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RESIDENTFEATURE

WENDY NEWMAN:

an Inspired Life

BY SYLVIA KARCZ

PHOTOS BY KATIE RICHARD PHOTOGRAPHY

Wendy Newman sees colors and patterns like a musician hears the intricate layers of a song. At any given time and in any given place, the lifelong creative is observing and absorbing the world around her with an inquisitive eye not many take the time to hone. It's a gift that has propelled her to become the multi-faceted artist she is today.

"Even if I don't consciously process it all at that moment, I just know it when I see it," Wendy says of her ability to recognize, at once, the beauty around her and its potential. It's as if she has feelers extended in every direction, experiencing her surroundings as an energetic vibration; one that calls out for artistic creation. And despite the dynamic nature of her design, her method is fairly straightforward. "Beauty is all in the eye of the beholder, but that's what inspires me. One, to appreciate it, two, to create it, and then three, to live within it. To make whatever I can out of the most simplistic form of beauty."

She relates it to her son, Will, a music producer in Nashville. When he was just four years old, somebody dropped a glass on a tile floor at a restaurant, and to everyone's surprise, he immediately recognized the note. "He goes, Oh! B-flat. He just knows when it's right, and he can imagine the depth of sound. And that's what I see: what he feels. And I think it's what I feel too."

If you've ever had the joy of seeing one of Wendy Newman's clothing designs, this all makes perfect sense. Her distinctive approach of creating a print from a photograph, and then layering it -be it to form a mandala or a mosaic print-makes for quite the conversation piece. No matter if it's a scarf or a pair of leggings, it's wearable art in every sense, and it's ripe with stories. Look closely, and you might find a collage featuring the Eiffel Tower or Asheville's historic Jackson Building. Recently, Wendy was even sanctioned by the estate of renowned Art-Deco artist Tamara de Lempicka to create one-of-a-kind garments and umbrellas featuring some of the painter's most iconic works.

"Sometimes I feel like I'm going to burst out of my skin, I have so many things I want to do and want to make," Wendy says of her day-to-day, which, not surprisingly, is anything but a typical day-to-day (except for her homemade protein-packed breakfast waffles!) "But it's more than just checking off a box for me. It's about creating. It doesn't matter if it's a meal, a scarf, or a little garden bed. It's about making what surrounds



you beautiful to live with, no matter what it is. It's not about getting more. In fact, if anything, it's about getting less."

Like most artists, Wendy wears many hats. And as fascinating as her work as a designer is, it's her efforts as the owner and head photographer of WENDY'S CANCER WARRIORS that leave the most lasting impact. Since BILTMORE LIVING spoke with her a couple of years ago, Wendy's passion project of offering free photography sessions to cancer patients has only grown. From those in recovery and women wanting to document reconstructive surgeries, to terminal patients with limited time remaining, Wendy has shown up for hundreds of cancer warriors in every stage of their fight.

With over ten years under her belt, it's as much a part of her life as design. In the beginning, Wendy admits that she had her doubts, though. It's never easy to witness someone's struggle, after all, let alone capture it on camera in a positive light. Seeing young cancer patients in their most vulnerable state, often with very little time left, is a feat all its own. "When you do a shoot and the next day you find out that they're not here anymore, it just makes you feel so fortunate that you were there for that time. And it's necessary for that healing to take place for the family," Wendy says of why CANCER WARRIORS is such important work. "It's so rewarding when

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Wendy wanted to share one of her little Warriors with us this time, and our Photographer Katie was delighted: "It was a heartwarming experience shooting behind the scenes with Wendy and Selah. They share a beautiful bond as Wendy has photographed Selah through her cancer journey. It reminded me of the power of portraits and the legacy we leave for our loved ones."

the parents write to me or they'll post something and say: I don't know what I would do without you. These are some of the last pictures I have of my child. And that's when you know you have to continue to do the work."

When the requests started to increase during the peak of the pandemic, Wendy even enlisted the talent of local photographers like Jeff Haffner, who rose to the occasion like no other to help accommodate the demand. "I think it takes a special person to do this kind of work, and Jeff is that person," she says of her appreciation for him and the network of people around her, all rallying together to see those special days for Cancer Warriors come to fruition. "There are just certain people that have that compassion in their heart to know what these people are going through."

That empathy has deepened in Wendy through personal experience. Her husband, Steve, has been battling leukemia for 25 years. She describes it as a double-edged sword. "You're given this sentence, but there's the other side of it, too. You tend to treasure more, and not argue about the little, silly, petty things. You have no time for that," she says. "It makes you very aware. So it gives you a gift and yet it takes one away, too."

"What matters most is enjoying this minute and this day that has been given to us," she says. "Because it is the only gift we have, right now. That's why we take care of ourselves, too. So we live this present moment in the best way that we know how."

A healthy lifestyle has always been a part of Wendy's life, though. Growing up in various "Shangri-La" health resorts that her father owned, the importance of wholesome, nutritious food and well-being was imprinted early on. The idea that 'your body is your one and only place to live' really stuck.

Wendy admits it was almost like positive brainwashing on healthy eating habits. "I just didn't even have to think about it, because I was presented and explained why it was important every single day. And I always knew it made sense, because I watched people come in really sick, and I watched them leave better. We had 130 people there a day, and that's a lot to see over and over and over again," she says of her upbringing.

And while she never imposes her lifestyle choices on anyone else, she does relish the opportunity to, humbly, inspire others by posting healthy recipes in her Get Healthy Facebook group, or through neighborhood dinner parties at her house. Whether it's a kale salad or a unique take on a nutrient-dense dish, it's a great feeling to see people step out of their culinary comfort zone and see how healthy food can be delicious food too. As Wendy says herself: "If it doesn't taste good, I don't want to deal with it!"

It's this ability to transcend and transform that makes Wendy stand out. Whether she's working on a new design piece or doing a follow-up photo shoot for a child celebrating cancer remission, anyone who knows her will admit that she's the kind of person who will light up a room as soon as she walks into it. And that kind of energy is truly a blessing. To take on each day with an unwavering awareness, openness, and positive outlook is a lesson we can all take from her. As Wendy will attest, attitude is everything. And it shows in every ounce of her inspired life.

"Somebody once told me: You give so much. And I responded, are you kidding? I get so much! You can't believe what I take away from these Cancer Warrior sessions and how I reprioritize what's important to me," she says. "That's a hard lesson to learn, and I felt like it was given to me, on a plate. I'm living in the present. That is a real gift."