



# the briefing

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## Meet Mrs Fix It

Profile



**A** drill is whirring right over Elizabeth Franklin's head, perilously close to the intricate plasterwork of her Robert Adam drawing room that, as it happens, will be featured tonight on a Home Garden network TV special. Anyone else would phone the insurance company, but Franklin dismisses it with a shrug of her petite shoulders.

**Elizabeth Franklin, founder of The Franklin Report, tells Sallie Brady why her plain-talking volume has revolutionised the New York interior decorating business.**

She knows that the contractor renovating for her new neighbour, designer Kate Spade, wouldn't dare disturb her three-floor, Federal-style Park Avenue dwelling. He knows her credentials.

Franklin, a 44-year-old dynamo, is the founder of *The Franklin Report*, the authoritative 481-page guide to 1,100 tradesmen in the home services industry. Although the plum-coloured tome is barely a year old, every decorator, architect, furniture restorer, antiques appraiser, cabinet maker, wallpaperer, upholsterer, electrician and plumber in town knows it - it's the maker and breaker of the interiors industry that rates tradesmen according to interviews with clients who have used their services (deliciously quoting them, as well).

"I've demystified the design business, Franklin says, skating around her hardwood floors in her stocking feet, in search of her pony-skinned boots that bear an uncanny resemblance to her pair of Bengal cats. Unlike London's interior designer

showrooms that are open to all, New York's have always been exclusively "to the trade" - meaning access to the hallowed D&D Building is only via the decorator - who was most likely hired, says Franklin, on the basis of a friend's latest re-do. "I've fundamentally changed that. Now people are consulting *The Franklin Report* before hiring."

Leave it to a former 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.

Raised in Short Hills, New Jersey and Ridgefield, Connecticut, Franklin studied mechanical engineering at Duke University before completing an MBA at Dartmouth. She hit Wall Street as a consultant for Booz Allen Hamilton and became a banker at Lehman Bros., where she married an office mate, Jeffrey Sechrest.

Franklin moved on to James Wolfensohn's eponymous boutique firm, but when Wolfensohn left to lead the World Bank, Franklin thought the firm would dissolve and left it to mother her two girls and redecorate her apartment.

The woman who flew Concorde home weekly throughout one of her pregnancies - while doing a European deal for Daimler-Benz - to spend weekends with her husband, was not

content to join the ladies-who-lunch set. "I've always had a massive project: Franklin says. After advising friends on their 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 Franklin began her research into every dusty corner of the home business, spending hours on the phone with friends-of-friends who had just had work done and tradesmen themselves, grilling them about their work. Today, her staff of 10 has completed a second edition of the New York volume and Chicago's first, and is at work on Los Angeles and Atlanta guides. A companion website, [www.franklinreport.com](http://www.franklinreport.com), offers photos of architects' and designers' work.

Despite her success, Franklin (or Betsy Sechrest, as she's known socially) is not about to rest. Homework and charity work fill her evenings, while country escapes to Locust Valley take up the weekends. *The Franklin Report* will continue to invade cities nationwide, she says. But a year from now, she hopes to be in the middle of a new enterprise - the redecoration of her apartment. This time, she's hiring a decorator. Any takers?

*The Franklin Report* (Allgood Press, \$22.50), tel 866 990 9100 to order