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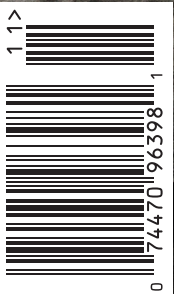
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HOME SWEET HOME

WE ASKED JEAN BROWNHILL, FOUNDER AND CEO OF SWEETEN, ABOUT RENOVATIONS MADE EASY

After earning an architecture degree at The Cooper Union, Connecticut native Jean Brownhill spent a decade in design and construction. After a challenging renovation of her own home, she saw the need for a free service to match people to vetted general contractors, providing support throughout the process. Sweeten (as in “home sweet home”) launched in 2011.

How does Sweeten work?

When you post a project on our website, our matchmakers consider the details—scope, timeline, budget and style—and



above: Jean Brownhill

select three to five general contractors (GCs) for your specific job. We make sure the GCs are available *and* interested in the project, then send you photos of their previous work and client reviews. You choose whom you'd like to meet (or if you'd like more matches), we introduce you to arrange site visits, and we help you evaluate estimates. Once you hire a Sweeten GC, we check in and are always there for questions and to keep things moving along smoothly. Our services are absolutely free to the renovator.

How do you vet the GCs?

My co-founders and I are trained architects. We spent the first few years—years!—screening GCs, going beyond insurance and licenses to check quality of craftsmanship, references and customer service skills. To be a part of Sweeten, GCs must understand we see their estimates and communication; we're in constant touch. They're accountable both to us and the client, who can review them at the end of the project. Today we have more than 1,000 GCs in our network, including great ones in Fairfield.

How do homeowners find the right GC for their job?

The operative word is “right.” I launched this company in 2011 after hiring the wrong contractor for my house...after going to architecture school and working in the industry! Many homeowners find us through real-life renovation stories on our blog. Word-of-mouth is also huge for us. On sweeten.com, when you click “Start your renovation,”



above and below: A classic wood pattern elevates this kitchen makeover; white subway tile paired with a marble hex floor increased the brightness tenfold in this renovated bath.



we lead you through a short form. Once we have key details, we offer excellent choices of GCs whose work we know firsthand.

Once homeowners are matched with a GC, how does Sweeten support them?

We have account managers in constant touch with the GCs and client services folks who are your ongoing contact. We check in at critical stages of construction to make sure there aren't any hiccups, and we're always

available to answer questions until the project is done.

Sweeten also provides GC matchmaking services for architects and designers. How does your support differ?

There's a lot of heavy lifting (pun intended) to finding first-rate GCs. Architects and designers like the sense of security that working with us brings—we're a one-stop source for multiple bids, and the job will be done right. Our content explains costs and >>



above: This sunny kitchen was part of a Brooklyn townhouse gut renovation.

value of the work to clients, which supports their work. The fun part is we commission photography and cover the stories on our blog and for our 500,000 Instagram followers, and we work with major design media to feature projects. We're there behind the scenes to make the design professional's work shine.

How do you support clients during inevitable "hiccups?"

One of the reasons you hear so many horror stories is because homeowners' and GCs' expectations are not aligned; we start from a place where budgets and timelines are reasonable. Still, sometimes renovations do go sideways, and that's when Sweeten really shows its worth. We work with both parties on a positive communication flow, map out milestones and get the project back on track.

What compelled Sweeten to expand into Fairfield County?

It was a natural extension for us, and we've had homeowners asking us to help them there. I grew up in Connecticut, and we always joke that all I'm trying to do is get back there!

Do Fairfield County clients have access to an in-person representative if needed?

Sweeten is a company of humans! About thirty-five, in fact. You can speak with a client services representative at 212-671-1713 or email team@sweeten.com if you'd like to talk through your renovation. sweeten.com



high concept

A new home design destination offers custom-made and one-of-a-kind creations

Fofie & Mia—an exciting new concept in furniture, furnishings and fun—celebrated its grand opening this past September at its Boston Post Road location in Larchmont.

"We're two sisters with a shared passion for people whose originality and personality are contagious," says Sophia Karipides, whose twenty years of design experience at leading fashion houses drives the store's eclectic personality. "At Fofie & Mia, we're inspired by innovation, cater to the fine taste of our clients and welcome the talents of selected interior designers."

Hardly a static furniture emporium, Fofie & Mia will connect customers and creators each day in its warm, cozy and intimate workspace. Customers can discover vintage, handmade furniture on display or have their own pieces built

to their specifications by the talented on-site craftsman, Rafael Figueroa. From magnificently restored armoires and dining tables to oversize designer couches and high-end accessories (pillows, rugs, blankets and candles), the selection will change frequently.

"We invite customers and neighbors to bring us their imaginations and 'must-have' lists. If we don't have what they crave, we'll create it or find it for them—no need to run around town. Instead, relax and enjoy our delicious coffee—it's always ready," adds Maria Katsaros, the store's event and marketing director, who promises a number of friendly get-togethers at the location. *2417 Boston Post Road, Larchmont, NY; 914-275-0375 or 888-417-6017; fofiemia.com*

above: Rafael Figueroa, Sophia Karipides and Maria Katsaros
below: Finds at Fofie & Mia include vintage 1950s zinc-and-metal olive baskets, vintage military wool blankets and an antique pre-Civil War bed from the early 1800s.



SWEETEN: COURTESY OF SWEETEN; FOFIE & MIA: ELLE KATSAROS