

CHRIS BARRETT

by Michael Allen

With her movie star looks, Chris Barrett could easily be mistaken for one of her star-studded clientele. In fact, she worked as an actress and appeared in several TV shows and films. After her time on the big and small screens, she decided to try a different role in life and became an interior designer. Now, after eighteen years in the business, she is a leading designer on the Westside with offices in Santa Monica.

Tell us about your acting career.

It seems like a lifetime ago. I was a contract player at Universal Studios. I was one of their last contract players. I did a lot of episodic television and some films, and a lot of commercials; your girl-next-door things. I was Nurse Ellen Bart on "Emergency." I had a recurring role. That was my first (acting) job.

That was a pretty big show in those days! My parents watched it all the time.

(Laughs) (Realizing my faux pas) I did too! Really!

(Laughs) You watch the reruns on Nick at Nite! (Laughs) "Emergency" was a very big deal. It was an amazing opportunity. It was a huge show.

You also did movies?

I was in "Sleeper" with Woody Allen. I co-starred in a movie called "Moonrunners" which was the inspiration for the "Dukes of Hazard." I was the Daisy Duke-like character. I worked and was able to support myself and that was good, but (acting) wasn't fulfilling enough. And it's hard to go on calls and not get the role because you're too short, or too blonde, or too old, or too young.

How did you get into interior design?

I took a class at UCLA, sort of on a whim, to see what I thought, and I really liked it. And while I was in the program at UCLA, I got an interior design job. Marcy Wallace said, "Please do my house." So I did her house while I was in school and that job segued into my career and she turned into one of my closest friends, and she is the founder of Madison's Foundation.

What is Madison's Foundation?

My involvement came through my

children with these diagnosis, and the other half researching diseases.

For me, I love my work so much, but I know it's not the end all, the important thing I do is work for Madison's Foundation. That makes a difference. You have to give back and that brings so much to me and makes me feel good.

Was it hard to get started in the interior design biz?

It was a very slow build, one job,



photo by Lesley Bohm

friend Marcy whose daughter was diagnosed with a very rare of neurofibromatosis. It started as a web-based foundation (www.MadisonsFoundation.org) where you can type in a disease and everything there is to know about that disease is all in one place.

I'm the Chairman of Events; last year Charlize Theron hosted (an event) for us. There are Madison Foundation classes at UCLA where second year medical students spend half the class working with parents and children, and learning how to relate to parents and

and then another job. I continued to go to school and worked. One of the reason I switched careers was that I wanted more stability in terms of income. And little did I know that the interior design business was very much like acting; you never know where your next job is coming from. In the beginning you don't get these huge projects, you get smaller things and you don't make a lot of money. You just have to persevere and find some way to support yourself.

What exactly does an interior designer do?

When you hire a designer, you're hiring and you're hiring the We shop all over the tainly all across the like to just shop th in L.A. it gets a litt of books, magazine research. Usually o pretty big. We do ground up. We cho surfaces, we work tect on built-ins, th kitchen and the ba design furniture an

Any difficult clients?

(Laughs) I certain names, but yes, I've difficult clients! U bring images that "I want something that." And we will information they gi pret what we thin ing based on the a they have. And th ages to the table and

What are some more memorable projects?

Charlize Theron and great, she's gre got Charlize's projec ing on "Cider Hous wasn't in town. So packages together Exed choices and sa We had to do it by m remodel of a 1920's S ranean house. It wa .She's just the most and has a really goo

Honestly, I've b lucky. I've had so derful clients. I k corny, but every cial, whether it's