

## Today's Chicago Woman

■ Readers

### Mother/Daughter Designers Teem with Success

By Vinita Nair - Photography by Audrey Nilsen

"Would you like a cup of tea?" she asks, standing in the doorway of her flawlessly decorated apartment. "I'll give you the tour in a bit," she announces, followed by, "Is this necklace too much for the photo shoot?" Her words echo a lifetime devoted to the art of making everything look perfect.

Joan Blutter is the founder of Blutter/Shiff Design Associates, a mother-daughter interior design firm located in the Merchandise Mart for over 30 years. In a sentence, she is an eccentric red-head with a posh English accent and an unbridled knowledge of the design world.

As she moves toward the dining room table, she says, "My daughter will be joining us shortly, but has to leave by 10:30 in order to look at marble samples." With a staff of five, Joan and Janet are involved in every step of re-doing a home.

Janet Blutter Shiff joined her mother in business in 1986, and admits she is "the more organized one, with lists for everything." After graduating from the University of Wisconsin with a B.A. in education, Janet decided to enroll in the Harrington Institute of Interior Design to follow in her mother's footsteps. "I never expected her to join me," says Joan, "but what could have been better?"

The chemistry between the two women is obvious, despite few similarities.



LEFT: Joan Blutter, in her own setting, founded Joan Blutter Design Associates more than 30 years ago. ABOVE: A few floors up, daughter Janet Shiff displays her own style, showcasing a splendid view of the skyline.

"I've always been the Taurus, the moonchild," says Joan. "My ideas are less predictable and more intuitive." Their success is, in fact, based upon these differences.

Blutter/Shiff Designs has been featured in Architectural Digest and national trade magazines. In addition to various radio shows and TV appearances on such stations as the Discovery Channel, the two have promoted the growth of the interior design profession, helping to raise more than \$100,000 in design education scholarships.



Janet Blutter Shiff and  
Joan Blutter

"Her strengths are my weaknesses, and my weaknesses are her strengths," reveals Janet, as her mother competes to finish the sentence. The balance has culminated in design projects ranging from executive offices like Heitman Financial to banks such as Columbia National.

Working and living in the same building, Joan and Janet credit their success to a mutual respect. "There has never been any sort of competition between the two of us," says Joan, "something a lot of other partners in this business struggle with." This philosophy transfers to their treatment of clients as well, as they share tales of mirrored ceilings and red walls in some of the homes the two have decorated. "We aren't the ones living there, so if someone wants it we can do it," says Janet. "We design atmospheres for our clients."

Their own homes serve as prime examples of the "form follows function" ideology. Separated by only a few floors, their interiors are perfect examples of how drastically different the two women are. Despite equally breathtaking views of downtown Chicago, Joan is the modern romantic, with century pieces and eclectic art, whereas Janet is the minimalist, with a streamlined, ultra-modern style. They are yin and yang, the perfect complement to one another.

Editor's note: The American Society of Interior Designers 31st Annual Showhouse is open to the public September 15-October 6 and features the work of 13 of the organization's talented designers. The Showhouse, located at 1101 North East Avenue in Oak Park, will be open Wednesday-Friday from 10 am - 2:30 pm, Thursday and Friday from 7 pm - 9 pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 11 am - 4 pm. Tickets are \$15 in advance and \$20 at the door. The show is sponsored by the Oak Park-River Forest Infant Welfare Society. 708.848.0528. [asidillinois.com](http://asidillinois.com).