

# This City

## PROFILE

### Home Maker

Silkscreened pillows and table runners by textile artist Andrea Stokes prove you don't have to break the bank to create wow factor in your home

BY ANDREA TOMKINS

**FOR TEXTILE ARTIST ANDREA STOKES**, the true love of her life is silk—especially dupioni silk—a rich, textured fabric with slubs in the weave. In fact, she loves nothing better than to spread an iridescent length of the colourful material on her ironing board. “I could iron silk for the rest of my life,” she says with a laugh.

It's not hard to see why. I first saw her work at an invitation-only craft show hosted by Glebe-area artist Kathrin von Dehn. There was Andrea and the gorgeous silkscreened pillows she had sewn. The pillows were all piled together on a beige couch: rows of lush silk in colours I had thought existed only in my imagination.

Sadly, Stokes' work isn't widely available in stores—though Christina Ballhorn, co-owner of Workshop Boutique on Dalhousie Street, is a big fan. She carries a line of the pillows (and owns a couple of her own). She also sells Andrea's other creations—table runners, tote bags, and the most popular item: silk cuffs.

As with most artists, Stokes' silkscreened designs are born deep inside her cortex. “Often I'm lying in bed, and I can't sleep because I'm seeing all these images behind my eyes,” she explains.

Her love for textiles and design shows itself naturally in her own home; she believes people should surround themselves with everyday beauty. “In my house, I'm perpetually trying to make a silk purse



**Pillow talk:**  
Having good design does not need to be an expensive undertaking

out of a sow's ear,” she jokes. But for most people, she insists, having good design around does not need to be an expensive undertaking. “Design has become so demo-

cratic today,” Stokes points out. “You don't have to spend thousands of dollars to be creative. And certainly what I'm making for the world is not the \$4,000 couch, but

the \$45 pillow. That's a little thing that brings out the 'wow factor' in a really big way."

Her art aside, Stokes gets another kind of wow factor from the challenge of balancing work with parenting. Fortunately, her husband, Barry Doyle, a senior CUPE officer, is supportive, and her two daughters—Tallie, 7, and Jaime, 3, "think everything I do is absolutely fantastic," she says with a laugh. Her girls are a source of inspiration but also keep her grounded. "Sometimes it's quite obvious I made a mistake, but they're really easy on me."

Forgiveness must come easily when your mom has such a major cool factor; we all know how tempting it is to be a kid around pots of paint. "It's exciting for them," Stokes admits. "I'm mixing colours all the time, and the paints look like yogurt or pudding, and of course, they want to play with it. I can't imagine being a kid and not being interested in this. It's fun for them. When they have their friends over, I can change their T-shirts in a minute. They just ask, 'Mummy, could you put a bird on this?' It's pretty cool."

But although Stokes encourages her daughters' exploration of art, at the same time she tries to remind them that being an artist isn't just about having fun and getting your fingers in the paint. There's a lot of work involved too. "It's all about rigour and practice and keeping at it—just like with everything else in life."

She doesn't want her daughters to inherit her own bad habits, either—such as being really hard on themselves when they don't do something perfectly. She considers herself slightly obsessive, for example. "I don't want to be teaching them that," she admits. "It's awfully hard to be an artist with those kinds of rigid tendencies."

Another kind of hardship Stokes has to rise above is her basement studio in their Hintonburg home: working there can be isolating, she acknowledges. For one thing, her lighting isn't professionally set up yet, so she's always amazed that the colours work so well in daylight. "But I'll be blind and hunched over by next year!"

One thing she does appreciate, though, is living in Hintonburg, one of Ottawa's hotbeds of art. Stokes is happy to see herself reflected in her chosen community and has made strong connections. "If you don't feel like you're in the right place, it's unsettling,"

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she says. "But in my neighbourhood, there's a really nurturing, involved, fantastically talented group of artists."

She has felt embraced there from day one, she claims, and that support has helped her stay true to her silk-spun dreams. If there are ever times when she feels like giving up her art for a government job, she fights back the urge: she wouldn't want to disappoint her neighbourhood friends.