

Maine Home

January/February 2011

+ DESIGN

In the Woods & On the Slopes

A modern Bridgton lightbox tucked in the trees



A Sunday River ski house built for a builder

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Family Ties

After working as a children's book illustrator, Jo Ellen Stammen realized that, if she didn't at least try to start her own business, she would always wonder about what could have been. She turned to her daughter, Jessica, to help in the endeavor, and the two opened a hand-hooked rug business and boutique in their hometown of Camden.

Inside their sunny storefront on Camden's Main Street, Jo Ellen Stammen and her daughter Jessica are busy. They are answering calls from customers, checking on orders, working on their website, and responding to my questions (and to my oohs and ahhs about the product line). The pair has been maintaining this dizzying pace since launching their hand-hooked rug business, Jo Ellen Designs, three years ago. In that short time, they have already added a retail store stocked with a selection of artfully curated home goods.

Although the women attribute the launch of Jo Ellen Designs to a confluence of lucky events, the truth is that creative energy and determination are the main factors behind

their success. Of course, the family bond and creative gene pool hasn't hurt. But it's Jo Ellen's aesthetic sense and Jessica's passion for social activism that puts them in a category all their own.

Before turning to rug design, Jo Ellen was a successful children's book illustrator with thirteen published titles. When illustrating lost its luster, Jo Ellen began to search for a new artistic career and eventually found her niche in designing textiles.

Enter Jessica, a graduate of the Cooper Union and accomplished painter, who was living in New York City at the time. She offered daily (and sometimes hourly) opinions by email and eventually joined her mom as a business partner. "She has great

ideas and keeps me balanced and in tune with younger tastes and trends," says Jo Ellen. "I'm glad we're in this together."

The two hatched a business plan, found a manufacturer, signed up for the prestigious New York International Gift Fair (and got in!), and they were off and running.

Jo Ellen Designs offers 100 percent hand-hooked wool rugs and pillows in over twenty patterns and color options. They are fresh, sophisticated, and colorful. Jo Ellen's designs strike a balance between classic patterns and her own "storytelling" aesthetic. "We offer a fresh take on the classics and use colors and themes that engage and create a mood," says the designer. "A rug takes center stage in any room, and we want Jo Ellen

Shop! Jo Ellen's range of stunning finds—from mirrors (below, top) to hand-hooked rugs—make it impossible to walk out empty handed.

Floored. Check out the rugs (below, right) (and the hand-stenciled floors by Jo Ellen herself).

rugs to be conversation pieces, stories about the interplay of colors, animals, flowers, and patterns.”

While Jessica tackles the business side, she has woven her own distinctive mark into her mother's heirloom rugs: a mission to make the world a better place. The sale of each design benefits Designs for Good, Jessica's brainchild that directs 10 percent of all post-tax profits to non-profits around the world. Take the Golden Grape design, for example: proceeds from its sale go to Seeds of Peace, a Maine organization that empowers young people from regions of conflict through various programs including summer leadership camps.

“Working on a family business that's creative and doing good at the same time is very inspiring,” says Jessica. “I can't wait to get to work every day.” **MH+D**

For more information, see Resources on page 81.



Duet. Jo Ellen Stammen and daughter Jessica (opposite) on a quick break from running their family-owned business.

Pillow talk. Jo Ellen Designs offers a collection of beautiful rugs, and—bonus!—coordinating pillows (above) complete the look.

What's the story? The shop houses a well-edited collection of rugs, tabletop decor (e.g., decoupage paperweights; left, bottom), handsome accessories, toys, and more.



Jo Ellen & Jessica can't get enough of Camden's...

Goose River Exchange

Enough ephemera to last several lifetimes and one-stop shopping for endless inspiration.

Josephine

A great store around the corner from ours. Wonderful finds from James Perse tees to upholstered chairs.

Nature

From the view of the harbor outside the store to Mount Battie up the road, there is so much color and texture in Camden's surroundings. It inspires our work and our lives.

TAKE A FIELD TRIP TO JO ELLEN DESIGNS AT 21 MAIN STREET IN CAMDEN OR VISIT JOELLENDISIGNS.COM