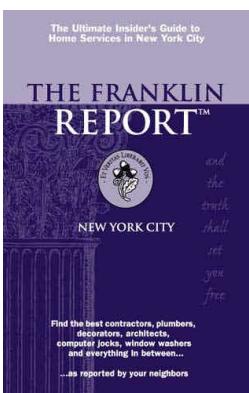




THE FRANKLIN REPORT

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The Purple Little Black Book

A plum colored guide called The Franklin Report will help you find the best home improvement experts in the world--By Sallie Brady

Kate Spade's contractor is drilling right over Elizabeth Franklin's head, perilously close to the intricate plasterwork ceiling of her Robert Adam drawing room. Anyone else would phone the insurance company, but Franklin dismisses it with a shrug. She knows the contractor wouldn't dare disturb her three-floor Park Avenue dwelling.

From the first whir of her new neighbor's drill bit, Franklin, who coltishly goes from zero to eighty in an instant, whizzed up a flight of stairs and introduced herself. That's Elizabeth Franklin, founder of *The Franklin Report: The Insider's Guide To Home Services*, the authoritative 481-page Zagat's-like handbook for your kitchen—or living room or foyer or bathroom. The guide rates 1,100 New York home professionals for people who have that certain lifestyle and care, really care, about quality.

Though the plum-colored tome is barely two years old, the Kate Spade contractor—like every other decorator, architect, furniture restorer, antiques appraiser, cabinet maker, wallpaper hanger, upholsterer, exterminator, plumber, window washer, and chimney sweep in town—knows Franklin's work, the dishy maker and breaker of the interiors industry that ranks vendors according to numerous client interviews (deliciously quoting them as well). How could they not when luminaries such as Barbara Corcoran of the legendary Corcoran Group real estate brokerage weigh in on the back cover with the likes of this: "The very first day I purchased the book I found a new window washer who did twice the job of my old window washer at half the cost."

I've demystified the design business," says Franklin, the 44-year-old entrepreneur who's recently published Franklin Reports covering L.A. and Chicago, and later this year, Atlanta. "People are no longer just hiring the decorator who did their friend's latest re-do. They're consulting *The Franklin Report* and interviewing six decorators or architects before hiring." In the book they find contractors rated in four columns—Quality, Cost, Value and Recommend? —on a 5-point scale, with 5 as the highest rating and 1 not being someone you want to trust an heirloom antique to for conservation.

Leave it to a former mergers and acquisitions investment banker, who, while remodeling her apartment, watched a prominent decorator walk off a half-completed job with the full \$50,000 fee, to introduce the free market system to this clubby world. Franklin, a triple-type-A businesswoman who flew Concorde home weekly from a deal in Europe to spend weekends with her husband throughout one of her pregnancies, was not content to join the ladies-who-lunch set. "I've always had a massive project," Franklin says, and after advising friends on decorating and becoming a member of the American Society of Interior Designers, she saw the home-services business as ripe for the picking.

In 1999, she hung her treasured Zuber panels next to the Brunschwig Fils signature plum-covered chairs in her home office and set out to conglomerate the industry and invent a brand name. "You need to create a market before you create a product," Franklin says.

With a state-of-the-art data-base management system and an enviable Christmas card list, Franklin began researching every dusty corner of the home business, spending hours on the phone with friends-of-friends who had just had improvements done and with vendors themselves, grilling them about their trade. A companion Web site, www.franklinreport.com (that vendors pay to be included in), offers one-stop-shopping photos of architects' and designers' work.

Despite her success, Franklin (or Betsy Sechrest, as she's known socially; her husband is Jeffrey Sechrest, the chair of mergers and acquisitions at Merrill Lynch) is not about to rest. She ricochets off antiques in a sprint to consult the family's website on a nearby computer. Homework, soccer and charity work fill her evenings and country escapes to Locust Valley, her weekends. The Franklin Report will continue to invade cities nationwide, she says. But she's gearing up for a brand new project—the redecoration of her apartment. This time, she's definitely hiring a decorator. Any takers?

From *The Franklin Report-New York*:

On decorator, "the prince of chintz," Mario Buatta: "He's clearly a genius, but will drive you to drink." "He hangs Peale portraits and field hockey sticks with equal skill and enthusiasm."

On decorator Bunny Williams: "She even showed us how to make the beds in the correct manner."

On contemporary designer Christopher Coleman: "He is the only guy in the business who can do red vinyl successfully."

On decorator Harry Schnaper: "He successfully worked with John McEnroe, so I knew that he could handle my husband."

On Auger's moving company: "The only people I would trust to hoist a marble table up 20 floors without damaging anything."

On Mr. Shower Door: "When my shower started leaking, Mr. Shower Door offered to send me some tubing, but did not offer to come out and fix it."

On upholsterer Randall Riddles: "He'll make your old ABC chair look as if it came from Kent shire."

On Robert O'Keefe of Distinctive Gardens: "Robert is willing to search the country to find the right plant or garden accent."