse.

Which, I have to tell you, my favorite clients are the bachelors of Dallas who have an idea of having a babe magnet but not sure how to go about doing it and getting it. And so those are the men that I love to do - but not really do. [laughs] But I can give them the place that's like hot and sexy - the babe magnet, you know what I mean - and edgy. And they're great, and easy, and fast to work with. So when I was doing that penthouse that's what I was thinking of - that I was designing for a man. That tire table was an example of that - very masculine and cool at the same time.

**How do you deal with working in such a group situation when what you normally do is essentially on your own?**

I think we all became very focused on the task at hand, and learned to tune it out - especially the camera aspect.

It's the time if anything. I used to sit at home with my drink in my hand, sitting on the sofa going, "Oh my god, why in the heck is she running and crying?! There's gotta be more time than - gimme a break - eight hours. As if!" And then there would be an f-bomb right there, which I did not say! [laughs]

But when you get there, truth be told, it's exactly what they say; it's not less. Because they don't stop for cameras. The pressure is intense so everything that you see on TV is that and then some more. I felt like Goldie Hawn in *Private Benjamin*, at one point. I was in my heels running down the street [screaming]. I was going, "Oh my god, I'm doing exactly what those stupid people did."

That was the other thing to: [For client projects] I no longer have to paint; I get to hire painters. So it's been a long time since I rolled a brush. My last breast cancer surgery was December 27 of 2010 and then March, I think, was when we started filming. So that was a little bit of a short recovery time. I was physically - I felt - challenged. I was not my strongest, for sure.

**Being an interior designer and also a breast cancer survivor, what is your relationship with pink?**

Thank you for that set-up! I don't do pink; it's not my color palette. I actually have been joking with my new best friends from Susan G. Komen. I keep telling them, "I really don't do pink. I do you guys; I don't do pink."

Because when I went through breast cancer I was in a very comfortable place of denial. I was totally fine right there in denial. Every time I turned around - you know with Susan G. Komen being here [in Dallas], you see a lot of it - so every time I turned around there's

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### General

another friggin' pink ribbon or pink boa and people running and I was over it.

I didn't want to deal with breast cancer, but now that I actually credit breast cancer with me going out for this show, because that's when I kinda - You get so damned depressed and you start asking well, what do I want to be when I grow up? And it's not this. There's gotta be more so what is it? And it was that I want my own design show.

And so now I'm giving back to Susan G. Komen. I had a little private party for the viewing of the first episode, and I had about three and a half or four weeks and I was able to get to \$29,000 by that night. My goal was \$25,000 for that night. Now I've **upped my goal to \$50,000** by the season end.

But Susan G. Komen has gotten behind me in a big sorta way and I am behind them. I'm delighted - I couldn't be more delighted.

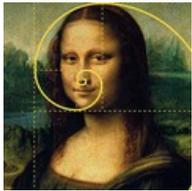
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