

# Following Her Heart

by Sarah Lynch

Thursday, January 28, 2010 07:06 AM

Interior designer Jona Collins is the principal and founder of **JCID**, based in San Francisco. In addition to specializing in furniture design and commercial and high-end residential interiors, Jona makes it a high priority to take on numerous philanthropic projects, such as San Francisco's annual Dining by Design event, as well as design for the Dickens Showcase House Charity, and to donate her time and talents to organizations that she is passionate about.



## Which charitable organizations you are involved with and in what capacity?

**NCEFT** is a non-profit organization that improves the lives of people with disabilities through equine-assisted therapy. As a volunteer, I walk next to the riders or lead horses during class, where I provide physical and emotional support to the riders during their sessions. I also assist in production of various fundraisers.

**Brides Against Breast Cancer** is a wish-granting service that helps put the realities of this terminal illness aside, if just for a few days, while providing the opportunity for a family to spend quality time together preparing for the bride's special day. I assist brides with various stages of cancer in selecting the perfect wedding dress for their special day.

**DIFFA** (Design Industry Foundation Fighting AIDS) is one of the country's largest supporters of direct care for people living with HIV/AIDS and preventive education for those at risk. I've been part of the San Francisco chapter for five years. I have designed two tables for the Dining by Design event and have volunteered to assist Candace Barnes with her stunningly beautiful table in 2008. As a committee member I have raised money, sold tickets and helped obtain auction donations.

## Why are you passionate about these organizations?

I was overjoyed by the NCEFT's ability to use horses to bring such a wonderful therapy program to so many, especially children with cerebral palsy. As an avid horse person myself, I take immense pride and satisfaction in being able to witness firsthand the significant improvements in their motor skills and to see their faces light up with pleasure while riding the horses.

I was impressed by Brides Against Breast Cancer's dedication to bring something so special to women tragically affected by this disease at what should be one of the happiest moments of their lives. The organization donates beautiful wedding dresses as well as complete wedding packages. I find it tremendously fulfilling to be able to help create a beautiful, memorable wedding experience and to remove some of the stress and worry so that the bride can focus on the new life she is about to begin.

I am passionate about DIFFA because my brother succumbed to AIDS. He contracted the disease when very little was known about it, and the stigma of having AIDS at that time only made his suffering worse. The emotional impact of losing my brother was excruciating, but as time passed, more was learned about the disease, including how it is transmitted and how to treat it, and I discovered that his death could have been prevented with proper knowledge and support. DIFFA has become an important outlet for me to be able to use my creativity to fight back against the disease that took my brother.

## As designer, which special skills do you bring to the different groups you are involved with?

Designers use their special gifts of creativity, imagination, and the love of beauty in various forms in order to create positive changes in people's lives. Designers also need drive, persistence and follow-through to see a project through to completion. All three of the organizations with which I am involved are also focused on creating positive changes in peoples' lives, and all three also need creative solutions and follow-through to implement those changes, so I see a great synergy between my skills and their goals and needs.

## What has been the most memorable or most rewarding part of your experience?

It is not possible to work for even a small amount of time with any of these organizations and only have one "most memorable" moment. Without question, the most rewarding part is being able to see my direct involvement with these organizations result in transforming lives. What greater satisfaction could anyone have than knowing that the gifts that I was given which allow me to be successful as a designer are also creating such a positive difference in the lives of others in need?

## What can other members of the design community do to help out?

I think the more important question is what is it about being in the design community that would prevent one from helping out? The answer is nothing! As designers, we thrive on creating positive changes in people's lives, and these organizations do exactly that. Of course, all charitable organizations are in need of funding, so any donation, no matter how small, is greatly appreciated. Volunteers perform a variety of free tasks for charities that are too under-funded and under-staffed to accomplish everything they are trying to do. I would be happy to talk with anyone interested in getting involved with the organizations that I support.