



PHOTO: ELLISON CLARY

Laresa Thompson, owner of Designs by Laresa, went from buying a townhome in the Adare community to designing model units there.

## Design intervention: Home makeovers spark creativity

By Ellison Clary

SPECIAL TO THE POST

CHARLOTTE - When Laresa Thompson changed careers, she got one of her first clients because she had taken an earlier bold step. That client is Adare, a town home community in Southwestern Mecklenburg County that remains in the fold of the Designs By Laresa decorating company she launched last July.

Though starting her company was an intrepid move, Thompson's first big step was buying a residence in Adare in 2005. As a news producer for Charlotte's NBC-6, she had admired the development as she passed it on her way to and from work.

"I would drive along South Tryon Street and I would see Adare and think 'I love those town homes,'" said Thompson. "They looked so 'Laresa.' I told myself I was going to live there and, sure enough, my prediction came true."

Now she runs her fledgling home design and decorating business from her 1,330-square-foot residence. And she continues designing model units for Adare.

Thompson had been living in an apartment complex in Ballantyne since she left her news producer position at WFMY-TV in Greensboro to work for NBC-6 in October 2000. But she wanted to invest in a home of her own and, as a newcomer to Charlotte, liked the convenient location of Adare, about equidistant from Charlotte-Douglas International Airport, SouthPark Mall, center city Charlotte and a giant mixed-use community at the inter-

section of South Tryon Street and Interstate 485.

Kathy Kelly, sales manager at Adare, said Thompson is typical of many young professionals who are new to Charlotte. They like the location of Adare in Southwest Mecklenburg County, an area that long-term Charlotte residents shied from.

As Kelly was revamping her marketing approach to appeal to newcomers in the 25-40 age group, she was quick to bring on Thompson, a 1997 graduate of North Carolina A&T State University, to spiff up furnishing and decorations in the models for Adare's four different unit designs.

"Laresa is a wonderful talent," Kelly said. "With her eye for the best in contemporary design, she's helped us make our Adare homes appeal to young people who often are buying their first residence. Together, we're making it hip to live in Southwest Charlotte."

Thompson appreciated the chance when she signed on with Adare. "My track record is about creativity," she said. "For years I've helped other people decorate their homes and put together colors. I even moved around furniture as a child. My new business is just my hobby made into my dream come true."

A Greensboro native with a degree in journalism and broadcast news, Thompson initiated her career shift in 2004 when she left NBC-6 and began working in public relations, marketing and advertising. She gravitated to The Decorating Den in 2005 where she worked an eight-month apprenticeship. She got the

Adare account while there and kept it when she initiated Designs By Laresa.

"I love decorating model homes like Adare," Thompson said, "because I can be just as creative as I want to. I love making people's visions come true and I love to do children's rooms."

Though she has worked on the lobby for University Park Baptist Church, Thompson said she much prefers residential design. Her clients include well-known Charlotteans such as Jerome Brown, personal chef for Brevin Knight of the Charlotte Bobcats, Charisse Bellamy and Mr. and Mrs. Toni Cruickshank.

"After finishing a project for one of my clients, she said to me, 'I now have my wow factor in my home,'" Thompson said. The changes that produced that "wow factor" cost less than \$1,000, she added.

For now, Thompson said, she's "single, no kids, no dogs." In five years, she hopes to be married, living in a house and still operating Designs By Laresa out of her Adare town home. She'd also like to have an office in or near Dilworth.

"Competition is tough," Thompson acknowledged. "With a business like this, you make progress through word of mouth. I've done very well. I've surprised a lot of people."

But Kelly of Adare isn't surprised. "I knew Laresa and her modern, contemporary flair was exactly what we wanted to appeal to young professionals," she said.

"I'm good at what I do," Thompson laughed. "For me, my business is a journey in faith."