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Ishpeming native has run on HGTV's 'Design Star'

By DAN WEINGARTEN Journal News Editor

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MARQUETTE -She looks the part of an up-and-coming Hollywood designer, but Jen Guerin's resume includes some Upper Peninsula experiences that made the Ishpeming native unique among the contestants on a cable reality show.

Guerin, 33, was one of 11 finalists in HGTV's current show "Design Star." She's the only contestant to have worked in an iron mine and decorated the walls of a railroad overpass.

"I worked in the Tilden Mine for a summer in the concentrator, where my dad worked for over 25 years," Guerin said in a recent e-mail interview. "It was such a good experience to work in the same place my dad spent his time away from us, make great money for a college student ... and I loved it!"

She said she took advantage of her summer there by learning how to weld.

A 1994 Westwood High School graduate who still has many relatives in the Marquette area, Guerin designed and painted the cement walls of the train trestle overpass on Second Street in Ishpeming in the mid-90s. An aspiring artist throughout junior high and high school, Guerin took on the project at the suggestion of her art teacher.

Today, she said she cringes "at the simplicity and mistakes in perspective in my sophomore design," but said it felt good to add a little beauty and a piece of history to her hometown.

"Plus I hired all my friends to help me throughout my last summer," Guerin said.

She left Michigan for fashion college when she was 18 and has been working hard in San Diego on her passions - color and design. After graduating from San Diego State University she started her own decorative painting company, eventually becoming a certified color consultant.

She earned a spot on the HGTV show when her audition tape was selected from among 10,000 submissions. Producers asked her to come to Los Angeles.

Article Photos



Ishpeming native Jen Guerin had a brief but exciting run on the HGTV cable television competition show 'Design Star.' (HGTV photo)

"I sat in a green screen room for my final interview while the judges, including Vern Yip and the producers, sat in the room with six TVs watching my answers and personality via the camera," Guerin said. "It was surreal ..."

The show was shot in May and June, so it's not unfolding in real time. Each week a challenge is set up and designers - in teams or individually -are given a very short time to design but build, shop for and install a room on a tight budget. The ultimate winner gets to host their own show on HGTV.

"It makes it really painful to watch a person get eliminated, or when you have to stand in front of the judges fighting to stay in the house and win your own show but having to point out others' weaknesses," Guerin said. "That was the hardest part. Besides the 20-hour days of shooting."

The grueling tapings came to an end for Guerin when she was voted off the show in week three. But she hasn't given up on her dream of getting her own slot with the home and garden TV network.

People can still vote for her at hgtv.com, where she could win an online show. Since she's no longer in the running for the TV show, it's even more important for fans to vote online, she said.

Now that she's back in the real world, she has no regrets about her experience.

"I pushed myself physically and mentally the whole time," Guerin said. "We aren't allowed to contact anyone during the taping. No TVs, no phones, no newspapers. And it's a strange vortex to be dropped into and sucked back out when it's over."

After all the hard work getting through the auditions, taping the show and relaunching her career, Guerin is grateful.

"The support from my family, friends and clients has been amazing and I am ever so grateful for every last drop of luck, love and lessons learned," she said. "Oh, and I miss dearly Congress pizza. Can someone send me a box?"

HGTV's "Design Star" airs at 10 p.m. Sundays on the cable network.

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