

INTERVIEW: Designer/Developer Judy Othmer On Her Lifelong Love Of Montauk, The Thrill Of Discovering One-Of-A-Kind Home Finds, And More

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For designer/developer Judy Othmer of Isabel James Home, it always starts with whether or not the lot speaks to her.

One of her latest projects, 24 Cranberry Road in Montauk is a stunning 3 bedroom abode - located just a quick walk to a magnificent private beach - that is currently listed with Theresa Eurell of Town & Country Real Estate. You can tour the approximately 1,200 square foot home during an open house on Saturday, November 24 from 1 to 4 p.m.

To learn more about Othmer and her process, she answered a few questions about her inspirations, taking her talents to Montauk, and more:

How did you get started in real estate and development?

JO: I began as a banker working with private banking clients. Most of my clients were involved with real estate acquisitions and development through their business as well as their personal residences and vacation homes. During my 12 years in banking I also financed many construction projects and found that I really enjoyed working with the architects and developers.

Are there different challenges for a woman builder and developer? Any benefits?

JO: My goal has always been to work with and for men and women who care first and foremost about talent, ability and work ethic. I've always worked in a male dominated environment. In construction, I've run up against many male sub contractors that do not want to take instruction from a woman. Some I win over and others I move on from, because it's just not worth it. I find that being a builder who is also deeply involved in design helps me connect with clients on subjects like finishes and overall project aesthetics in ways that most builders typically do not.

Who has inspired you as a businessperson?

JO: I've been inspired by a number of female entrepreneurs in a variety of industries who head up their own corporations and have paved the way for women like me. Martha Stewart and Rachel Ashwell for their creativity and innovative approach to all things home. Arianna Huffington for her outspokenness and groundbreaking take on media. Christiane Amanpour for her fearless pursuit of the truth. And of course Oprah Winfrey for everything.

What designers inspire you?

JO: Again I would have to say Rachel Ashwell. I just love everything from Shabby Chic, creatively and as a business model. From its recreated vintage designs to its retail stores and even its large-scale business partnerships. I love designing kitchens, not only because I love to cook but because it is a place of comfort and warmth where there are so many opportunities to be creative. Which is why I must credit Allysa Torrey of Magnolia Bakery, not only for her wonderful recipes but because of their gorgeously designed kitchens. They have just the right amount of vintage mixed in with practical functioning design.

Where do you find the furnishings and accessories that you decorate your homes with?

JO: Well, I love the thrill of pursuing and landing one-of-a-kind finds. When accessorizing I have a group of favorite vintage and consignment shops throughout the Hudson Valley and Connecticut, and I'm always on the lookout for hidden gems. However vintage and antique isn't always practical



Designer/developer Judy Othmer. (Photo: Courtesy of Town & Country)

for certain home furnishings. When I need more substantial comfort items like beds and couches I'll often turn to a store like Country Willow, in Westchester, which carries so many interesting pieces from all over the globe.

Why go to the extreme of furnishing and decorating a home before putting it on the market?

JO: I want people to see the full potential of a home, and to see themselves in it. I apply my taste to everything from the architect's plan to the siding and shingles, cabinets, flooring, countertops and fixtures. Why not go all the way and show how it comes together?

You've built and renovated a number of homes in Westchester County, why the move to Montauk?

JO: I've been coming to Montauk since I was two and I think it's one of the most beautiful places in the world. It was always a dream for me and my husband, James, a writer, to have a home here, and to be lucky enough to work here. Also, I'm fortunate that one of my building partners, our long-time friend Gregg Danielle, shared a lifelong love of Montauk; and it only took one visit for our other partner, Vladimir Kunca, the most talented and creative master carpenter there is, to agree to take his talents to the East End and join our merry crew.

What do you look for in a potential project?

JO: I always start with the lot. I love privacy and a view and the mature plantings that can be incorporated into a new plan. We love to save everything we can from the landscaping to any interesting and unique architectural elements of the existing house. That is exactly what excited me about doing projects in Montauk. There are so many homes that have great bones and potential to be recreated into the naturally beautiful landscape.



24 Cranberry Road in Montauk. (Photo courtesy of Town & Country)

What distinguishes an Isabel James Home from other homes on the market in Montauk?

JO: Every one of our homes will be individually designed and furnished to take maximum advantage of the landscape, the lot and the floorplan. Each house should be different and incredibly satisfying in its own way. And, while this is hard to quantify, I want people to feel that everything feels comfortable, unique and just about perfect when they walk into one of our homes.

What would be your dream project?

JO: Of course Montauk. The setting is a private lot overlooking the water. I actually have found it. It has a lovely little cottage located on the property. I know exactly what I would do to incorporate the cottage into a larger expanded floor plan, the end result would be just magical.

For more information about 24 Cranberry Road, visit www.townandcountryhamptons.com.